

cinnamon roll
saviors

keeping
her safe

LYRIC NICOLE

KEEPING HER SAFE

CINNAMON ROLL SAVIORS



LYRIC NICOLE

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TRIGGER WARNING

This book contains the following:

- Domestic Violence
- Attempted Sexual Assault

*Dad, you are the greatest. This one's for you, because you are
a cinnamon roll at heart.*

I love you. Thank you for always protecting me.

PLAYLIST

- “Fast Car” - Luke Combs
- “Send My Love (To Your New Lover)” - Adele
- “Love Me Like You Do” - Ellie Goulding
- “Do Ya Thang” - Rihanna
- “Stronger (What Doesn’t Kill You)” - Kelly Clarkson
- “Roar” - Katy Perry
- “Dark Horse” - Katy Perry feat. Juicy J
- “The Way I Am” - Charlie Puth
- “Somebody That I Used To Know” - Goyte
- “Rolex” - Iggy Azalea
- “Don’t Wanna Know” - Maroon 5 feat. Kedrick Lamar
- “Used to Love You Sober” - Kane Brown
- “There Goes My Everything” - Kane Brown
- “Slide Away” - Miley Cyrus
- “Follow Me” - Uncle Kracker
- “Drowning” - Backstreet Boys
- “Footloose” - Kenny Loggins
- “I Don’t Want to Live Forever” - ZAYN feat. Taylor Swift
- “Replay” - Zendaya
- “Barbie World” - Nicki Minaj feat. Ice Spice
- “Bite Me” - Avril Lavigne
- “Hot” - Avril Lavigne
- “We Belong Together” - Mariah Carey
- “Fallin’ For You” - Colbie Caillat
- “Fight Song” - Rachel Platten
- “Stay With Me” - Sam Smith
- “Wide Awake” - Katy Perry

CHAPTER 1



EMERY

“HEY, JUSTIN. ARE YOU HERE FOR YOUR USUAL?” I ASK AS HE walks into the shop.

“Yes please. My hair is getting a little too long for my liking,” he replies.

“Your hair isn’t even an inch long! How is it too long for you?” I exclaim.

“If I can grab it with my fingers, it’s too long, Emery,” he states.

I look Justin’s hair over, and it is indeed longer than it usually is. He didn’t come in two weeks ago to get his haircut. I didn’t think much of it at the time.

“You missed your haircut two weeks ago. That’s why it’s so long. You know your hair grows fast.”

“Yeah, I know, but I was on vacation with Kelly. I didn’t want to get it cut by anyone but you,” he tells me.

“Aw, I feel special. Now, get over here so I can get you back to Kel. She is due for a haircut soon too. Can you remind her for me, please?”

“Of course! I know Kel will regret not getting her hair cut. She hates having split ends,” he says as he sits down in the chair.

“Okay, do you want a two or a three on the sides? You like to switch between the two every now and then.”

“Let’s do two. That way it will take a little longer for me to have to get it cut again.”

As I grab the clippers, the over-the-door doorbell rings.

“Welcome to Em’s Cuts! If you have a seat, I’ll get to you just as soon as I get done with this customer,” I say as I take the first swipe through Justin’s hair.

“No rush. I can wait,” the newcomer says.

His husky voice sends shivers down my spine. Looking up, I try to get a good look at him, and I’m hit with insta-lust. He has lower back-length honey-brown wavy hair, soulful brown eyes you want to get lost in, and a neat beard. Let’s not forget his smile. It’s so bright and cheerful. Like no matter what, he is always happy and is trying to pass it on through his smile.

“You gonna keep drooling, Emery, or are you going to finish trimming my hair?” Justin asks, laughing.

“Oh, shut up. I was not drooling,” I tell him while trying discreetly to wipe my mouth off.

“Uh-huh. You keep telling yourself that until you believe it,” he chuckles.

Turning back to Justin’s hair, I finish trimming it just the way he likes. He likes it shorter on the sides and just a tiny bit longer on the top. Getting the hair dryer, I fan him with it to help blow off the hair.

“All done, Justin,” I say as I put the blow dryer back on my station.

“Thanks, Em. I appreciate it!” Justin says as I pull the cape off him.

I walk over to the register and Justin follows behind me.

“That’s fifteen dollars,” I tell him.

“Yeah, it has never changed in the six months you have been here. Here, take this and keep the change,” he says, as he hands me some cash.

Not looking at what he handed me, I thank him as he leaves the shop. Since my eyes are on the door, I notice the

new customer moving in my peripheral vision. I take this time to look him over again. He's wearing a tan suede jacket with a white undershirt and jeans. To say he is hot is an understatement.

"Come on, big guy, let's get you in a chair and you can tell me what you want," I tell the newbie as I look for a new cape. "So, my name is Emery, but you can call me Em if you want."

Once I finally grab one and pull it out, I turn around and see him checking my ass out. Heat rushes to my face. This man should not be turning me on at all.

Remember, Em, you swore off all men.

"My name is Knox," he says as he holds out his hand.

"Nice to meet you, Knox," I say as I shake his outstretched hand. "Come sit down and tell me what you would like me to do to your hair."

As he sits down, I get a good look at his ass. Looking up in the mirror in front of me, I see him catching me staring at him. He smiles at me, but it's not a cocky smile. It's a sincere smile.

"Now, Knox, what can I do for you?" I question.

"I just want it trimmed a little, please," he says.

"So, just the split ends, or a little more?"

"I'd just like the split ends cut off. I really like my long hair," he tells me.

You and me both, I think to myself.

I hear a chuckle and I look up to the mirror and see him staring at me. Then it clicks.

"Did I just say that out loud?" I exclaim in horror.

"Yes, Emery, you did," he chuckles again.

"Oh, my God. I am so sorry. I shouldn't have said that. I just really like long hair on guys, as long as they can pull it off, and you're the first guy that I've seen that has hair this gorgeous," I try to explain.

“It’s okay. It doesn’t bother me. I like your bluntness and honesty.”

I blush from his compliment. Once I have the cape around him, I pull my fingers through his hair, trying to get a feeling for it. Every person’s hair is different and needs to be treated as such.

God, his hair is so soft and silky too.

Emery. Stop thinking about those kinds of things.

I turn his chair around and then grab some hair, figure out where his split ends are, and show him how much I’m going to be cutting. He nods his head, agreeing that it’s okay. I get on with it; it takes about twenty minutes to get through all of his hair. While it’s soft, it’s thick and that takes a lot longer to cut.

Turning the chair back around to face the mirror, I say, “Okay Knox. What do you think? I think your hair looks way healthier than it did before. And it’s still pretty long for you. Enough to put it in a bun if you wanted.”

I grab the hair dryer and fan him off with it just like I did Justin. I don’t want him to have loose cut hair all over him.

“Thank you, Emery. I greatly appreciate it. How much do I owe you?” he asks.

“That will be fifteen,” I reply.

As he hands me the cash he pulled out of his wallet, he tells me to keep the change. Our hands graze—just barely, but enough for a jolt to be sent through my body. Not understanding why it feels good, I jerk away with the cash.

“Sorry,” I whisper as I’m putting the money in the register.

“Why are you apologizing? You have nothing to be sorry about.”

“Sorry. Well, not sorry. I don’t know. It’s just a normal reaction. I’m sor—” I cut myself off before I say it again and bother him. “Thank you for coming in. I look forward to seeing you again soon. I mean, not that you have to come here or anything like that. Just if you liked my service. Okay, I’m shutting up now.”

God, Emery. Just shut up. Foot, meet mouth.

“Bye, Emery. It was nice meeting you, and I can’t wait to see you again either,” he says as he walks out of the shop.

Blushing, I tell him goodbye and then head back over to my station to clean up all the hair that is left over from the two cuts.

CHAPTER 2



EMERY

I WALK INTO THE BAR TO MEET MY FRIENDS THAT I'VE MADE IN the past few months. They keep pestering me to go out with them, and this morning I finally got tired of brushing them off. Since I finally agreed to meet with them, they didn't want me to back out on it, so they told me we had to come out tonight. So, here I am, in a bar, for the first time in twenty-three years.

As I get through the doorway, I see my friends already have a table for us. As soon as they see me, they wave me over. Heading over to them, I bump into several people, and I feel like I'm going to throw up from them touching me. Ever since *him*, I have hated human contact that I didn't initiate.

I know it seems weird since I am a hairstylist, but it's simple. I am *choosing* to cut their hair, so it's my choice, not theirs. Having the ability to choose and make my own decisions now is something I won't ever give up again.

Looking around the table, I see Alice, Kari, Phoebe, and to my surprise, Kelly. I wasn't expecting to see her for another couple of weeks for her haircut. I wave at everyone before I start any conversation.

"Hey, Em! I'm so happy you finally agreed to come out with us!" Alice yells over the live band.

"Well, yeah. You wouldn't stop hounding me to come out and it was getting exhausting. Congratulations for breaking down my resolve!" I yell back. "So, how do I order a drink? What's good to drink, anyway?"

“What do you mean, how do you order? Have you never been to a bar before?” Kari asks.

“No, actually. This is my first time,” I admit.

“Oh. Well, you just go up to the bar and order whatever drink you want. But you just asked what is good, so I’m guessing you have never drunk either?” asks Kari.

“You’d be correct. Never had the opportunity, and money was always tight before coming here.”

“Well, since it’s your first time, I’d recommend just a basic margarita. It’s simple and has tequila in it. I would say to stick to the same alcohol. So don’t mix tequila, bourbon, and vodka together. Or any other ones. Stick with one, and always drink a cup of water in between each drink. We need to see your tolerance level, so take it slow, please,” Alice says.

Listening to their advice, I head to the bar and order a margarita and a glass of water from one of the bartenders. I honestly hate plain water; it’s like filling your stomach with nothing, but trying to make it full. Now, don’t get me wrong. When I’m all sweaty and overheated, water is an amazing drink.

As I wait for my drink, I look around the bar, people-watching. I see a bunch of guys in the corner, yelling and screaming at the television. I think it’s because of the game that’s on, though I don’t know the team or even what sport it is.

“Here you go, Emery,” I hear.

I turn around, recognizing the voice.

Seeing Knox here, I never expected him to be a bartender. He seemed like a loner that would be up on the mountain doing some wood carvings or something. Looking him over, I see he has his hair up in a man bun and is wearing a different outfit than earlier, and I genuinely smile. He looks amazing with his band tee and jeans. The jeans and shirt totally do him justice. The jeans are tight-fitting, showing off his nice, round ass, and the shirt shows off his arm muscles.

“Oh. Hey, Knox,” I say as I reach for my drink. “How much do I owe you?”

“Nothing. It’s on the house. Just come find me if you want more drinks.” He shoots me a wink, then turns to take the next customer’s order.

I walk back to where the girls are and put my drinks down on the table. This is when I noticed the band had stopped playing. I look up at them all, and they are pinning me with their stares.

“So, want to tell us what that was about, Emery?” Kelly asks.

“What are you talking about?” I ask her.

“You and the bartender. Don’t think I didn’t notice you didn’t give him any money.”

“Oh, he said it was on the house,” I tell them.

“It means he is paying for it. I mean, you *are* hot. I would want to buy you drinks too if I was a guy,” Kari says.

“I don’t think it’s because of my looks. I’m guessing it was because he was a new customer today at the shop and I treated him well? I didn’t know he was going to be here tonight. Hell, I didn’t even know he was a bartender. We didn’t talk while I was cutting his hair,” I tell the girls. “His name is Knox, and he has super silky hair. That is all I really know about him.”

Looking over my shoulder, I catch him staring at me while drying off a cup. I smile at him and turn back around and take a drink. Not remembering that it’s an alcoholic drink, I chug some down. When I feel the burn in my throat, I almost spit it all back up, trying to get rid of the feeling.

“Why didn’t you tell me it would burn going down? Shit!” I exclaim.

“Because if you knew, you wouldn’t have tried it. We should have told you to sip, not gulp, though I feel like that should have been common knowledge. Who just takes a gulp of something they have never had before?” Alice shrugs.

“I thought I grabbed the water cup,” I say, defeated.

After having that feeling, I wonder how anyone likes drinking any type of alcohol. Man, I'm still feeling the burn. But this is a new experience and I want to be all in, so I go to take another drink, but Kelly puts her hand out to stop me.

"Stir it up. The alcohol likes to sit at the bottom if it stays still too long," she tells me.

When I feel like I've stirred it up enough times, I take a small sip. While I feel the burn, it's not nearly as bad as before. This time, it's somewhat pleasant. Now I know to stir before I drink and to take small drinks.

I finally finish the margarita about forty-five minutes after I ordered it. The whole time we have been sitting here, they have been gossiping about the latest scandal in town. Apparently, Kelly was in BB's the other day, and that is when she saw the newcomers. She went over to introduce herself and got their names. Aubrey, the girl, introduced the guys as her boyfriends: Jeremy, Liam, and Noah. I don't see the big deal. Love is love.

Trying to get away from their talks, since I'm uninterested, I try to change the subject to drinks.

"Hey, I'm done with my drink. I'm going to go get another one and more water. Do any of you want me to get you anything?" I ask the table.

All I hear is a round of yeses from them. The girls all give me their drink orders, and I have to type them in my phone, knowing that I won't remember them.

Heading over to the bar, I look for Knox. He did tell me to get his attention if I wanted anything else. When I finally lock eyes with him, I wave at him, and he starts walking my way.

"What can I get for you, beautiful?" he says.

Blushing, I tell him all the orders. I tell him which tab goes to each drink and I also tell him to open me up one.

“You don’t need to worry about a tab. I’m paying for your drinks tonight,” he states matter-of-factly.

“That’s awfully nice of you, but I can pay for my stuff myself,” I reply.

“I’m sure you can. I just want to,” he tells me.

“Just take my card and open a tab for me, please.”

He takes my card with the rest of them and goes and does whatever bartenders do. A few minutes later, he brings back my card and the drinks. He tells me what is what, and my eyes get big. There is no way I can carry all of these drinks at one time.

“Can I take a few to the table and come get the rest?” I ask him.

“Of course. I’ll wait with them.”

I grab three drinks and head over to the table and distribute them, then go back to grab the last three.

“Thank you, Knox. You are amazing!” I yell as I walk away back to the table.

Getting back to the table, I give Kari her drink.

“He is staring at you,” she says.

“I’m sure he is checking one of you four out. It’s definitely not me he is looking at.”

And I mean it. There is absolutely no way he could be checking me out. I’m damaged goods, with all my physical, mental, and emotional scars. *He* broke me.

As the night goes on, we end up ordering bar food and more drinks. I drink a few glasses of water and two more drinks, making it a total of four. I think I’m holding my liquor fine because the girls assure me I am, but they tell me it’s because I had food and I listened to their water suggestion.

“Alright, everyone, give it up for Gibson Four! I’m DJ Yeti, and I’m going to be here for the rest of the night.”

The song “Maniac” by Stray Kidz starts to come over the loudspeakers, and Alice squeals as she grabs me and Kari by the hand.

“Oh, my God! I love this song! Let’s go dance, everyone!”

“I actually have to head home, y’all. Justin is already going to kill me that he has to come out and get me this late. I’ll get my haircut in the next couple of weeks, okay, Emery?” Kelly asks.

As I nod my head, Phoebe and Kari also say they should be getting home because they have college classes tomorrow. I nod at them as all three of the girls grab their stuff and head out of the bar.

“I guess that just leaves us two. The two amigas, you could say. Now, let’s go dance. This song is my jam,” Alice says as she grabs my hand and pulls me to the dance floor.

As I listen, I hear Ariana Grande’s “Problem” and I start singing along as much as I can. When it gets to Iggy’s rap part, I slam that one hundred percent. This is one of like five or six songs that I know the rap part in, so hearing it and being able to sing it makes me happy.

Alice and I dance together through the next couple of songs until some guy comes up to bump and grind on her. I want her to have time with the guy, so I yell over to her and tell her I’m heading to the bathroom. She nods in acknowledgement.

As I come out of the bathroom, trying to head back to Alice on the dance floor, someone grabs my upper arm and twists me around, holding my arms above me. Before I have time to panic about being touched, I’m being pressed up against a guy that I don’t even know, and a wall. I try to fight him off, but I have no way to get leverage with him boxing me in against the wall and my hands pinned.

“It’s okay, baby. I just want to have a little fun,” he chuckles darkly.

I'm at a loss for words, unable to speak, because I'm already panicking on the inside. My body wants to revolt so much from his touch that it's trembling. As I try to tell him I don't want him touching me, he starts to run his hands up and down my body.

"Pl-pl-please, n-no," I say, shaking from fear.

"Come on, I know you want it. You have been taunting me since you stepped on that dance floor," this guy says.

"N-n-no," I stutter out.

I struggle to get out of his hold. I try to remember all the self-defense that I learned, but I'm drawing a blank. As I'm struggling, the guy starts to slowly move his hand up under my shirt, pulling my bra down and squeezing my breast.

Now crying because he is violating me, I try to tell him to stop, but nothing comes out.

Come on, Emery, say something. Do something.

Realizing that he only has one hand pinning my hands, I try to struggle against his hold. With no luck and losing strength, I'm starting to lose hope that I will get out of here before he goes further.

"Come on, slut, let me have a taste," he hisses in my ear as his hand is slowly climbing my inner thigh.

He licks my neck; my already queasy stomach turns from his saliva on my neck.

"No, pl-please stop. Y-you don't have to do this," I plead.

"I'm just taking what you were flaunting, being a cock-tease on the dancefloor, shaking that ass like that," he says as he grabs my ass.

My begging, pleading, and crying are doing nothing, and I can't stop him. He starts to unbutton my jeans, and I try to move my legs to prevent him from going further but it's no use; I have no strength left to fight.

After he has completely unbuttoned and unzipped my pants, I feel his hand move closer and closer to my entrance.

Just as he moves his hand inside my underwear, he is ripped off of me.

“Get the fuck off her!” I hear.

Looking over, I see Knox punching the guy in the face. Relieved, I fix my clothes and then I slide down the wall and keep crying.

He saved me.

I sit there with my back against the wall, legs up and my face on my knees, crying. Crying because Knox saved me, but also crying because he *had* to save me.

I was such an easy target, I scold myself.

“Emery. You’re safe. He’s gone. It’s okay. Can I help you up and take you somewhere quiet?” he says, holding his hands up in a nonthreatening way.

I nod, still not able to talk. My skin is crawling because I can still feel that guy’s hands everywhere he touched.

As soon as Knox grabs my hand, a jolt goes through my whole body. He doesn’t let go. Instead, he leads me to a back room at the bar.

Looking at him, I give him a gracious smile. He came to help, even when I didn’t ask or know what to do. I’ve never been rescued before—unless I did it myself—so this is unfamiliar territory.

As we are walking into the room, he asks, “Are you okay?”

“Not really, but I will be eventually.”

“I’m sorry I didn’t get there sooner,” he admits out loud once we get into the room.

“Wh-wh-what are you talking about? You came to my rescue. I...I can never thank you enough,” I tell him.

“And I’m glad I got there when I did, but he still put his hands on you. That’s not okay. Ever.”

“It’s not your job to take care of me, Knox! I’ve done fine these past few months,” I blurt out.

My mouth is faster than my brain, because I didn’t mean to word it like that. Hopefully he ignores it.

“I know you can take care of yourself, but you don’t have to. I’d like to help you if you’ll let me,” he replies. “I’d really like to make sure you’re safe tonight. Can I give you a ride home after I get off at midnight to make sure you get there okay? Or if you don’t want to be alone, I have a comfortable bed you can sleep in at my place. Are either of those options okay with you?”

I think about the options. I could go back home and be alone, or I could go with Knox to his house. I sit here and try to figure out what to do when I realize that I don’t want to be alone tonight. Looking up at Knox, I come to a realization that I feel safe with him.

“Are you sure it’s okay if I go to your house? I don’t want to be a burden,” I say just loud enough for him to hear.

“Absolutely. I want you to feel comfortable and happy. If that means coming to my house, then that’s what we do,” he replies.

My heart warms at his answer. He is offering me company and a safe space, both things that I need right now.

“Is it okay if I take a picture of your driver’s license and send it to my friend just in case? I just want to be cautious.”

“Of course. Here you go,” he says as he hands me his license.

I grab my phone out of my back pocket and send it to Alice. Immediately, I get a phone call from her.

“Em, hey. What’s with the picture of Knox’s license?” she questions.

“I’m going home with him. I just want to make sure someone knows where I am and who I’m with, just in case,” I tell her.

“Are you still at the bar?!” she exclaims. “I left. I thought you had left after the bathroom. I couldn’t find you.”

“Yeah...something happened, and Knox helped me with it. Now I’m just going to go home with him,” I explain.

“Oh, Em. I’m so sorry I wasn’t there and thought you left. I should have called or done a thorough sweep of the bar,” she says.

“It’s fine, Alice. It’s done and over with. We can’t change the past. We can only change the future. I’m going to go. I still need to talk to Knox. Bye.”

“Do you want to stay here until my shift ends, or do you want to be out by the bar?” Knox asks.

“I’ll stay in here. I don’t want to be around people right now.” I reply.

“I understand. I’ll come check on you every now and then,” he says.

CHAPTER 3



EMERY

“COME ON, I’LL DRIVE YOU TO MY HOUSE,” KNOX SAYS AS HE motions for me to follow him.

“What am I supposed to do about my car? I drove it here. I can’t just leave it. I need to go to work in the morning,” I say louder than necessary.

“I’ll bring you back in the morning with enough time for you to get ready, get your car, and go to work.”

“Okay, I need to be back at my apartment by seven. I have to open the shop at eight a.m. tomorrow. Today? You know what I mean.”

As he leads me to his car, I start getting nervous, wondering if this was the right choice to go home with him in the middle of the night without knowing much about him. Though nervous, I have that little voice inside my head telling me it’s okay to trust him, because of the way he handled the situation earlier. He didn’t push—unlike some people, who would have—and he has that reassuring smile that just made me feel better seeing it.

He opens the car door for me, and I climb in. Once he is on his side, he tells me to pick whatever on the radio, as he doesn’t care. Not knowing what to put on, I use the search function and let it pick. It lands on some random pop station and is blaring out a Maroon 5 song. I start to sing along to the song, even though I don’t know the name of it, and Knox just keeps driving.

“How far are we from your house?” I question.

“About five or so more minutes. I don’t live far from town or the bar,” he tells me.

As soon as we get to his house, he is out of the car and on my side, opening up my door for me. He puts out his hand for me to use and I graciously accept. Except, as soon as I step out of the car, I trip over my own foot and start to fall, until I feel strong arms around my waist.

Looking up, I see Knox’s face close to mine. Our lips are inches apart.

My breath turns short, and I start panting. Being this close makes me nervous. I haven’t been this close to a guy since I left months ago and came here.

“Let’s head inside,” he says as he helps straighten me upright and then he steps away.

Disappointment runs through my veins. After *him*, I never thought I would want someone to kiss me again, let alone touch me. So having that feeling run through my body is unexpected, especially after what happened earlier. *Was I expecting him to kiss me? Did I want him to kiss me?* I honestly don’t know but disappointment was not the emotion I thought I would have.

I follow him along the path up to his front door. He has a ranch-style house, only having one floor. Walking into his house, I see it’s an open concept with a modern feel and lots of neutral tones, though the house doesn’t feel lived in. It feels dreary.

“Well, welcome to my house. Are you hungry? I know it’s late, but I could make some eggs and toast for you,” he says.

“No. I’m not hungry, but... I would love a shower... if that’s possible? I want to get the feeling of his hands off me,” I mumble sheepishly.

“Of course, the bathroom is the second door on the right,” he says as he points toward the hallway. “Towels are already in the bathroom. I’ll bring you some clothes and leave them outside the door.”

As I head toward the bathroom, I look back and see him in the kitchen grabbing a pan. He must be cooking something for himself.

When I get into the bathroom, I pull the door shut and lock it. I may trust this guy, but I don't want him to see me naked. As I look around, it looks the same as the rest of his house, or what I saw of it. It's very modern, but with blue tones on the wall. The tile in the shower also has some blue in it.

I grab a towel and put it on one of the hooks beside the shower before I open the door and turn the water on. While giving it some time to warm up, I remove the clothes I wore to the bar, grab a towel, and then I get under the warm water. Thinking it's not warm enough, I turn it up slightly, finding the right warmth to help relax my muscles.

Not having any shower stuff here, I look around to see what he has and grab some of his body wash. I open the cap and smell it; it smells like pine trees. I squirt some of it in my hands and wash my body.

Once I'm clean, my muscles relaxed—and I've washed the feeling of my assailant's hands off me—I shut the water off. I take the towel off the hook I left it on before the shower and wrap it around my body. Double-checking that I'm wrapped up, I head to the bathroom door to check for the clothes that Knox said he was going to leave me.

Opening the door, I gaze down and see clothes. Grabbing them quickly, I shut and lock the door again, not wanting to be seen.

Before even looking over the clothes, I know they are going to be way too big. Knox is about a foot taller than my 5'5" stature. I put the shirt on first, and it goes down to mid-thigh. Next is the gym shorts. I have to tie them tight and roll them up a few times for them to be wearable.

I hand-comb my wet hair, then grab the ponytail holder from my wrist and put my hair up. Grabbing my dirty clothes and the towel, I head back out to the living area.

“Hey, Knox?” I say in a questioning tone as I walk toward the kitchen. “Where do you want me to put the towel I used?”

“Bring it here. I’ll throw it in the laundry room. I made us some food,” he says loudly.

I get into the kitchen, and he in fact did cook. Eggs and toast, to be exact.

“Why did you cook?” I question.

“I’m always hungry after a shift, and the last time you ate something was around eight with your friends. Besides, what we don’t eat, I’ll put in the fridge and eat later.”

I sit down at the table, and we eat in silence. It’s one of those peaceful silences, where you don’t feel the need to fill it with useless chatter. Once we done eating, which between the two of us, we ate everything, I take my plate and go to wash it off in the sink.

“You don’t have to do that. You are a guest at my house. Guests do not do chores here,” he says.

“It’s quite alright. Where I grew up, the cook doesn’t clean up after themselves, so don’t bother arguing,” I reply.

“Fine, but at least let me help. It is my house, after all,” he says to me.

“Of course. I would never tell you what to do in your own home.”

“I didn’t say you were, I just don’t want you doing everything.”

I nod my head and get to work picking up the dishes around the kitchen and putting them in the sink. As I’m doing that, it looks like Knox is cleaning them off and putting them in his dishwasher.

Good.

I hate loading other people’s dishwashers. They are all different, and everyone likes them loaded a certain way.

“Thank you for helping, even though you didn’t need to,” he tells me.

“It was my pleasure. I’m glad I could,”. yawning.

“Time for bed, for both of us, you are yawning and I have no idea how long you have been up. You can have the room on the left. It’s the only door on that side.”

I thank him and head exactly where he told me. As I walk into the room, it’s obvious this is the master bedroom. There is so much space in the room. In the middle, there is a big bed—maybe queen, possibly full. The comforter and sheets are all types of grays, and he has nightstands that match the headboard on both sides of the bed. This is exactly what I expected of his room, from the other ones that I have seen.

I want to go out there and tell him I can sleep on the couch or in the guest room, but my selfishness is taking over. I sleep on a pull-out couch at my apartment. I haven’t slept in a real bed in six months.

Pulling back his covers, I slowly slide into his bed, and it’s the softest bed I have ever had the chance to be on, not that I have had many beds to test. As I lie against his pillows and am cuddled up with his sheet and comforter, I smell him. His pine tree scent is surrounding me on every side. Every time I breathe, it’s like I’m taking him in. I feel like I can feel Knox holding me against him, safe in his arms. I close my eyes and take several deep breaths as I count backward from five hundred.

Meow.

Meow.

Meow.

Waking up, I keep hearing meowing. Looking around, I don’t see anything that would make a noise, which is very curious.

Meow.

I screech, hearing it from right behind me and so unexpectedly. I'm taking long breaths and counting them when Knox comes running in the door.

“What? What? What’s wrong?” he questions.

“Nothing. The cat scared me. I thought I heard meowing, but I couldn’t see any cats, so I brushed it off. As soon as I did, the cat meowed behind me and it scared me,” I say to him, luckily still under the covers, as I’m only in underwear right now.

“Oh, that’s just Charlie. I should have asked if you were allergic, but I let him in here earlier this morning. He was stalking the door and kept swiping at it until I let him in,” he tells me.

I turn around and look at the chubby kitty. He has this little white triangle over his nose that makes his actual nose look like a tall chocolate chip. He has a white chest and belly, but everything else is all tabby color. I try to pick him up, and he runs from me.

“You wake me up and won’t even let me hold you. Such an asshole. I just wanted to give you love,” I say in the direction Charlie ran off to, then turn to look at Knox. “I love cats. Ever since kindergarten, I’ve always wanted one, but was never allowed to have one. When I moved in with Derek, he told me we couldn’t have one either.”

Fuck. Fuck. Fuckity fuck.

I didn’t mean to bring *him* up. It slipped out.

Fuck.

Hopefully, he just lets it slide and doesn’t bring it up. I don’t know if I can talk about *him* right now.

“Who’s Derek, and was he allergic or something?” he asks.

I shake my head, not wanting to comment on it further.

Hoping to change the subject, I ask, “How old is Charlie?”

“He’s ten. Are you okay, Emery? You look like you’ve seen a ghost.”

“I-I just don’t want to talk about...about him. Please,” I beg.

“Okay. You know you can trust me, right?”

Nodding my head, I know it’s true. As much as it doesn’t seem possible, I trust this man with my life.

“I know you don’t want to talk about him, but I want to know if you are in any type of danger,” he says.

“Yo-yo-you are ri-ri-right. I don’t want to talk about him. He is just from my past and I want to live in the present.”

“Okay, but just know I’m here if you ever want to talk about him. I’m going to check on breakfast. You are free to roam my dresser and closet for something to wear, or you can just wear what I gave you earlier,” he says as he walks out and shuts the door behind him.

Oh, thank God. I release the breath that I didn’t know I was holding. As I slowly rise from the bed, I pull his shirt over my head and start rummaging through his drawers, looking for something smaller that will hopefully fit me.

After about five minutes of looking, I find nothing, so I give up on my endeavor. I grab his shorts from last night, put them on, and head to the kitchen. He did mention breakfast, after all.

When I open the door, there is an overwhelming bacon smell. So much that my stomach grumbles and my mouth starts to water. I head toward the kitchen, and the closer I get to it, the stronger the bacon smell is.

“Bacon is almost all lost. I was able to save about four pieces. I’m so sorry for them being burnt. I’m making pancakes as well. There are some on the island over there. You can grab as many as you want. I got plenty of mix to make more if we run out,” he says as he is flipping said pancakes.

“Don’t worry about it. It was my fault for them being burnt. I kept you too long.”

“Hey, now, you don’t need to keep apologizing. You did nothing wrong. It’s just bacon. We still have pancakes.”

Nodding, I start opening up cabinets and draws looking for the plates, silverware, and syrup.

“What are you doing?” he asks.

“Just looking for the plates and silverware. Oh, and the syrup. You forgot to get them out,” I reply.

“Oh, shit. That was my fault. I was worried about the burning bacon and didn’t get a chance. Plates are in the far left cabinet, silverware is to the left of the dishwasher, and you’ll have to open a new syrup. It’s in the pantry beside the fridge,” I hear him say as I’m still checking the cabinets.

Now knowing where everything is, I hunt down what I’m looking for and pull everything out. I place it all on the island for him to use as well. It would be rude of me just to get the stuff out for me, right?

I grab half the bacon and a couple of pancakes. After drizzling—well, really smothering—everything in syrup, I head to the other side of the island, where he has seats.

“Come join me. I left you plenty to eat,” I say, which is the truth.

All of his pancakes are plate-sized. And I only took two. There are still about five or six left.

“Let me finish this set, and I’ll be over. Go ahead and start eating. I’ll scarf mine down so we can get you to your place in time,” he says as he flips the pancakes again from the griddle.

CHAPTER 4



EMERY

“OKAY, HERE IS MY NUMBER. YOU CAN CALL ME IF SOMETHING is weird, you feel funny, or you need or want to talk,” he says with a smile.

I grab the little slip of paper from his hands, and as I do, our hands graze and a shot of heat runs right to my core.

No, Emery. Not allowed, I tell myself as I smile shyly and close the car door.

Running to my car that I left at the bar, I hurry and get in the driver’s seat. I look back and see he is still waiting, so I start the car and head to my apartment as fast as possible.

Rushing toward my apartment building, I climb the three levels of stairs. Once I’m at my door, I finally take a long breath. Climbing those every day never gets less exhausting.

Finally in my apartment, I run around like a chicken with its head cut off, trying to get ready for work. I find some clothes: a nice button-up, some jeans, and a pair of black Chucks. I throw my hair up in a high ponytail, grab my purse and the keys to the store, and head right back out the door.

The day is going slow. I’ve only had two customers in the past few hours, making this day go by so much slower. I’ve had my phone out and I’ve been on Facebook most of the day, just scrolling my news feed.

I keep scrolling until I get a ping. I see I have a direct message from someone in my old town. I ignore it, though. After what people said to me after the trial, I told myself I wouldn't listen or look at what they had to say to me. I pull the chat bubble down to close out of the app.

Just as I'm about ready to keep scrolling, I hear the bell above the door ring. I look up, and it's Alice.

"Hey, Alice! What are you doing here? I don't think you're due for a haircut yet?"

"Oh, I'm not here to get my hair cut. I'm here to gossip! Here. I brought you a frozen latte from the coffee shop, BB's, down the road, since I know you don't drink coffee."

"Thank you," I say as I take what she is handing me. "What gossip are you here for?"

"Yours! Now, spill. What happened to make you go home with Knox when you have been a recluse since you came to town?"

"I was almost raped last night. If Knox hadn't been there, he would have succeeded. Knox saved me last night, and then he took me to the back room and let me sit there to regain my composure. The whole time, he was sweet and caring, trying really hard to make sure I was okay."

"Oh, my God, Emery! I'm so fucking sorry. I should have gone to the bathroom with you! Are you okay, though? Do we need to go to the police and file a report?" she asks.

"No. No police. I just want to put it in the past and try to focus on the here and now."

"So now I have to ask, how come you went home with him? I would have come over or you could have come to my place."

"Honestly, I didn't want to be alone, and he made me feel safe and protected after he saved me. It just felt right," I reply.

"So, you felt safe with him? Do you trust Knox?"

"Weirdly enough, yeah. I know it's weird, but I do," I tell her.

“So, what happened when you went over to his house?”

“Nothing happened, really. He let me take a shower, he made a late-night meal, and then we went to bed. Though this morning, he made breakfast and when he dropped me off at my car, he gave me his number,” I say.

“*Ooh*, that’s a good sign. He definitely likes you!” she exclaims.

“I don’t know, Alice. I think he was just being nice to me. There are some guys out there who still don’t think chivalry is dead,” I reply.

“Dude, he couldn’t keep his eyes off you all night last night. I’m sure before you left, he would have asked for your number at least. How do you feel about him?”

“I honestly don’t know. I trust him, and I’ve only known him for twenty-four hours. I’m forever grateful for what he did last night. Every time we touch, I feel like I’m burning inside. But that doesn’t mean anything, does it? It’s just lust, right?”

“I don’t think so, honey. I’ve been in lust with several people, and I have never felt what you are describing. Maybe your body and your heart know something that your mind doesn’t yet.”

“Last time I trusted my heart, it ended badly. I’m afraid to trust it again,” I admit.

“Listen, you shouldn’t live your life in fear all the time. I understand why you think and feel that, but it’s no way to live. You need to be happy. If Knox makes you feel safe and happy, you should give it a chance. Besides, you shouldn’t hold your past against him,” Alice says. “Why don’t you text him and see if you guys could go get coffee or go on a date for food or something?”

I think about what she said, and I know that I would hate for people to hold their past against me when I did nothing to wrong them.

“You are right. I shouldn’t hold my past against him. I might text him after work. Thank you, Alice. For coming and talking to me, and for helping me,” I tell her.

“Of course. What are besties for, if not to gossip and help each other?”

CHAPTER 5



KNOX

AFTER I DROP OFF EMERY AT HER HOUSE, I HEAD BACK HOME to get some rest. Being a bartender means my sleep schedule is reversed. I sleep during the day, and I work at night. Don't get me wrong, the pay is amazing, but on days like today, I miss being able to be up during the day. Even though I couldn't really pay Emery a visit since I just got my hair cut yesterday.

Last night at the bar, when I saw the look in her eyes when that guy was all up on her, I saw red. I was over there in seconds, pulling Jackson off her. If I wasn't concerned for Emery's safety, I probably would have lost my job because I don't know if I would have been able to stop myself from hitting him.

Luckily, knowing Emery was beside me and needed comforting, I only got one good punch in before I told him if he came near her again, the cops wouldn't even be able to find his body. That got him running scared.

I'm glad she decided to come to my place, though I would have respected her decision if she had wanted to go back to her house. When we locked eyes in her shop, I could see the desperation for someone to save her, but the unwillingness to show weakness. I could get lost in her mesmerizing eyes.

When I tried to get her out of the car, she almost fell, and I caught her. There was a moment when our lips were inches away from each other and I wanted to capture hers with mine, except I knew it wasn't the right time, especially after what she went through.

The sight of her in my clothes was the hottest thing I have ever seen. I know everyone says that it's hot when women wear men's clothes, and after last night, I can definitely say it's fucking true. After she'd walked into the kitchen, I had spent the rest of our time last night trying to hide my rock-hard cock. I'd tried to tell him it wasn't the right time.

When I get home from dropping off Emery, Charlie is waiting by the door. He meows as soon as I step in. I pet him a few times before I walk to my bedroom.

As soon as I get inside, I head to my dresser and notice that she must have gone through it earlier this morning, since everything is a lot messier than I would like it to be. Grabbing a different pair of underwear, I change into them and then head to go to sleep. It's seven-thirty a.m., and I have to be up at two to get my run in before I go to work.

Remembering that Emery was in my bed turns me on. My cock turns rock-hard, harder than it ever has been before. I take myself out of my boxer briefs and run my hand up and down my length, pre-cum leaking from the tip.

I jerk my hands up and down a few more times and imagine what it would be like to have my way with Emery.

Claiming her lips with mine, I let my hands roam under her shirt, just grazing her flat stomach. I hear her moan against my lips, and I slowly work my way up to her chest. Pulling her bra down, I cup her breasts with my hands. I work kisses all the way down her jaw and neck, slowly nibbling and biting along the way.

"Yes. More, Knox," I hear her moan.

I grab her shirt and pull it completely off, wanting full access to her breasts. Removing her bra, I attach my lips to one of her nipples, and in rhythm, I pinch and pull the other one.

Pulling away, I ask, "What do you want, Emery? Tell me and I'll make it come true. Your every wish is my command."

"Lower, Knox. Lower. I need you lower," she moans out.

I slowly move my hand down her breasts, past her stomach, and I land directly above her pussy. "Are you wet for me, baby girl? If I shove my fingers into your core, will you be dripping for me?"

Nodding her head, she whimpers.

Opening up her jeans, I'm met with no underwear.

"Such a bad girl, not wearing any underwear," I say as I pull her jeans off.

I slowly move my hands up her inner thighs, getting closer and closer to her core. When I'm inches away, she whimpers again.

"Please," I hear her beg me.

"You are glistening for me. It's so hot. Should I clean you up, baby girl?" I ask as I breathe on her core, warming it up.

"Yes. God. Please," she breathes out. "Just keep touching me."

I slowly take a finger and run it from her clit to her entrance, and she shudders. I move my face closer and take her bud into my mouth. Slowly, I suck and nibble on it, eliciting a moan from her yet again. I take my free hand and hold her hips down.

I keep licking and sucking her bundle of nerves, and then I add one finger to her core, moving it in and out at a slow, punishing pace. I hear her beg for more, that she needs more and I'm more than happy to give her heart's desire to her. I insert another finger and then another, slowly speeding up with each new addition.

With my hands holding her hips, I have nothing to prevent her from squeezing my head with her thighs. As she is squeezing, her hands wrap around my hair, pushing me further into her dripping core. I know she is close, because I hear her whimper and her body is quivering under my touch.

"How close are you, baby girl?" I ask her.

"So close, God, Knox, please. I'm so close. Don't stop. Don't ever stop," she moans in between thrusts.

Switching tactics, I move my thumb to her nub and my mouth to her core. I want to drink up all her cum when it comes. I circle her pearl, pinching and twisting along with me eating her core like it's my last meal. I use my tongue, and I feel her insides quiver. Keeping up my pace on her clit, I pull away.

"Come for me now," I demand of her.

And that's when I feel her whole body convulsing for her orgasm. I lick her up until I have drunk every last drop of her nectar.

"God, you taste divine. I'll never get tired of having your delicious juices all over my face like that. But, baby girl, it's my turn." I move up the bed and slowly pull her to the edge. "I want to fuck that pretty mouth of yours. Will you let me do that?"

She nods.

"If you ever feel uncomfortable or need to stop, tap my leg two times. Understand?"

"Yes sir," she says.

When she says "sir," it makes my cock twitch with excitement.

"I need you to open up, baby girl. I'm going to feed you my seed now," I tell her as she looks up at me.

God, is she gorgeous. Naked and waiting for my cock. I'm going to burn this image into my brain so I never forget it. Once she opens up, I slowly walk closer to her face. Pushing my length inside her mouth slowly, so she can get used to the feeling, I moan, and it takes everything in me not to blow my load then and there.

"Take a deep breath, baby girl. I'm going to start moving, okay? I don't think I can hold back. Your mouth feels so damn good," I say.

She nods, and I feel her take a breath. As soon as she looks back at me, I push all the way into her mouth and pull back again. I move faster and faster with each thrust, getting closer

and closer to oblivion. I look at her gorgeous face, taking my cock like a good girl.

“Such a good girl, taking my cock all perfectly. Do you need another breath, baby girl, before I shoot my load down your throat?” I ask her.

She nods, so I pull back and let her breathe. As soon as she is ready, I push my dick back into her mouth. On the verge of ecstasy, I thrust in short, quick movements.

“Does it feel as good for you to please me as it does for me to take pleasure from your mouth?”

I feel her hum something against my dick, and that’s exactly what I need to push me over the edge.

“Get ready, baby girl. I’m coming,” I shout out as I shoot stream after stream of my cum into her mouth. “Swallow it all like the good girl I know you are.”

Once I feel she has gotten every drop, I pull my dick out of her mouth with a pop. I look at her gorgeous face and I see a little bit of cum running down her mouth. I take my finger, swipe it up and stick it in her mouth, not wanting her to miss any.

And that’s when I feel the sensation of my impending orgasm take over my body. My eyes roll back in my head as I shout out Emery’s name.

I realize that I’ve come all over my hand and made a mess on my stomach.

God, I need a shower.

CHAPTER 6



KNOX

Buzz.

Buzz.

Buzz.

As I wake up, I hear a buzzing coming from my room. I look around, trying to figure out where it's coming from, and that's when it clicks. It's my cellphone. I left it in my jeans pocket earlier this morning before I got into bed.

Getting out of bed, I look around for my jeans until I finally find them. Pulling my phone out, I see it's a text message from an unknown number. I unlock the phone to see what the message says.

EMERY

Hey, Knox. It's Emery.

My heart soars. I text her back.

KNOX

Hey, Emery! Glad you texted me. Now I have your number. :-P

Looking around, I see I also slept through my alarm, as it's four now and I only have about an hour to get ready before work.

When my phone buzzes again, I look down and see Emery texted again. I add her information to my contact list before I text her back.

EMERY

That's how that works.

KNOX

How is work? Are you getting off soon?

EMERY

It was slow. My friend Alice came in and we talked for a little bit. I just got off. I'm heading home now.

KNOX

I hope you aren't texting and driving.

EMERY

No, I haven't even gotten into my car yet. I'm closing shop now.

KNOX

Good. I'm happy that you are being safe.

EMERY

I texted to see if maybe you wanted to get coffee or dinner. Like a date.

I can't believe she just asked me on a date. I thought for sure it would be a little longer before that was a possibility.

KNOX

Of course. Which would you prefer? I'm down for either. If it's dinner, I can pick you up and we can go to Lexington.

EMERY

Then let's do dinner. I haven't been to Lexington since I got here. That sounds exciting.

KNOX

Deal. How about tomorrow? I'm off and I can pick you up at 6 p.m.

EMERY

Sounds perfect. I'll let you pick. I like everything but seafood and Olive Garden.

KNOX

Deal. Just be ready tomorrow. I have the perfect spot to take you.

EMERY

You got it.

Smiling, I look at the clock and see I have five minutes until I have to leave for work. Throwing my phone on the bed, I rush to the dresser and put on some clothes, then head out the door.

CHAPTER 7



EMERY

OPENING MY DOOR, I WALK IN AND LOOK AROUND MY ONE-bedroom apartment. I didn't get a chance to really pay attention to it this morning when I was rushing to get ready for work. All I see are dishes that need to be done, carpet that needs to be vacuumed, and clothes that need to be cleaned.

I take a deep breath, trying not to get overwhelmed. If Knox is coming over and picking me up tomorrow, I don't want to take the chance that he'll see this mess that I call my home. After I take a few more deep breaths, I put my headphones in and think of a plan to get the house clean as efficiently as possible.

I run around the house, picking up all the clothes and separating them into piles for the washer. With my apartment not having its own washer and dryer, I'm going to have to take them to the laundromat in town.

Now that they are picked up and put in piles for the washer, I head to the kitchen and start running hot water in the sink to soak the dishes before I wash them. As the water is running, I try to pile like dishes together, with all the plates and bowls in their own piles. Turning off the water, I turn around and look at how messy the living room is.

I see books, my computer, candy wrappers, and so much more trash just lounging around on the floor. Grabbing a trash bag, I clean up the living room so I can vacuum. Pulling it out of the bedroom closet, I vacuum the living room and my bedroom.

Remembering that I still have the dishes to do, I put the vacuum cleaner up and head over to do the dishes. It takes me around thirty minutes to do the dishes. I hate doing them. That is why they pile up. I guess it's also why everything else does too, if I'm being honest with myself.

It gets overwhelming if I don't keep up with it all the time, but that also is exhausting. Constantly having to think about keeping the house clean. I know it needs to be done. I try to do most of the cleaning on the weekends, but I just wasn't feeling it last weekend. I stayed in bed and read books on the Kindle app on my phone all weekend.

Exhausted, I sit down on the couch to finally take a breather. I look at the time on my phone and I realize I have been cleaning for two hours. I let out another big breath and then head to take a shower. Cleaning made me super sweaty, and I think it's gross.

After my shower, I lie in my bed and read a book on my Kindle. I'm about twenty pages into a new book when I hear my phone ping, meaning I got a notification. Setting my Kindle down, I check my phone and see that it's a text from Knox.

KNOX

Hey, Emery. Just wanted to check in with you since it's about nine p.m.

EMERY

Knox, hi. I'm doing good, just lying in my bed reading a book.

KNOX

Is your door locked? Just want you to be safe, beautiful.

EMERY

It should be. I'll double-check just to make sure, though.

I get up from the bed and go check my door. When I get there, it's unlocked, and I swear I locked it when I got home today. Not thinking much of it, I shake off the unease I feel.

EMERY

It was unlocked, though I could swear I locked it. Guess I forgot today. My mind was wandering a lot because of a certain guy.

KNOX

Well, I'm glad I had you check it out, and that it's now locked. That guy wouldn't happen to be me, would it?

EMERY

I plead the Fifth. *devil emoji* Goodnight, Knox. I'll see you tomorrow at six.

KNOX

Get some sleep, Emery. I want you well rested for me tomorrow.

Setting my phone on the floor by my bed, I tell myself that everything will be okay while I slowly fade to sleep.

It's five-thirty, and I'm waiting for Knox to get here. Today was boring at work again. I had another Facebook Messenger message from the same person as yesterday. I ignored it yet again.

Knock.

Knock.

Knock.

That must be Knox.

Getting up quickly, I head to the door and open it without thinking.

As I open the door, I'm pushed into my apartment. A hand finds my mouth before I'm able to scream.

At first, I'm afraid that I have misjudged Knox and it's him, but when I look up, I find myself looking into a pair of eyes I thought I would never see again. It takes everything in me not to start crying. I'm terrified of what he will do to me.

"Hello, my darling. Did you miss me? Because I sure missed you," he whispers into my ear.

Finally, my fight or flight instincts take over. I try to shove him off me, but he pushes me up against the wall beside the front door.

"God, I love when you struggle for your life. It was my favorite part. Keep fighting. You know it's only going to turn me on, and I'm already hard as a rock," he says as he grinds his groin against me.

I try not to vomit from his touch. Trying to reason with myself, I tell myself to calm down. That running and fighting only make things worse for me. That he gets off from it.

"Now, are you going to be good and quiet if I remove my hand?" he asks.

I nod because there isn't any other response I can think of that will get him to remove his hand. My body, moving to shrink itself, automatically obeys him from years of being torn down and him beating it into me. Literally.

"What do you want, *Derek*?" I grit out as soon as he removes his hand.

"Oh, darling, I want you. What else would I want? I have only ever wanted you. After your shenanigans and trying to get me locked up, it just made me harder for you. I knew you would run. Of course I did. I've had someone watching you

ever since the sentencing. I knew where you were all along. You were never going to escape me,” Derek says.

A tear falls down my face. I feel so helpless and scared. I ran so far away and started over with nothing, and now he is telling me all of my hard work was pointless. Another tear trails down my cheek when I think of everything I went through to get to where I am today.

“Now, I know you spent the night at that guy, Knox’s, house. Did you fuck him like the slut you are?” he asks.

Even though I did nothing with Knox the other night, it won’t matter what I say to him. He won’t believe me. He’ll think I’m lying and hurt me anyway. It’s what he does, so I don’t respond to him.

Slap.

“Such a fucking slut! Did you let him shove his cock in your tight cunt? Did you let him shove his cock down your throat? Swallow his cum, like you always did with me?” he screams.

“N-n-no,” I reply, knowing that if I stay silent again, his punishment will only get worse.

“Yeah right!” Derek yells in my face. “You spent the night with him and wore his clothes home!”

“I pro-pro-promise. Nothing happened,” I say, hoping that is enough.

Slap.

“Fucking lies! You fucked him, didn’t you? Why else would you need to change clothes?”

I think about what to say. If I tell him the truth, that I wanted to get that dude’s touch off me, he will just punish me more for showing off what’s his at the bar. Not thinking fast enough, I feel another slap.

“Answer me, slut! You fucked him, and you liked it!”

“No, Derek. I-I-I didn’t do anything with him. I just took a shower at his place, had some food, and then slept in a bed by

myself,” I say just loud enough for him to hear.

Slap.

“Enough lies! You know I have to punish you, right? For letting someone else touch what’s mine,” he says with a smile.

I whimper as my stomach turns from the scent of sulfur, a stench I lived with for years.

“Oh, darling, are you excited for your punishment? I always knew you were a slut for me.”

Derek takes his hand and runs it down my face, making me shiver. Once he gets to my throat, he slowly grips it tighter and tighter until I’m barely breathing. I see the glee in his face from me slowly losing consciousness.

“I love having your life in the palm of my hand, darling,” he laughs out.

Letting go of my throat, he grabs my hands, spins me around, and slams me against the wall. I whimper from the pain and hear him chuckle against my ear.

“Such a pain slut. I knew you liked it when I was rough with you.”

All I feel is hopelessness. I know no matter how much I try to fight against him, it will all end the same. I feel Derek move his hand up my shirt and under my bra. He grasps my breasts, and it is rough and hurts. Biting my lip, I don’t want to make any sounds, afraid he will think the wrong thing.

“N-n-no, ple-ple-please don’t, Derek. I beg of you, just let me go. If you love me, you won’t do this to me.”

“HA!” he exclaims. “How could you doubt my love for you? I escaped from prison to be with you. You are everything to me, and you ruined us when you went to the hospital that day. You couldn’t just let us live in blissful happiness, could you?”

“That wasn’t love. You don’t beat the people that you love.”

“I had to make you see that my love for you was all-consuming. If you would just listen, I wouldn’t have to hurt you, Emery,” he says. “Now I have to show you who you belong to.”

Slowly, Derek takes his hand and lowers it closer and closer to my jeans. I try my hardest to stay calm and breathe normally, but the closer he gets, the harder my breathing gets with me internally freaking out.

He unbuttons my jeans and starts to pull them down. I struggle a little bit, trying to keep him from doing what he is about to do to me. But, in my struggle, I keep brushing up against him.

“I knew you liked it like this. You want more don’t you, slut? I bet you are fucking wet from all this pain. Why don’t I just see?” he says as he slips his hands down in my underwear.

Automatically, I shout, “No!”

As he is moving his hands up further, I hear beating on the front door.

“Emery? Emery! Answer me, are you okay?” I hear Knox say on the other side of the door.

“You better not say a single word, or I’ll kill you,” Derek says as he moves his hand back to my throat.

I try to think of all my options. I could stay quiet, and he will just have his way with me if I pass out, or I could yell and hope that Knox is still out there and can save me. Going back and forth, I make my decision.

“Knox, help!” I scream as fast as possible before Derek tightens his hold on my throat.

“Emery! Emery!” Knox says frantically. “Hold on, baby! I’m coming.”

Next thing I know, I hear grunts and the door getting bumped until it finally opens up. As everything slowly fades to black, I get a glimpse of Knox before I succumb to the darkness.

CHAPTER 8



EMERY

“SHE HAS A PULSE. SIR. SIR. I’M GOING TO HAVE TO ASK YOU to move away from the patient please,” I hear, but it seems far away.

“Emery. Emery. Wake up, baby. Please wake up,” I think I hear Knox say.

Fighting to open my eyes, I slowly do so, and there is a bright light in my eyes and I have something on my face. Blinking to get used to the lights again, I look down and see that it’s an oxygen mask covering my face. I start looking around, scared because I don’t know what happened to Derek, and someone—I don’t know who—is touching me.

“Shh. Shh. It’s okay. He is just a paramedic. I’m right here beside you,” Knox says as he grabs my hand and starts rubbing circles in my palm. “Just breathe, okay?”

I try my hardest to breathe normally. I close my eyes and start to count backward from ten, taking a deep breath on each count.

“How do you feel...Emery, is it?” the paramedic asks.

“I-I-I... Hurts...talk,” I end up whispering.

“That’s okay, just nod your head slightly if whatever I say is hurting, okay?” the paramedic replies.

“Head?”

I nod.

“On a scale of one to ten, how much does it hurt? You can use your fingers.”

After going through every body part, the paramedic eventually just says he thinks I have a concussion and I should go to the hospital just in case. I decline, not wanting more people to poke and prod me.

“Are you sure, Em?” Knox asks.

“Yes, I’m sure. I just want to go back to your house, if that is okay? I don’t want to be here right now.”

“Of course you can. We can do whatever you feel comfortable doing,” he tells me.

“Okay, well, just watch her for any mood swings, or if she develops a worse headache,” the paramedic tells Knox. “Take her to the ER if any of those happen, okay?”

Knox nods his head. “I will. Don’t worry, I’ll watch her.”

Knox drives us back to his house. During the drive, he tries to make conversation with me, but I just stay silent, not wanting to talk just yet about what happened. As soon as we park, I’m out of the car, with Knox right behind me. He pulls my back up against his chest.

“Everything is going to be okay, I promise. You are a survivor. You are strong. You are brave and resilient. You are not alone. I’m right here for whatever you need,” Knox says against my temple. “Do you feel up to talking about who that was?”

I nod, and I start off the story about when I was eighteen.

“I had just gotten out of foster care, so I was stumbling to get on my feet. Then, in walks this guy, Derek, and he sat in my chair and I gave him a haircut much like I did with you. He left that day, but then kept coming back every day, bringing me flowers, chocolates... You name it, he probably brought it to me. All the while, constantly asking me to go out with him.

“I did finally cave, and we went on a date. Then another date and another until it was just assumed I was his girlfriend. About a year after we got together, that’s when it started. It was just yelling at first. That I wasn’t keeping the place clean enough, or that I was out too late. The first time he slapped me, I told myself that I would leave, but he promised he wouldn’t do it again. But a couple months later, he did it again. I didn’t have anywhere else to go, so I stayed. Stayed for five years, until he collapsed a lung from a broken rib bone penetrating it, and he had to call 911.

“When I woke up, the cops were there. Once I told the cops everything, they arrested him. There was a trial and everything. That was when I found out he was selling drugs to teenagers. He got sentenced to up to ten for his drug charges alone.”

Once I’m done, my body feels like a weight is lifted off of it. I feel so calm and relaxed. I never would have guessed I would feel this way after sharing all of that. Before I know it, Knox has pulled me into a hug, and I use every fiber of my being not to break down and cry.

“As I said earlier, you are so strong, and even now you have me in awe. Thank you for telling me your story,” he says as he is still hugging me.

“I think I’m okay now. Thank you for listening,” I say, exhausted now.

“Are you tired? Do you want to rest? Come on, let me take you to the bedroom so you can lie down. I’ll cook us something while you rest.” He takes my hand and leads me to his room. “Take all the time you need, Emery. I’ll be in the kitchen. I’ll come check on you in a little bit.”

As he walks away, I grab his shirt. “Don’t leave. Please. I’m scared to be alone. What if he escapes again. What if he comes after me again?”

I feel my hands get clammy and I start gasping for air, with tears running down my face.

“Hey. Hey. It’s okay. Shh. I’ve got you. He won’t get to you. The cops have him in custody.”

He pulls me into his embrace while we are both sitting on the bed. His warmth, his touch...it feels like he is fixing all the broken pieces I thought would never heal. I feel like he is blocking out the whole world to protect me, trying to keep me safe with just his warmth. I lean into the feeling of his heat, wanting to feel safe again.

“I just thought that after what happened you might want some space.”

“No, please stay.”

“Okay. Is it okay if I hold you while we lie down?”

I nod, not wanting to leave the protected feeling that I get in his arms.

As we move up to the top of the bed, he asks me, “Do you want to take a shower...before we lie down? Just to relax your muscles and help you sleep a little better?”

I look at the bathroom and then at Knox. I shake my head. As much as a shower feels good, his embrace is better. He nods and then pulls me closer to him, kissing me on the forehead.

“I’m here, Emery. I’m not leaving. Just get some rest. I’ll be here when you wake up.”

CHAPTER 9



EMERY

“AND THAT IS OUR TIME, EMERY. SAME TIME IN TWO WEEKS?” my therapist asks.

“Yes, please. I’ll see you then.” I wave goodbye and shut the laptop.

I head out of the bedroom and toward the kitchen, where I smell something delicious and mouthwatering.

It’s been a month since the attack and that morning I woke up in Knox’s hold. He stayed true to his word and was there when I woke up. That morning after the attack from Derek, I asked if I could stay for a couple days, and he agreed. It ended up being a few weeks before I was okay with the thought of being alone. Except I didn’t have to be, because Knox invited me to stay over indefinitely until I truly wanted to go home.

I immediately agreed, knowing that if I went home, I would relive the attack.

Knox has been nothing but amazing to me since that dreadful night. He dotes on me all the time. He even went over and packed up all my clothes and brought them over here for me. He cleared out closet space and everything just because I wasn’t ready to go home.

After about a week after he asked me to stay, he asked me on a date, since our original one never happened. Let me tell you, this guy knows how to plan dates.

Our first date that he planned was a picnic under the stars. I have always loved stargazing, but never get the chance to

anymore. I remember saying it in one of those nighttime conversations that we had that first month. I couldn't believe he remembered, and the fact that he did... It tore down most of my walls. Slowly, with each date, he tore them completely down.

I never thought I would be able to love someone after how badly Derek broke me, but this feeling? The overwhelming longing to be close to him, to want him to be happy, to see his smile, to go out on more dates with him? It's love. I thought I loved Derek at one point, but it's nothing compared to how I feel about Knox.

Knox takes care of me, is true to his word, and is my protector. If I'm feeling down, alone, lost, Knox is there to shine the way to the light. He just makes everything better in my life and all I want to do is be with him.

Which is why it's finally time to tell him how I feel.

Walking into the kitchen, I gaze at Knox, cooking lunch for us. It smells delicious, but I stay quiet, silently taking in the image. Knox is at the stove, cooking whatever, completely oblivious to me watching.

I go to clear my throat to announce my presence, but before I can, he asks, "How was therapy? Was it a good session?"

"H-h-how did you know I was here? I thought I was finally getting better at sneaking up on you!"

"Because, baby girl, I can feel your eyes on me."

"GRRRR. Stop it, I want to surprise you sometimes!" I pout.

"Sorry, baby girl. But you surprise me every day with the little things you do, like getting the coffee ready for me or knowing all of my takeout orders."

I blush, not knowing how to truly react. "Well, yeah. I want to do things for you too, like you do for me."

"You don't have to do anything for me, except be happy. Your happiness is all I want from you."

I beam up at him, smiling and so happy.

“I love you!” I say quickly, afraid I’ll chicken out and not say it to him.

Saying *I love you* is going to change a lot of things, hopefully for the better, but I’m unsure and now I’m nervous, since I finally said it.

Before I can even think that he is going to laugh at me, he pulls my chin up, making me look at him. “I love you too, Emery.”

“Ca-ca-can you kiss me, please?”

“Are you sure, Emery? We don’t have to do anything, just yet.”

As Knox is asking the question, I know I want him. Even after being attacked by Derek, I still want to be with Knox. He makes me feel protected, safe, and wanted in a good way. There isn’t anyone else I want to be with.

“I’m sure, Knox. Please. I love you. I know you are it for me.”

“Last chance, Emery. If we do this, you are mine. Forever. There is no going back,” Knox growls.

“I’m sure Knox. I want you. Please?” I’m begging this time.

“Fuck,” I hear Knox growl before he slams his lips down on mine. “God, you taste better than I imagined.”

Taking the kiss slowly at first, we explore each other’s mouths. Knox pulls my bottom lip between his and nibbles it. Moaning, he takes his chance and moves his tongue against mine, taking the kiss deeper than before.

I move my hands around his neck, and that’s when he picks me up. Without thinking, I wrap my legs around his waist. He is moving, but I have no idea where he is going, nor do I care. I’m lost in this kiss.

I hear a door open when he and I come up for a breath. I look around, and it’s his room. Knox places me on his bed. I

scoot up to the top of the bed, while Knox stays at the end.

“Emery, I don’t want you to feel like you have to do this or that I’m taking advantage of you, because once we do this, that’s it. You are my end game.”

“Yes, please.”

Crawling toward me on the bed, he slams his lips back on mine and I feel his hands roam my body, touching me everywhere and making me feel on fire for him. For a while, all we do is kiss, exploring each other’s mouths until Knox moves his hands to my hips, and it’s like the spark is ignited.

“Ca-can I touch you Knox?”

“Baby girl, you can do whatever you want. You are in control.”

My heart warming, I move my hands to where his shirt and jeans meet and slowly grab his shirt and take it off him.

I touch his chest and move down to his abs, slowly exploring the exposed part of his body. He shivers under my touch, and I hear a little moan come from his lips. Wanting to feel his hands on me, I take my hands away and grab my shirt and take it off, leaving me topless.

“Will you touch me, like I’m touching you?” I plead.

“If you’re sure?”

As soon as I say yes, he is bringing his hands up to my breasts and slowly grazes them with the back of his hand. I moan just from the simple touch.

“More, baby girl?”

I nod slightly. My body is on fire from his touch and every time his skin connects with mine, I know my panties are getting wetter and wetter for him. Knox takes my breasts in his hands and ever so slowly pulls my nipple into his mouth. I moan from the feeling of his tongue on me.

Knox looks at me as his hand slides down my stomach to my pajama shorts.

“Yes?” he whispers.

“Yes,” I breathe out.

Knox takes his time, pulling my shorts off with my underwear, kissing my hips and my thighs the whole time. Finally bare in front of him, I get nervous and try to cover up.

“Don’t. I love your body. It looks amazing and beautiful.”

Without hesitation, he moves his hand to my core, as soon as he thrusts his finger inside me, I moan and my head rolls back from the pleasure. I know he can tell how wet I am, and I want to be embarrassed, but I push it aside.

Slowly, he tests my pussy with his finger, moving in and out slowly. He adds another finger and starts going faster, listening to my moans.

“Fuck. Fuck. Yes, Knox. Keep it up. That’s the spot. Right there. Fuck!” I say as I feel my body trembling.

“Come on my fingers for me, baby girl, so I can go down there and clean you up and give you another orgasm.”

And fuck, do I come.

“Fuck, Knox. Yesssssssss!” I say as I clamp down on his fingers.

He keeps thrusting throughout, and it extends my orgasm longer. I go limp on the bed. My body is wiped out. If that’s what he can do with just his fingers, I can only imagine what his tongue and dick will do to me.

Standing up at the end of the bed, Knox pulls off his jeans and boxers. I finally have a chance to look at his naked body as he stalks toward me. I start with his face then work my way down, stopping when I get to his chiseled chest and six pack abs. Roaming further down, I see he has the V that every girl swoons over, and now I understand the commotion around the subject. When I lower my gaze further, my eyes bug out. His dick is long, but not only that, it’s thick too.

“It’ll fit, baby girl. Don’t worry,” Knox says.

“How did you...” I trail off.

“Your eyes gave you away.” He grins. “I’ve just got to get you good and ready for it.”

As he marches toward me on the bed, he leaves little kisses all over my body, on my thighs, until he gets to my core. Moving between my legs, he parts my thighs, opening them up.

Slowly lowering his head, he licks up to my clit, sending a volt of pleasure to my dripping pussy. Knox starts flicking and sucking on my clit, and my eyes roll back from the pleasure.

“Now, are you going to be a good girl?”

“Yes, God. Just don’t stop,” I pant.

And he doesn’t. He flicks, sucks, twirls his tongue around my clit non-stop. I’m on the verge of coming, and all of a sudden, he inserts his fingers back into my wet core, thrusting them in and out at a painstakingly slow pace.

“Please, Knox, I’m going to come. I’m so close.”

“Don’t come yet. I haven’t even feasted on your pussy yet,” he says, then moves his head down and shoves his tongue in my core. “God, you taste like ambrosia. Forbidden, but oh so sweet.”

Knox moves his hand to my clit, circling it, while thrusting his tongue in and out of my core.

“Come for me again, baby girl.”

With my body on the edge, I finally let myself fall over, knowing he will catch me just like last time. I feel the bed shift, and then Knox is over my body in an instant, locking his lips with mine.

“Are you ready for more, baby girl?” he asks.

“I can’t. Too much. Overwhelmed,” I barely get out.

“Yes, you can,” he growls in my ear, and I shiver.

I nod, not having words. I feel him line himself up at my entrance and sink just the tip inside, then slowly adding inch by inch of his length. I gasp from the pleasure. Knox takes his precious time to fully seat himself inside me.

“God, you are so fucking tight,” he grits out. “I feel like a fucking teenager, about ready to blow my load in the first minute.”

Once he takes a few seconds to himself, he slowly pulls back and then thrusts back in and out again. It’s so agonizing. He is taking his sweet time building up both his and my orgasms. Wanting more friction, I start to meet his thrusts halfway, making him go faster.

“More. Harder. Please. God, Knox. I need more,” I beg.

“Anything for my girl,” he says as he starts going harder and harder.

I feel that undeniable quivering of my thighs, signaling that my orgasm is building. I drag my nails against his back, Knox roars.

“Oh, fuck. So fucking good” he moans as he picks up his pace. “Touch yourself for me baby girl. Show me how you make yourself come.”

I move my hand immediately, responding to him. I start off slowly circling my clit, adding pressure here and there. Knox starts to slow his movements, and I keep rubbing myself faster and faster until I’m so close to the edge.

“I’m close, Knox,” I utter between pants.

“Then come, baby girl. Come with me,” he grunts out.

That’s all I need to hear, and then I’m gushing all over his dick.

“Knox!” I pant.

Then that’s when I feel his hot ropes of cum coating my inner walls.

“Emery!” Knox shouts out as he comes.

He slowly pulls out, and I wince from the loss of him.

“Let me clean you up, baby girl,” Knox says as he gets out of the bed and heads to the bathroom.

My heart warms at him wanting to take care of me.

After a moment, Knox comes out of the bathroom with a wet cloth and moves between my legs to clean me up, then throws the washcloth on the floor. Getting back on the bed, he moves to lie beside me on the bed, pulling me into his arms.

“I love you, Emery. Get some sleep. I’ll protect you and keep you safe. Always.”

EPILOGUE



EMERY

THREE MONTHS LATER

I WALK INTO THE BAR THAT KNOX WORKS AT AND SEARCH HIM out. Tonight is a weeknight, so it's a little slower than usual. Finding him wiping down some tables, I walk toward him and hug him from behind.

“Hey, baby girl. What are you doing here?” he says.

“One, how did you know it was me, and two, can't I just come and be around my boyfriend?” I quickly say.

“I knew as soon as you got here. I felt it in my bones that you were close. And of course you can. I'm just surprised. Normally, you don't come unless the girls are here with you. Besides, you know I don't like it when you go out alone.”

“Well, I just wanted to see you. I miss you,” I tell him. “Besides, with Derek in prison again for escaping from jail and almost killing me, he is locked in solitary confinement for the rest of his sentence. I'm not worried. You'd come and save me if anything happened.”

“I'd burn the whole world down to protect you, baby girl. Now, let's head to the bar top. Do you want your usual?” Knox questions.

“Um, actually, I can't drink right now.” I say as I look him in the eye.

“Oh, yeah. You drove, right? I can just drive you home tonight and we can come back and get your car tomorrow.”

“Actually, that's not why, though it was a good thought. You know how you call me 'baby girl'? Well, I might not be your baby girl anymore,” I say as I give him the box that has the positive pregnancy test I took this morning in our bathroom.

He takes what I handed him and looks at me funny trying to figure out what the fuck it is. When he finally opens it, I see the moment it clicks in his head.

“WE’RE PREGNANT?!” he screams...in excitement, I hope.

“Yes. I don’t know how far I am, but I missed my period and thought that maybe I could be,” I tell him.

He jumps over the bar, picks me up, and swings me around. “Oh, my God, we are having a baby. Everyone, rounds on me. WE ARE HAVING A BABY!”

KNOX

FOUR YEARS LATER

Life has definitely taken a turn since the twins arrived. About two years after they were born, we got married, with them walking her down the aisle. The whole time I was tearing up at how stunning she was.

Emery finally got to have the wedding of her dreams. Anything she wanted, she got. Not that she wanted much. Our wedding was small and close-knit. My family came, and her friends were the only ones in attendance.

I stand in the hallway, watching her running around chasing the boys.

“Xander! Xavier! Come here. I need to change your clothes. You both look like a pigsty, and we have your little sibling’s baby shower to get ready for!” my wife yells.

“Boys! Listen to your mother. Get your butts over there and get changed,” I say as I get in front of them.

Emery and I box them in; I grab both of them when they try to make a break for it.

“Special delivery to one Mrs. Emery Adams,” I say as I drop off the twins in front of her.

“You can keep them if they are going to be acting like this,” she huffs and puffs.

I know secretly she would kill for these two to stay as young as they are. Emery finally agreed to be a stay-at-home mom after the first day dropping them off at daycare. Emery and the kids cried the whole time. She realized she didn't want to spend the days without them.

Looking at her now, changing the kids' clothes and then rubbing her belly...my life feels like it's exactly how it's supposed to be.

I knew the day I walked into Em's Cuts and saw her that she was the one. Almost four years later, and I still fall in love with her all over again every time I see her.

CINNAMON ROLL SAVIORS COLLABORATION

Cinnamon Roll Hero (sin-a-mon roll he-ro): (n) a hero who is too sweet for this world...but will fight to the death for the people they care about.

Join nineteen of your favorite romance authors on our journey to prove that cinnamon rolls can still be steaming hot! These sweet, sexy heroes (and heroines!) are here to save the day, whether it's rescuing their partner from the ghosts of their past or just showing them that they deserve to be loved, cherished, respected...and, of course, pleased.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lyric Nicole is a stay-at-home mom whose love of reading sparked her interest in writing. She has four kids. When Lyric is not writing, which honestly is most of the time, she is running around the house chasing her youngest child or taking the kids on “adventures.”

To be updated about all things Lyric Nicole, please join her newsletter: <https://bit.ly/LyricNicoleNews>

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