



MY BF'S PROFESSOR DADDY

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MY BOYFRIEND'S PROFESSOR DADDY

MY BOYFRIEND'S DAD: BOOK 7

LENA LITTLE



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PREVIEW

All I'm doing is substituting for a class.

It's easy. Simple. I'll teach a couple of lectures and collect a paycheck, no problem.

But the first time I lay eyes on Noelle, everything changes. She's gorgeous, smart, and sweet, and I burn with desire for her, a never-ending fever under my skin.

I struggle to find my breath when she's around, trying to distance myself.

But...I should've known that eventually my tether would snap.

When it does, staying away from her is no longer possible.

I'm determined to make her mine, but there's just one problem—she's my son's ex-girlfriend.

Unfortunately for him, zero part of me cares.

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NATHAN

I haven't been up this early in years, and it's frustrating as hell. These conditions should be illegal and considered inhumane—not for the students but for the professors, at least.

But when my son's school calls and asks me to substitute for just a few weeks of classes, with the perk of a hefty percent coming off his tuition, I can't exactly say no. Which is why I'm entering the mostly empty lecture hall at 7:15 am for the 7:30 English 101 class at the University of California Irvine.

Setting down my things on the desk, I blow out a long breath. I adjusted my morning routine, waking up hours earlier to get my morning run in before class, but I still don't feel totally awake. The class's actual professor, Dr. Gray, had an unfortunate car accident a mere two weeks before Christmas break, and I just so happened to live nearby and meet the criteria to substitute. I haven't taught in years, not since I found significantly more success in textbook research and writing, but my love for English hasn't faded. Students on the other hand...

I've never been overly fond of students. Maybe this time it will be different, but I doubt it.

The freshman and struggling sophomores file into the lecture hall as I organize my sparse amount of teaching accessories and grab the list of students off the top of the pile of papers Gray left me. The college kids don't look all that different from when I was teaching, and the ones in front of me look

more alert than I'm feeling, which is impressive. I've always preferred to teach upper-level English courses, but this is an easy gig. I'm here to help them through this last final they have, and that's all.

"I'm Professor Nathan Nolan, I'll be taking over the rest of Dr. Gray's classes," I announce after the last student is seated, their attention turning toward me. "For this first day, I'm just going to review his lesson plan so you aren't confused, and then you're free to leave. If anyone has any questions, please raise your hand. I'll start by calling roll..."

I make it about halfway down the list, disassociating until I call a name that rolls off my tongue, smooth like butter.

"Noelle Henry?"

I raise my head and scan the sea of faces before I hear the sweetest sound.

"Here!"

I follow the voice and the moment I lay my eyes on her, a jolt surges through me. My pulse kicks into overdrive, and my brain is firing on all synapses. I have to force my mouth to continue the roll call, even as the world slows and every part of me becomes hyper-aware. Holy shit, she's beautiful. The most beautiful girl I've ever seen, and this is California. There isn't exactly a drought of beautiful women. But this one...she puts them all to shame.

Noelle's a young thing, a freshman by the looks of her, honey blond and with sapphire eyes that are round and intent on me. Her pale skin is a stark contrast to the bright red sundress dress she's wearing. It clings to her curves, leaving little to the imagination. At first, it strikes me as strange that she'd be wearing so little in December, but it's an unseasonably warm day, and she must be taking advantage of it.

There's something else I'd like to take advantage of...

I've never been the kind of man to lust after a woman, especially a student. It's not who I am. But as my heart continues to beat hard in my chest, I can't tear my eyes away from her. I'm on autopilot, reading off the papers that Gray

gave me and looking up to focus on Noelle every chance I get. I'll have to read over this lesson plan later because I'm not retaining a damn word.

I have to get this girl to stay after class, even if it's just to prove to myself that I'm in control. But oh...even with her rows and rows away in her seat, I can feel my control fraying and an erection growing at the simple thought of being alone with her.

When the class is over, the students are slow to shuffle out, and I'm practically losing my mind, trying to bullshit a reason to keep her back. But luck is shining down on me today because as everyone else gathers their things to leave, Noelle shoulders her pale pink backpack and comes down the stairs, heading my way.

"Professor, hi," she starts once she reaches me. "I'm Noelle, and this might not be the best time but I'm sort of desperate."

Me too, I think but keep those thoughts to myself. Up close, Noelle smells like apples and sunshine, and I want to bury my face in her neck and breathe it in from the source. Her neck or between her legs...

Clearing my throat, I force my attention back to her. "Desperate, huh? Go ahead."

"Before Professor Gray had his accident, he called me into his office to talk about my grades. I know I haven't been doing well, but it's just..." She bites her lip and looks away as if she's embarrassed. I don't want her to feel any sort of negative, not while I'm around.

The idea comes quickly, and while it's insanely problematic and inappropriate, I can't put that cat back in the bag now that it's out. English 101 and 202 at 9 am are the only classes I'm covering, and I have the rest of the day free. Maybe individual tutoring is just what Miss Noelle needs. Just her and me, and not one other soul.

"You're working on a literary analysis for Romeo and Juliet, right?" She nods, ponytail bouncing. "I have to go talk to the Dean about my compensation for subbing this class, but

afterward I'll be in Gray's office around noon, getting things in order for the next two weeks. But if I know Gray, he's got everything planned out to the very last detail for me, and I think I'll have a lot of free time if you want to stop by. I'd be more than happy to help you with your paper."

Noelle's whole face lights up, and I know I've said the right thing. "Seriously? Thank you so much, Professor Nolan! I was going to see if you had office hours."

"This will be better, don't you think?"

"I'll see you at one, then." She grins, and it's so infectious that my lips quirk up in response.

"I'll be waiting."

Once she's gone, I take a moment to adjust my cock, which is painfully hard and tenting the front of my pants. There's a part of me that knows this is a terrible idea, and another part that's telling me how right it is. That I'm supposed to help Noelle, and she's supposed to help me.

She'll help me, alright.

I can't help the smile that stays plastered on my face as I grab my things and head over to the Dean's office. This entire substituting gig just got a lot more interesting.

FUCK. My second class had dragged, and the Dean wanted to talk my fucking ear off afterward. Lunch was disappointing—not because the food was bad but because I haven't been able to focus on one damn thing besides the girl due in my office in ten minutes.

Obsessed is a strong word, especially after only seeing her for one class, but I think it's fitting in this situation. Long blond hair, curvy as hell, and the scent of apples...I'm going to lose my mind. Someone in the cafeteria had ordered applesauce, and I thought my erection was going to burst through my pants just at the memory of her scent.

I slam the office door shut behind me, throw my bag aside, and stomp to the leather computer chair, which I sink into. Gray's desk is meticulously organized and tidy, and I have the urge to sweep everything off it with my arm, just as some way to bleed off the excess amount of tension inside of me.

I could run a marathon right now.

I could punch a hole through solid stone.

But I don't think any of that will help me with how keyed up just the idea of Noelle has me. There is one thing that will, though. With a dismissive glance at the shut but unlocked door, I whisper "Fuck it" to myself and lean back in the chair. With one hand, I work to open my belt, then the button to my slacks and the zipper. Feeling like I can't get enough air, I yank my tie from my neck and throw it aside, finally, finally freeing my turgid member and getting a fist around it.

"Ah, fuck."

It's so good and not nearly enough, but it'll have to do. I'm not even really sure what to picture, but the idea of Noelle's lips wrapped around my cock is too perfect not to go with. So that's exactly what I do.

I don't know what the girl is really like, if she's a little vixen or an innocent angel. But as I imagine her, on her knees and looking up at me, she's a mix of both. Her blue eyes are wide and eager, her lips plump and wet and begging for me to fill them. And I do.

In my mind, I fist her hair and pull her closer. She takes me in her mouth and sucks me eagerly, and the pressure builds at the base of my spine, threatening to explode. In the fantasy, her small hands come up to squeeze and fondle my balls.

"That's a good girl," I grunt, my hips bucking up of their own accord.

I can feel it coming, and I try to fight it, not ready for this to be over, but there's no stopping it. Not with how good the fantasy feels and not with the real-life memory of her apple scent still lingering in the air.

I pump my cock a few more times. The dam breaks and I'm coming, thick ropes of pearlescent warmth shooting onto my dress shirt. My body shudders with the intensity of it, and it seems to go on forever. Once I'm empty, I sit back, chest heaving.

And of course that's exactly when I hear a shy knock at the door.

Frantically, I look at my watch. 12:59. Dammit!

Jumping up, I unbutton the shirt and shove it haphazardly in the garbage can, leaving me in just my white t-shirt. I button my pants, pull up my fly, and buckle the belt, all the while knowing I'm flying too close to the sun here.

Once I'm decent again, I go back to the chair, sit down, and call, "Come in."

My heart stops, then beats again in double time as the door swings open. My body is already on the edge of arousal, and seeing Noelle only intensifies it. I've never been so grateful for a desk job because the moment I harden again, the desk hides it.

"Hi, Professor."

"Please, call me Nathan."

Noelle's eyes go wide. "Nathan," she tests, and my cock jerks beneath the table. Her cheeks turn a shade of red, and the blush is adorable and sexy. "Thank you so much for doing this. I know this is really short notice."

"I'm happy to help. And since it's a Friday, we have the entire weekend to go over things."

Her mouth falls open and her lips glisten.

I want to taste them.

"Really?" she breathes, and I have the distinct feeling she's asking about more than the weekend.

"Really. Please, sit."

There's a couch and loveseat in the office, and she sets her backpack down on the couch before perching on the edge. Her

sundress rides up her thighs a bit, and her bare legs are so long and smooth that I can't help but picture them wrapped around my waist.

"Where do we start?"

"What is your topic of choice? And have you written the paper yet?"

Noelle shakes her head. "No. The assignment was to choose a fictional romantic couple and draw comparisons between them and Romeo and Juliet. I chose Helen and Paris of Troy."

My eyebrows creep up my face, some of my immediate arousal replaced by surprise. "That's a rather deep cut for first-year English. A more contemporary fictional couple might have been easier."

She smiles, looking down at the papers in her hands. "Believe it or not, I used to be at the top of my class. I've just had some...things going on in my life, and it's made my grades take a back seat. Which I know is stupid, and I want to fix them."

"I do not doubt that you will. Why did you choose the Trojans?"

She shifts and the skirt inches higher, revealing the crease where her thigh meets her ass before she swiftly adjusts it. "Because they're like Romeo and Juliet. Their relationship was doomed from the start. Helen was already married, and Paris was the prince of Troy. They couldn't have a happily ever after."

"But they had love, which is what the entire play is about. Do you think the fact that their relationship was doomed made their love stronger?"

Noelle's eyebrows draw together as she thinks. "I'm not sure. I have notes and ideas, but it's kind of hard to focus on anything."

"Hmm." I steeple my fingers, pressing them to my mouth. "I have a theory."

"I'd love to hear it."

I lean forward, the movement causing my erection to push painfully against the front of my pants. The pain is welcome because it grounds me and reminds me of why this is a bad idea.

“Well, for one, love is a chemical reaction. It’s hormones and neurotransmitters and a rush of serotonin. But that doesn’t mean the emotion doesn’t have a real impact. For two people to find each other and fall in love, and have the love be requited, it’s a beautiful thing.”

Noelle bites her lip and leans in, her eyes intent on mine. “Okay...But sometimes those things are short-lived. The feelings fade, or the relationship becomes toxic, or there’s some other complication that can’t be worked through. So, no. I don’t think the fact that the couple is doomed makes the love stronger. It makes the love more fleeting, more intense.”

I realize that my fingers are clenching the edge of the desk, and I loosen them.

“And if the relationship is doomed, or the relationship is toxic, or the relationship is any other combination of circumstances,” she continues, “doesn’t that mean the couple should work harder to overcome it? Because if you love someone, shouldn’t you work for it?”

She looks so hopeful, so desperate to have an answer to the question that’s plagued humankind for centuries. And it’s not the answer I have for her.

“Sometimes,” I answer, and the smile she’d worn is wiped from her face. “But sometimes, there’s no fighting fate.” The disappointment on her face is clear, and she shuffles her papers around as if I’ve ruined everything she’s been working on. “I’m sorry. That’s not the answer you wanted, is it?”

She shakes her head, and I sigh.

“The truth is, there is no right answer. But what you have is a solid thesis and the beginnings of a paper. I know that’s not what you wanted, but it’s a start.”

“Thank you, Professor...er, I mean, Nathan. Did you...want to read what I already have?” She puts on a happy face again,

looking up at me, red lips turning up at the corners. The flashback to the fantasy I just had, those cherry lips wrapped around...

Never mind. Never fucking mind. I can't think about that right now. "Of course," I tell her, discreetly adjusting my half-hard member before going to join her on the sofa. She moves from the arm and settles on the cushion, handing me the small stack of papers that she has already written for me to look over. I try to ignore how close we are, legs touching, arms brushing against each other as we shift about.

I read the papers carefully, making notes as I go, and she doesn't make a sound the entire time. The silence is unnerving, but I'm so engrossed in her words that it's not as bad as it could be.

"Noelle," I say, and my voice comes out husky. Clearing my throat, I continue. "You're very eloquent, but this is too flowery and descriptive. Your professors don't care if the sky's the color of sapphires or diamonds or whatever, they just want the facts and the analysis. But, the analysis is strong. Your point is clear and well-argued, and the conclusion is perfect. I think if you just take this and strip away some of the extra, you'll have a really strong essay."

I hand the papers back, and when her fingers brush mine, I almost jump at the zing of electricity.

"Really? This is all stuff I'm not even sure about, so hearing you like it is a huge weight off my shoulders. I can fix it." She leans forward, pointing to an area that she has circled in red. "You didn't think this portion was reaching too much? I was really unsure about it..."

I also lean closer to get a better look at the paper she's holding, and we're basically touching at all available points, side by side. This close, I can see Noelle is affected by me like I am her. She licks her lips and inhales shakily each time we touch for a prolonged moment. When she looks up at me, it's with such sweet, needy innocence that it almost zaps the remaining shreds of my control.

Damn it...this job isn't worth letting this opportunity pass me by. There's something about Noelle that just calls to me, and I don't have any intentions of letting her go without exploring just what this connection is. Danny will just have to understand. He can get a part-time job or something.

"It could be more concise, but it's a good passage," I tell her. "Sometimes we just need to strip things down a little, you know? Make them bare..."

My voice is so rough that I barely recognize it, and I swear she makes an almost inaudible whimper at my words. I turn, ready to give in and cup her face in my hands, to press my lips to hers—

There's another knock at the door—this time, louder and more demanding. Whoever it is doesn't wait for me to ask them inside but just turns the knob and walks in like he owns the place. When I see who it is, the arrogant attitude makes perfect sense.

"Hey Dad, I just wanted to know if I could borrow—" Danny freezes, looking at Noelle with confusion. "Baby, what are you doing here?"

Noelle shoots across the couch, as far away from me as she can get, and turns her chin up stubbornly as she looks at my son. "I'm not your baby. We're over, remember?"

"Yeah, whatever. That doesn't explain why you're in my Dad's office after hours."

"Danny," I snap. "I'm at work, and I don't appreciate you barging in."

"A private matter?" he sputters. "Alone with my girlfriend?"

"She just said she wasn't your girlfriend," I correct. "And she's my student. I know you don't attend much class, but let me remind you of something—this is college."

"Dad! Come on," he groans, turning his attention back to the girl next to me. "Noelle, baby, just come back home and we can talk. You're not yourself lately and—"

“I’m not myself?” She stands, putting her hands on her hips. “Are you kidding me? I broke up with you, and you can’t accept that. What? Did you think it would just magically fix itself if we both ignored it for long enough?”

“Why wouldn’t it? I’m your boyfriend, and you’re my girl. Isn’t that enough?”

“No,” she says. “It isn’t. And I’m not.”

“Then what is? If it’s money, or school, or something else, I can help you.”

“This isn’t about that.” She’s fuming, and I get more pissed by the second, watching her gather her things and storm past Danny out the door. “Thank you for your help Professor,” she says, stopping to look at me one more time. Her face softens. “It was...fun. A lot of fun. See you in class.”

“Noelle, wait,” Danny calls, taking off after her.

I stand there, staring at the empty doorway. I could have just ruined my career for a girl. Hell, I probably still would if she walked back in here right now. Instead, I’m stuck with my disrespectful son.

“What the hell was that about?”

He scoffs. “She’s just playing hard to get is all. So she was here for a tutoring session or what?”

“Sure,” I snap dismissively. “Something tells me you’re mistaking ‘playing hard to get’ and uninterested. Leave the girl alone, Danny.”

“What? So you can move in?” He sneers. “Yeah, right. I saw the way you just looked at her. You’re too old for her, and I’m her boyfriend.”

“You were her boyfriend,” I repeat, enunciating the past tense. I’ve never wanted to strike my son before, but I feel my hands balling into fists beside me.

“Whatever. Noelle and I will work things out, don’t you worry about it. She’s a student anyway like you said.” He waves his hand as if he’s done with the subject. “Anyway, can I borrow a few bucks? My card is maxed.”

“No.”

“Dad, please. You’ve got money.”

“Your card is maxed because you spent it all. Now go home and get to work on that term paper you’ve been avoiding.”

He glares but doesn’t protest. Instead, he leaves, slamming the door behind him. I sit in the quiet office, thinking about everything that just happened.

“Fuck.”

I can’t believe I was so close to giving in and kissing her, and if it wasn’t for Danny barging in, I might have.

I 'm almost running as I leave Professor Nolan's office, turning down hallways until I know I'm completely alone.

Once I'm there, I lean against the tile wall and slide down it like my muscles have given out, the cold of the ceramic welcome after feeling like I was about to burst into flames.

When my butt hits the floor, I cover my face with my hands and groan. What in the world is wrong with me? I definitely shouldn't have been lusting after my professor, and all of that is made so much worse that he's apparently Danny's dad because of course he is! I can't have a single thing, even a crush on an admittedly off-limits older man, without Danny showing up to ruin it. The fact that logically, he can't help who his father is isn't lost on me, but I'm too annoyed to let logic get in the way of my bad mood.

How can they even be related? Professor Nolan is a gentleman and a scholar. He's serious and dedicated and has this presence that just oozes maturity. On the other hand, Danny is immature and selfish, and while I don't think he's necessarily stupid, he's certainly not as smart. If it wasn't for Danny, I'd still be at the top of my class. Instead, I'm struggling just to pass this quarter before the break.

I didn't see how Danny was ruining my life at first, too caught up with finally having a boyfriend. Danny gave me 110% of the attention I thought I wanted, to the point I was talking to him as soon as I woke up and until the very second I went to sleep. It was fun...for a few days being the center of attention like that. But having to give Danny an equal amount of

attention gave me basically no time for school, and when I tried to slow things down, he whined and complained and guilt-tripped me until I gave it. It became a game where he could see how much of my time he could take up, buying me gifts knowing I didn't have money to do the same, and telling me I could repay him instead with my time.

Now I'm on the verge of failing because I ignored my assignments for weeks, doing the bare minimum to get by. I lost track of the days, and before I knew it, I was screwed. Danny had grown tired of dates and our intimacy only going as far as making out and had been pressuring me to sleep with him. But the idea of sleeping with him and losing my virginity to him was less and less appealing until I was absolutely certain I never wanted to have sex with him.

I broke up with him two weeks ago, and he was pissed. Danny has been pretending we aren't split up, despite me insisting that we are. But even if I was still interested in his toxic, pushy ass, which I'm not, I can't have him anymore. I won't allow him to treat me like this. I have to focus on school, and now that everything is down to the wire, I have to focus if I'm going to pass English. As a graphic design major, English was never high on my priorities, so while I was able to save all my other grades over the past few weeks, I'm still having trouble pulling this one up.

I thought having a substitute would make things easier, that he'd just give us busy work, but Professor Gray apparently organized everything so the class would stay on track. The problem is, even if I had been able to coast through the next few classes until the break, the universe has decided to put another enormous distraction in my way.

That distraction is named Professor Nathan Nolan.

When I entered the lecture hall and saw him below me on the floor level, it took my breath away. His back was turned, and all I could think about was the way those wide shoulders filled out the suit jacket he was wearing, and the way his slacks clung to the shape of his ass. The way his arms stretched the material of his jacket was mouthwatering, and I hadn't even seen his face.

My first thought was to go talk to him. But I shook off the bizarre desire and took my seat, hoping that my instant attraction to a man whose face I hadn't even seen was just a side effect of working myself to the bone lately. But then he turned around and started a roll call. When he called my name and I called out that I was present, our eyes met, and it felt like the world had fallen out from beneath my feet.

I've had crushes before. I know the butterflies and the nerves, and the way my heart races when I think about them. But I've never felt that instant attraction you read about in books, and I've definitely never had a connection like the one I just had with Nathan.

His eyes are dark brown under heavy brows, and his face is rough-hewn yet handsome, with a wide mouth and strong jawline covered in a heavy amount of stubble. His hair is deep brown, with just a few shoots of gray appearing near his temples.

Nathan Nolan was the most gorgeous man I had ever seen, so much so that the eye contact made me feel like an arrow had struck me right in the chest, connecting the two of us. When his gaze heated as he looked at me, maybe feeling the same sort of connection, my pussy started to tingle and ache, making me shift in my chair to relieve the horribly inconvenient side effect of seeing my substitute professor.

That should have been the end of it.

But it wasn't.

I had zero expectations for Professor Gray's temporary replacement, but the way he taught us today and the way he was willing to spend time explaining things to me, had me hooked. It was the most fun I had in ages, and Nathan's smile, and the way his face changed from stern and serious to a relaxed and genuine grin, made my heart race.

I could barely stop myself from getting carried away and imagining what it would be like if this wasn't just a tutor session, if I was spending time with him because he wanted to, not because I needed him. When he invited me into his office and I saw the hard lines of his torso under nothing but a t-shirt,

I could have perished on the spot. We sat so close together, barely touching, but it felt like the most sexual thing I have ever done—just brushing elbows!

But then Danny showed up and ruined everything. I didn't want to see Danny, even on a good day, and I didn't want him to see me with Nathan. He would never understand.

I can't believe I almost kissed my professor! It's insane! What's worse is that part of me wishes I did it. I wish Danny hadn't come in and ruined the moment. I should be thankful. If Danny hadn't interrupted us, who knows how far I would have let things go?

But, if he hadn't...I would know what kissing Nathan feels like. What that stubble would feel like against my cheeks, how soft his lips might be... Ugh, I'm a mess. I have a crush on my teacher. Not just any teacher, but my ex-boyfriend's dad.

"He's your teacher," I mutter, pushing myself off the floor and getting my legs underneath me. "Get it together, Noelle."

I need to get home and do some homework. If I don't pass this quarter, it will throw off my whole college career, and my mom will probably kill me. And then bring me back from the dead so she can kill me again. But even as I grab my things and head out of the building, I can't stop thinking about Nathan.

"Stop it!" I hiss at myself, but I can't.

My body is practically on fire, my skin so hot that it feels like it's too tight for me, and my underwear is soaked.

"Damn it," I whisper, heading straight to the dorms. I don't care if it's a long walk.

I'm so worked up that I don't think I could stand waiting for a ride or even taking the bus. So, I shoulder my bag and hurry home, keeping my head down so no one will talk to me. If someone stops me, I'm afraid I'll start to babble, telling them everything. I can't tell anyone about this. Not my friends, not my mom, not anyone. I have to keep it a secret.

It's a crush. That's all it is. I've had crushes before, and I'll get over it.

“Yeah right,” I mutter to myself, thinking of how intense the feeling was when our eyes met. It’s a lot more than a crush, but that’s all I’ll let it be.

Nathan is the one man in the world who is strictly off-limits, and he knows it. There’s no way he will ever be interested in a student, let alone his son’s ex-girlfriend. Even if I hadn’t just broken up with Danny, he wouldn’t be interested. I don’t have a shot in hell, so why am I still thinking about him?

Because he’s the best-looking guy I’ve ever met, and the chemistry between us was real. The worst part is that I don’t think it was one-sided. I’m lying to myself about his interest—some part of him wants me, even if it’s just physically, and that’s going to make resisting him even harder. He’s smart, kind, and generous, and he makes me feel like a woman. For once, I want to be treated like an adult.

“Noelle?”

I stop, looking up to see Danny leaning against the outside of the dorm. He’s grinning like he’s just found the best Christmas present. I scowl at him.

“What are you doing here?” I groan, wondering how this day can get any worse.

“Waiting for you. I figured you’d come back here.” He stands up straight, looking me up and down. “We didn’t get to finish our conversation back in my dad’s office.”

“No, Danny,” I say, sighing. “There is no conversation. We aren’t together anymore. You keep pretending we are, but we aren’t. Go away.”

“Noelle, baby. I’m sorry.” His voice takes on that whiny tone that grates against my nerves. “Whatever I did or didn’t do or whatever, I’m sorry. Come on, don’t leave. Don’t be mad at me.”

“Go away, Danny.” I brush past him, knowing he doesn’t have the fob to unlock the girl’s dorm, but before I can make it inside, he grabs my arm.

“You don’t mean that.” Danny tries to force me to meet his eyes, but I refuse. “Just tell me what I can do to fix this. I want

us to be together. We're a team, right?"

"We aren't," I grit out, wrenching my arm from his grip.

"Don't say that." There's an edge of franticness to Danny's voice that wasn't there before, and I wonder if it's because he could sense the energy between me and his dad back in the office.

Luckily, another group of girls enter the dorm, and I manage to slip away from Danny and into the crowd, making sure the door shuts behind all of us before I relax. He's still waiting outside the glass doors, but for now, he can't harass me anymore. Ultimately, he's probably harmless, just annoying, but I'm still infinitely glad to be rid of him.

The girls and I take the elevator upstairs, and I head straight to my room. Fortunately, my roommate is off campus with her parents for break already since her finals are all online, so I don't have to worry about her trying to make small talk or asking why I look so upset. Instead, I toss my bag onto my bed, flop down, and cover my face with a pillow.

This is bad. Really, really bad. I can't stop thinking about him.

"No," I insist, throwing the pillow across the room and sitting up. I dig through my bag, grab my laptop, cram my earbuds in my ears, and log in to do what little homework I have left.

The unfinished Romeo and Juliet essay is screaming at me. It's the most important assignment I have left, but I know that if I open it and start to work on it, I'm going to be mentally sent back to that couch with Professor Nolan and the way I really think he was about to kiss me before his son interrupted us. So instead, I open the next assignment.

I have a graphic design project due tomorrow, and while the work isn't difficult, it requires a lot of concentration. After an hour of work, I've managed to get lost in the creative process and forget all about Nathan. But as soon as I close the computer and lie back on my pillow, exhausted despite the early evening hour, he's back in my mind all over again, and the need is pulsing in my core like it never left.

Frustrated to the point of breaking, I retrieve the pillow from the floor but not to sleep. With no other outlet, I cover my face with it and, this time, scream my heart out.

NATHAN

Today is cooler, but my blood is just as hot.

It's the second English 101 class of the week, and just like before, Noelle is perched at her desk, looking like the most gorgeous, most fuckable thing on the planet. Unfortunately for me, she's also the most off-limits woman. My son's ex. Nineteen years old. Sweet, smart, and potentially a career-ruiner.

Except this isn't my career, is it? No one cares if the guy writing the textbooks is sleeping with a student. Noelle is an adult. There's nothing technically wrong with it. Morally, though?

There is a hell of a lot wrong with it morally.

She's dressed in a matching sage green yoga set, the shirt so tight and thin that I'm positive I can see the outline of her nipples all the way down here on the lecture floor. Her legs are crossed, her hair is in a high ponytail, and she has a pair of glasses on today that I'm almost certain aren't necessary, but they look incredible on her.

"Professor?"

The sound of a student clearing their throat, followed by my name, brings me out of my daydream. It's one of the boys in the front row, looking at me like he has a question.

"Yes?"

"Are you okay, man? You're sweating."

The class breaks into laughter and I roll my eyes, wiping the perspiration from my brow. “Just fine.”

It’s a lie.

I’m not fine.

Not only am I attracted to a girl I should not be, but my son is a grade-A asshole who’s apparently treated her like shit. I feel like shit because no matter how hard I try, I can’t make myself less interested in her simply because she dated my son. The connection is too strong, and the desire is undeniable.

Kissing her, holding her, and fucking her has occupied every spare moment I’ve had since the last time I saw her. Touching her even a little and getting caught would blacklist me from every university in the country. I’d have to start publishing under a pseudonym. Not only that, but it would earn me the moniker of the worst father in the fucking world.

Still, I want her.

When she came to see me for extra help, when I had her pressed up against the couch, and when we were face to face, inches away from a kiss that would change everything, it took all of my self-control not to give in. My son interrupted us, and that was the perfect excuse. But at that moment, all I wanted to do was tear her clothes off and make her mine.

That would be a disaster, not only for her grades and reputation but for my son too. Something tells me he wouldn’t keep quiet about something like that.

Class finally ends, and I turn to the whiteboard, hoping Noelle will leave quietly and I won’t have to watch her pert, little ass walking up the stairs and out of the classroom. A few moments pass, and then I hear the delicate clearing of a throat behind me. I close my eyes in defeat because there is zero doubt in my mind who is expecting my attention.

“Did you have a question, Miss Henry?” I ask without turning around, erasing the words from the whiteboard, hoping to hide the erection straining in my slacks.

“Yes,” she says softly. “About the essay.”

“The essay is due tomorrow, Miss Henry.” Maybe if I don’t say her name, I’ll be able to rebuild that wall between us, the one that should exist for teachers and students.

“I know.” She sighs. “I’m having trouble concentrating.”

I swallow down the offer to help her that pops into my mind immediately, telling her instead, “I hear the library is quiet this close to break. Maybe you should head there and...give us both some space.”

“Sorry,” Noelle mutters and the hurt in her voice makes me wince. “I’m just worried.”

I turn, leaning against the podium and crossing my arms. She looks adorable, with a light dusting of freckles on her cheeks and her glasses a little askew. All I can think about is pulling them off her face and kissing her, pushing her onto her knees, and sliding my cock into her mouth.

“Why are you worried?” I ask, my voice sounding hoarse even to my own ears.

Noelle’s voice is small. “It’s the essay. I finished it, but I was hoping you could read it over for me before I submit it. Give me some pointers if there’s anything glaring I should fix. I need to get as close to a perfect grade as possible.”

I figured as much. We are careening towards the exact same situation we were in earlier this week—Noelle and I alone in my office. And like a fool, I’m going to let it happen.

“If it’s due tomorrow, I’ll read it tonight. Bring it after 5 PM.”

Her face lights up, and the smile that spreads across her face makes the ache in my dick grow worse. “Great! Thank you!”

“Of course.” I watch her turn and rush up the stairs, her little ass moving like it was made to jiggle for me.

Damn it.

I’m in trouble.

I'VE PACED the length of the office at least a dozen times when Noelle's soft knock echoes through the room.

"Come in," I tell her, both anticipating seeing her and dreading how hard I'm going to have to hold myself back. She enters just as hesitantly as before, a small smile on her face when she sees me. She's still dressed in that damn tight yoga outfit, the long sleeves of the shirt doing basically nothing to hide her figure.

"Thank you for seeing me again." She makes a beeline right for the couch where we sat before, shuffling through her bag and pulling out a familiar stack of papers. She clearly thinks we're going to pick right back up where we left off, but I had other plans to try and maintain some distance between us.

Noelle waits for me, looking up, face bright. I give one last dejected look at the desk and computer chair where I hoped to host her and resign myself to sitting on the couch next to Noelle Henry—the cause of all my fantasies and woes.

Just like before, she smells like apples and a warm summer day. Everything about her radiates life and my urge to pull her to me and breathe every bit of her in is almost overwhelming. I flex the muscles of my legs hard to keep the blood flow where it needs to be and not in the one place I don't want it.

"Here." She hands me her essay, brimming with excitement. "I trimmed it down like you said. I know you're the one giving me the grade and it isn't exactly ethical for you to be the one giving me pointers, so I really appreciate it."

I settle in to read, leaning back against the couch, Noelle hovering over me as I do so. I know she's reading along, second-guessing these words she's probably read 1,000 times already, but with each sentence, I become more and more sure that her worry is misplaced.

It's an excellent paper. She took direction perfectly, and everything was succinct and to the point. Noelle's writing is clear and concise without being stilted. A smile pulls at the corner of my lips. It might have been at the very last minute, but she pulled it off.

“This is great, Noelle,” I tell her, looking up. The joy on her face at the compliment is obvious, and it makes my heart slam against my ribcage.

“Really?”

“Really.” I nod. “It’s well-written and clear, and you managed to hit the requirements on all fronts. There are some small things here and there, but overall, it’s fantastic.”

“Thank you.” Her body relaxes as she sits back, and the movement draws my attention to the way the yoga pants hug the curves of her thighs.

I swallow and look away, handing her back the essay. “You don’t need my help, Noelle. I don’t think I have anything else to offer.”

“Nathan.” Noelle reaches out and places her hand on my thigh, making me jump. The heat from her palm sinks through my slacks, and I swear I can feel every square inch of it. “I don’t know how I can ever thank you.”

The tension that had briefly faded returns in a flash, and it feels like a rubber band is being stretched between us.

“You don’t have to thank me, Noelle,” I assure her, looking down at her hand, the way it rests on my leg, and I fight the urge to move it up. “I’m here to help, and your essay was good. It needed some trimming, but that was it. You didn’t need any guidance.”

Her expression is like the sun. I don’t know if I’ve ever made anyone this happy in my entire life, and a wave of possession rolls over me so intensely that it shakes me to my bones. I want to make Noelle happy every day for the rest of our lives. I don’t just want to, I WILL. Sitting here, basking in her joy, I know for a fact that I will never be able to let her go, never be able to get her out of my head. This is my girl. Period. Full stop.

While I’m having a full-on crisis, Noelle melts back into the couch with the most relaxed sigh I’ve ever heard. “I can’t believe it. I’m going to pass. Thank goodness. My mom would have lost her marbles had I flunked out freshman year.”

I chuckle. This, at least, is a conversation I'm familiar with. "Just your mom, huh?"

Sweet Noelle's face shutters, just a little. "I, ah, actually never met him. She's been a strong independent woman forever." She tries to laugh it off, but I know I've accidentally struck a chord. Fuck.

"Oh, shit." I reach out for her, wanting to comfort her somehow. My hand lands on her knee and her eyes drop to the spot immediately, a little gasp escaping her lips. "I'm sorry, Noelle. That was thoughtless of me."

"It's okay." She doesn't pull away from my touch.

We sit like that for a while, her looking at my hand on her thigh, and me looking at her beautiful face. Eventually, she meets my gaze and bites her lower lip, sending a shockwave of desire through me.

"Nathan..." she whispers, and her voice is husky, heavy. It sounds like sex.

I don't say anything, but I squeeze her thigh gently, and she gasps, her eyes drifting down to my mouth.

"Nathan," she says again, and there's an edge of desperation in her voice that makes me ache.

I should pull away.

I should tell her no.

I should put an end to this right now before it can go anywhere else.

But I don't.

"Noelle," I whisper instead, my eyes searching hers.

Her tongue darts out, wetting her plush lips, and the movement makes my breath catch in my chest. She wants this.

Fuck, so do I.

The moment I realize that we're both on the same page, I reach up, cupping her cheek and pulling her closer. When her breath mingles with mine, she whimpers and reaches up to

grab the front of my shirt, the paper she was just so concerned about crumpling between us.

Our mouths connect and she moans, her lips soft and pliant, and I groan into the kiss. Fuck, this is a bad idea, but kissing her has ignited a storm of electricity inside of me like nothing else I've ever felt. That possessiveness I felt earlier builds and builds as I swipe my tongue over the seam of her lips, and she opens them, granting me access.

Noelle tastes sweet and minty, her tongue a little shy against my own. I bury my hands in her hair, working out the tie and letting the blond waves fall over her shoulder. Cupping the back of her head, I hold her in place while I explore her mouth fully, slowly, taking my time and memorizing the way her tongue feels against mine.

I feel her relax under me, melting against my chest as I deepen the kiss, her fingers digging into the muscles of my arms. Fuck, her touch is incredible. She's incredible. When we finally pull away, both of us are breathing heavily. Her eyes are glassy, and her face is flushed. I'm sure I don't look any better.

"Noelle," I start, but then my phone starts vibrating in my pocket. With a growl, I take it out, planning to toss the damned thing to the side somewhere so it can go off as much as it wants without bothering us. Except both of us get a glimpse of the contact on the screen—Danny, with the picture I had saved as his contact photo, the two of us fishing a few summers ago before he became an absolute selfish prick.

We both freeze. There's no way in hell I'm going to answer the call. I wouldn't even if she wasn't here because he's probably just asking for money again. But seeing his face and name on my phone screen is a stark reminder of what Noelle and I are doing and who exactly she is—not to me but to my son.

Noelle must see the struggle on my face because her own goes pale, and she stands quickly.

"I should go." She grabs her essay and stuffs it back into her bag.

I stand with her. “Noelle, wait.”

“I shouldn’t have come.” There’s a frantic edge to her voice.

“It’s fine.” I stand with her, shoving the silenced phone back into my pocket. “I’m not going to answer.”

“You’re his father!” she blurts out, looking at me with a sheen of tears in her eyes.

“That doesn’t matter, Noelle,” I insist, and she looks up at me. Her cheeks are pink, and her eyes are wet. The expression on her face is enough to shatter my heart.

“It does. You’re his father, and I’m his ex-girlfriend, and you’re a professor. You’re my teacher.” Her voice is shaking, and I want to hold her, comfort her, tell her that none of it matters. But there’s something about the look on her face. Something vulnerable.

I reach out to stop her, to haul her against me, but she evades my grasp like a frightened bird. “Noelle—”

“I’ll see you in class.”

Before I can say anything, she’s rushing out of the office, slamming the door behind her and leaving me standing alone, confused, and incredibly aroused.

Fuck.

There’s no way we’re going to be able to put a lid on this. Not after that. Not after the way she felt pressed against me, the way she tasted. Not with the way she made me feel when she looked up at me, trusting and open.

The rest of the evening passes in a daze. I manage to finish packing my things and head home, trying desperately to distract myself by making plans for Christmas and trying not to think about how Noelle’s mouth tasted.

When I finally make it to bed, sleep doesn’t come. I toss and turn, unable to get the feel of her body out of my mind, her taste, her smell. Fuck, I’m going insane. I’m a 38-year-old man who has a hard time keeping it in his pants around a woman half his age and the ex-girlfriend of my teenage son.

When I finally do sleep, it's restless. No matter how dark I make the room, no matter how much I try to relax, she's there, right at the forefront of my mind.

Noelle. Noelle. Noelle.

O h. No.

Okay. I need to keep it together. I just kissed my substitute professor *with tongue* on campus. I didn't even take a second to put my assignment away. I feel like I don't even know who I am anymore.

And it turned me on more than anything else ever has and probably more than anything ever if I'm being honest with myself.

Not only is Nathan Nolan the hottest man I've ever laid eyes on, but there's also this unspoken thing between us I can't shake. I knew I was asking for trouble going to his office after hours for help I don't think I really even needed, but the temptation was too strong. I have two more classes with him next week, and then I'll probably never see him again, and that just isn't enough for me. So I asked him to look over my paper again.

Right back on that couch where we were so close before. Sure, I knew I was playing with fire, but until Nathan put his mouth on mine, I had no idea how good it was going to feel to burn.

I make it back to my dorm in one piece, once again infinitely grateful that my roommate is already home for the holidays. I've spent most of the night freaking out about what's going to happen now, and I've come to the conclusion that the best option is to pretend like it didn't happen. That's easier said than done, though, considering everything that went down is all I can think about. My stomach is twisted into a tight knot,

and every time I close my eyes, I can feel his hands, his lips, his stubble brushing against my skin.

I can't stop thinking about the way he felt under my hands, the way his breath hitched when I ran my fingertips across his stomach, and the way his voice sounded as he whispered my name.

Ugh, what have I done?

I've made up my mind. No matter what, I'm not going to let myself act like a total freak in front of Nathan. If anything, he's probably more upset about what happened than I am, and that's saying a lot. He's Danny's dad. That's weird. Super weird. I don't have a dad, but I'm sure it's weird for a dad to be with his son's ex-girlfriend.

It doesn't feel weird, though. It feels hot. Forbidden. It makes me want it more.

I throw myself on my bed again, screaming into my pillow just like before, feeling like I'm crawling out of my skin with want.

I should just go and see him again. Talk to him. It's the mature thing to do. I've already made such a mess of everything. I should clear the air. Just the thought of going back to his office, seeing him, smelling him, and sitting next to him, is enough to make my head spin.

All it would take is one student or staff member to see us sitting too close to each other or touching, not even kissing, and it would be all over for me on campus. Nathan would lose his job too, not to mention probably ruin his relationship with Danny forever. Not that the two seem close or anything. If I hadn't heard Danny call him "Dad", there's no way I would have made any sort of connection between the two. I guess Danny looks like Nathan a little, but everything about Nathan is stronger, more refined.

A knock at my door interrupts my thoughts and I shoot up, scrambling to straighten my hair and clothes. Shit, I hope it's not a friend.

"Hello?" A gruff voice asks, and my stomach drops.

Oh no. No, no, no.

It's him. How did he find out where I live?

"I need to talk to you," he says, his voice muffled through the wood.

I don't respond, frozen in place on my bed, and eventually, I hear the lock click, the handle turn, and the door swings open. Nathan fills the doorway, his face tense, his jaw set. His eyes are darker than usual, his mouth pulled into a grim line, and when they lock on mine, a shiver runs down my spine.

He's pissed.

"How did you find me?" I ask, and he takes a step inside, closing the door behind him.

"I'm a professor, Noelle. You won't let me forget that, so don't act surprised." He raises an eyebrow, looking past me into the empty dorm. "I just looked up your file."

Shit. Shit. Shit.

"Why are you here, Nathan?" I whisper, and he shakes his head, running a hand through his hair.

"We need to talk."

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have come by your office, and I definitely shouldn't have—"

"Kissed me back?" he asks, cutting me off.

My cheeks burn, and I nod. "Yes. I'm sorry."

"Don't be sorry."

His eyes are hot on mine, and the fire burns in his gaze. I feel the heat pouring off his skin. There's electricity between us, and it's growing stronger every second, and it's almost like I can feel it, sparking off the air, making my hair stand on end.

"I'm not sorry," he admits, taking a step toward me, then another. "In fact, I don't want to hear you apologize ever again. Not to me, especially not for that."

He's so close to me now that if I just stand up, our bodies would touch, but I don't. Instead, I watch him, feeling small

and fragile, completely under his spell.

“But you’re Danny’s dad,” I say, my voice a mere whisper.

“So? That doesn’t mean I’m blind, Noelle. You’re the most gorgeous woman I’ve ever seen, and I’ve wanted you from the first second I saw you.” His voice is low and gruff, and his words are like a physical caress.

“Wanted me?” I breathe, my stomach turning a flip.

“Yes. You’re so fucking beautiful, and the moment I saw you, I couldn’t get you out of my head. Your laugh, your smile, your eyes. Your body. I thought it would go away, but every day that we’re together in that classroom, I want you more.”

“You do?” My voice is shaking, and his words have sent a jolt of arousal straight to my core.

“Yes. Fuck, I don’t think I can want someone as much as I want you.” His eyes flick down to my lips.

“There are still a few students staying on this floor,” I tell him, babbling now. “And the RA is just down the hall. If I get caught with you here, or if you get caught with me here...”

“Don’t be afraid.” His voice is so low I can feel it ghosting across my skin. “I can be discreet.”

I feel a blush creeping up my neck, and I reach up, wrapping my fingers around the thin gold chain at my throat—a nervous habit. His gaze tracks the movement, and he takes another step toward me, reaching out to pull my hand away from the necklace.

“Don’t hide from me,” he whispers, his thumb brushing over the soft skin of my inner wrist. “I like to watch you. I love it when you touch yourself.”

“What?” My voice is a gasp.

“In class,” he explains, and his eyes are molten, dark. “The way you play with the chain around your neck, how you tug on your ear, the way you twirl your pen. I notice everything.”

My heart is pounding, my body on fire.

“Nathan, I...”

He reaches out, grabbing me and hauling me against his chest. My hands press into his rock-hard abs, and I gasp, looking up at him, our faces mere inches apart.

“Please don’t tell me to stop, Noelle. I can’t, not now. Not after feeling your mouth on mine.” His voice is rough, and the sound of it sends a rush of wetness to my core.

“Then don’t,” I whisper, and his mouth crashes down on mine.

This time, his kiss is different. There’s none of the gentleness and hesitation from before. His lips are rough and insistent, and I feel the stubble on his jaw scratching at my chin. I part my lips, letting him inside, and his tongue meets mine, sliding and swirling as his hands grip my waist.

I’m on fire, burning with want, and I moan softly, feeling him harden against my stomach.

He pulls away from me, his mouth red and wet, and his eyes are black with desire.

“Say my name again,” he growls, his hands tightening on my hips. “Tell me you want this.”

“Yes, Nathan. I want this,” I mumble, and his eyes flare, his hands moving to cup my ass and lift me.

I squeal, wrapping my legs around his waist, and he carries me across the room and lays me down on my bed. He looms over me, his large body pressing mine into the mattress. Nathan’s lips trail over my jaw, down my neck, and he sucks gently at the hollow of my collarbone.

Deep in my mind, there is a sort of panic telling me this is a mistake, that I’m risking my entire college career just to have a make-out session with my professor, but my desire for him overrides everything else.

Then he hitches one of my legs up to his waist, urging me to wrap it around him. I do, and he grinds into me, and it feels like the entire world shifts.

“Oh God,” I moan, and his teeth scrape along the shell of my ear.

“You’re so beautiful.” His praise goes straight to my head, making me dizzy. “So sexy.”

His fingers slip under my shirt, and he slides them over the bare skin of my stomach, pulling a shuddering breath from me.

“Nathan,” I whimper, and his fingers hook under the wire of my bra.

“You have no idea how many times I’ve pictured doing this, how many times I’ve pictured fucking you.”

Everything comes to a stuttering stop, and so much of the lust drains out of me in an instant. Of course, I knew where this was all leading, that he wanted to fuck me, but hearing him say makes everything all too real.

Because it makes it clear that I have to tell him something. I have to tell Nathan that I’m a virgin before things can go any further, and when I do, I just know he’s going to laugh at how inexperienced and silly I am. I don’t know if I can take it, but it’s not like I can keep the secret either.

Nathan senses the change in my body, the tenseness that replaces how pliable I had been before, and he sits up, giving me space. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah.” My face flames with embarrassment.

“Do you want me to leave?” he asks, and my eyes dart up to his.

“No,” I whisper, and his face breaks into a small smile.

“Good. Then tell me what’s wrong.”

I bite my lip, considering my words carefully.

“Noelle,” he growls, and goosebumps ripple across my skin.

“I’m a virgin,” I blurt out, and the silence that follows is deafening.

“What?”

I close my eyes, wishing I could just disappear. “I’m a virgin.”

“I’m sorry. I heard you, I’m just surprised.” He pauses, and when he speaks again, his voice is thick with lust. “Are you

saving yourself for marriage or..."

"No," I say, opening my eyes to see him staring down at me. "It just never happened. It's not for religious or moral reasons or anything."

"Then why?" Nathan is demanding, but not pushy. The walls of the dorm are thin, and while we haven't exactly been silent so far, making this confession in front of him seems louder than anything else. But at least the worst part is over.

"I never wanted to...you know, have sex. I never felt any sort of spark. But now..." I twist my fingers in the soft blanket covering the bed, looking down.

"But now?" he prods, a sense of pride creeping into his tone.

"You make me want it." I know my face is painfully red and flushed at this point. Oh my God, if he didn't think I was too young before, he definitely does now. "You make me...feel things. All sorts of things."

Now Nathan is moving closer again, the back of his knuckles skimming up my arms. "Tell me, Noelle. I want to hear what I make you feel."

I suck in a shuddering breath, my thoughts spinning out of control. "Um. Well... hot for one. All over."

I can't believe I'm saying these things, but the look on his face is worth the humiliation.

"What else?"

"When you kiss me, I feel it everywhere. I'm on fire, and I can't breathe. I don't even think I want to breathe. You make me ache, Nathan." I can barely meet his eyes, but when I do, they're blazing.

"Ache where?"

"In my...down there."

He laughs, a deep, rumbling sound, and the vibration of it has me pressing my thighs together. "Say the word, Noelle. Say where I make you ache."

“My pussy, Nathan.” The word sounds strange and foreign on my lips, but I love the way it tastes, the way it sounds. “You make me ache in my pussy.”

His hand slips between my legs and the thin cotton of my pajama shorts is no match for the rough pads of his fingers.

“Here, baby girl?”

I whimper. “Yes.”

“Do you like that?” he asks, pressing gently. “When I call you that?”

“Y-yes.”

“Good girl. Now let’s take these off, okay?” He tugs at the tie on the front of my leggings, and when I nod, he slips them down my legs.

His fingers stroke up my thigh, and the air leaves my lungs. He’s so close to where I need him to touch, but he’s taking his time, tracing patterns over my skin. When his fingertips finally brush against the fabric of my panties, I moan loudly, and he silences me with his mouth, kissing me as his fingers dip under the cotton and find the wetness that’s gathered there.

“Oh fuck,” he groans, his lips leaving mine. “You’re soaked, baby girl.”

I nod, unable to speak.

“Is this all for me? Because of me?”

“Yes.”

His fingers slide between my folds, and I nearly scream.

Nathan pulls his hand away from me, and while it makes me almost cry out at the loss of his touch, I patiently watch as he kneels on the floor instead. He’s so huge that it’s almost comical, but there’s nothing funny about the way he grabs my hips and pivots me to face him fully, my legs spread on either side of him.

“I have to taste you, Noelle.” His eyes are wild, and his voice is raw. “I can’t wait. Is that okay?”

I can only nod because if I open my mouth, I'm afraid I'll start babbling.

Nathan's hands are rough and calloused, and when he pushes the thin cotton of my underwear aside and drags a finger through my wetness, my back arches off the bed.

"Fuck, baby. You're dripping." He sounds pleased, and I bite my lip as his thumb grazes my clit.

"Please," I whimper.

He doesn't ask what I'm begging for. Instead, he lowers his head, his lips brushing against the sensitive skin of my inner thigh.

I can't stop myself from shaking.

"Look at me," Nathan's voice is a growl, and my eyes fly to his. "I want you to watch me while I make you come."

His mouth closes over my pussy, and the world dissolves.

Nathan licks a broad stripe up the center of me, his tongue circling my clit before dipping inside. My fingers thread into his dark hair, and he groans, sending vibrations through my core.

"So sweet," he mutters against me, and I moan. "So good, baby girl."

His lips close over my clit and suck, his tongue flicking over the bundle of nerves, and his finger pushes inside me. I'm so tight, and the feeling is new and strange, but I love it. Nathan's fingers meet a barrier, and before I can register what's happening, he's sucking my clit relentlessly while he scissors his fingers and breaks through the membrane. It hurts, but only for a single sharp second before the pain starts to fade, replaced by how intense the pleasure is. My hips buck, and he wraps his arm around my waist, pinning me to the bed and holding me down while his tongue drives me crazy.

"Oh, Nathan."

"That's it, baby girl. Tell me how much you like it." He pulls his mouth away from me for a brief moment before going back to what he was doing.

“It’s so good,” I moan, writhing beneath him. “Please, Nathan.”

He pulls away again, but this time when I meet his eyes, there’s a dangerous edge in them. It makes my stomach and core clench hard. “‘Please Daddy’, Noelle. Say it.”

Oh. Oh my God.

“Please, Daddy,” I repeat, and a feral smile graces his handsome features.

“Good girl. Fuck, you’re a good girl, aren’t you? Such a sweet, innocent little thing, and here you are letting your teacher eat you out.”

The dirty talk should have turned me off, should have made me feel shameful or embarrassed, but it has the opposite effect. I’m practically vibrating with lust.

“Tell me you want it,” Nathan says, his finger teasing my opening, making me pant. “Say the words, Noelle.”

“I want it,” I whisper, my entire body trembling.

“You want what?”

“I want you, Nathan.”

He shakes his head, and his voice drops even lower. “That’s not what I want to hear.”

I take a deep breath.

“I want you, Daddy.”

He surges forward, his finger pumping inside me, his mouth closing over my clit once more. I cry out, my entire body tensing as he works me, and the pressure builds inside. Everything zeros in on each swipe of his tongue, and each thrust of his fingers inside of me. He crooks the two of them up, hitting a spot deep inside that makes stars burst behind my eyes.

“Nathan!” I moan, and he growls against me.

“Come on, baby girl. Come for Daddy.”

And that’s all it takes.

My hips buck wildly as the orgasm crashes over me, and Nathan's free hand pins me down while his fingers continue to work, drawing it out, making it last. I'm shaking, trembling, and it feels like hours before the pleasure fades.

Nathan withdraws his fingers from me, and the sight of him sucking them clean has a fresh rush of wetness leaking out of me.

"Did you like that?" he asks me, his voice hoarse, and all I can do is nod.

"Words, Noelle. I want to hear it."

"Yes," I whisper. "I loved it."

"Good. Because we're not done yet."

Before I can even think about what he said, his mouth is on me again, licking, sucking, and tasting. He spreads me wide open, and then his tongue is pressing into me, thrusting inside, and his lips close over the sensitive nub of my clit.

"Oh, God." My fingers dig into the blankets beneath me.

He sucks gently, and the pressure begins to build once more. He's relentless, his mouth and tongue driving me crazy, and soon I'm falling apart again, gasping and trembling, my orgasm rolling through me.

"Good girl." Nathan's voice is a low growl, and I shiver, watching him as he climbs up onto the bed. I expect, for a moment, that he's going to try to wring even more pleasure out of my body, and I'm afraid that I can't take anymore. My head is still swimming, and my legs are shaking hard.

To my surprise, he curls himself around me, almost falling off the twin-sized bed but making sure I'm tucked in safely against his body. I'm still dressed from the waist up, but he strokes every inch of me anyway, clothed or not, as the aftershocks of it all ripple through me.

"That was amazing," I whisper, and he chuckles, the rumble vibrating through him and into me.

"You're amazing, baby girl." His lips press a soft kiss to my temple, and a yawn creeps up on me. "Tired?"

“Mhm.”

“Get some rest, Noelle. You’ve had a busy day.”

“Will you stay with me?”

“As long as you want,” he answers, and my heart swells.

“I wish you didn’t have to leave tomorrow,” I confess, and his arms tighten around me.

“Me too.”

We lie there together in silence, and soon the steady rise and fall of his chest lulls me to sleep.

It’s still dark when I wake up, the light of the moon coming in through the window and casting a glow over the room. For a moment, I think the events of last night were a dream, and when I feel the bed dip and someone’s arm tighten around my waist, it all comes rushing back.

I don’t say anything as he climbs out of the bed, gathering the few things he brought with him and slowly slipping out of the door and into the hallway. He has no idea that I’m awake, and shock hits me so hard that tears fill my eyes seeing him go. Why did he just leave like that?

I hear a quiet click as the door to the dorm room shuts, and then my tears spill over. I know I shouldn’t have gotten my hopes up. I know I should have known better than to expect more than just a hookup, but it’s all too real now.

No man like Nathan—successful, older, and attractive—would really want a 19-year-old student that he could get in a shit load of trouble for just being seen with. I wonder if he still thinks I’ll let him fuck me after he leaves me like this in the middle of the night. How can one man make me feel so good and then, just hours later, so miserable?

I wrap my arms around myself and try to go back to sleep. It’s impossible, though, and I end up staring at the ceiling for a long, long time.

Just a few more days of class, and only one more where I have to see Nathan. And then, I can put this all in the past and pretend it didn’t happen.

As if I could forget all the things he just made me feel, all the things he did to my body.

NATHAN

Leaving her felt like cutting off my own arm. Well, the lack of circulation from that tiny ass bed already made it feel like I was cutting off my own arm, but...leaving Noelle was torture.

I know how she's going to feel when she wakes up and I'm not there. I didn't even get her fucking number, but I certainly had time to bury my face between her legs until she came not once but twice. This girl has my priorities all over the place. Damn.

But there were a million reasons I couldn't stay, not the least of which I could hear movement in the hallway and from the other dormitories as we lay asleep. It's the week before break, and those who are still on campus are no doubt partying more than usual while they finish up their finals.

As much as I keep telling myself that I don't give a damn about losing this temporary position and the chance to come back and teach later if I so desire, getting caught still has plenty of repercussions. The cold fact of the matter is that I do care—maybe not so much about my own reputation, which would be difficult to fix if I was caught fucking a student, but Noelle's reputation, and the reputation of Dr. Gray, who trusted me to take care of his class while he was away.

Something tells me burying my face in the pussy of one of his students wasn't exactly what he had in mind.

Even with all of that, I would have liked to stay in bed with her as long as possible—at least until 5 or 6 AM and then kiss her goodbye as I left. Instead, I heard my phone going off in

my pocket again and again and had to answer it before it woke her up.

I had ignored Danny when he called earlier, but when I checked the texts from him discreetly, not wanting to tip off Noelle, they drove me from her bed and out into the night. Danny had messaged me for help—real help, not financial—and even if he pisses me off to no end, I'm not that much of a bad father.

Danny: Dad, I'm broken down right outside of campus and it's really cold. I rolled my ankle trying to check the engine. I could really use your help.

Reading that message made my stomach drop to my feet. I was messing around with his ex-girlfriend while he was stranded out in the cold. I've already made a claim on Noelle in both my heart and mind, but I still have to do the right thing. She'll understand. She has to.

I wait until things are quiet outside of Noelle's room and exit into the hall, taking the stairs so I don't run into any other students on the elevator and slipping out the back door. Danny is right, it's colder than I expected, and it makes me pick up the pace, almost jogging back to Gray's office where my car is parked.

Except, halfway there, something catches my eye. It's Danny, leaning on his still-running car, parked right there in the middle of campus. Not on some outside road like he had claimed. And his ankle looks suspiciously unrolled, considering that he's putting weight on both legs.

I feel just a flash of something akin to guilt, but it's replaced by a white-hot rage immediately. Guilt because we are still close enough that he must have seen me coming out of Noelle's dorm, and rage that this little shit thinks he can set me up like this and lie to get my attention.

To think I was fucking worried about him. Fuck!

There's no avoiding it now, and I wouldn't let him get away with messing around with me like this anyway. "What the hell is this?" I growl, and Danny grins.

He looks so smug that I want to punch the expression off his face. “So you were fucking her. I thought so.”

“Don’t answer a question with a question, asshole.” I sneer. “What is this?”

“I wanted to see if you’d come out of her building. I had a feeling you were messing around with Noelle.” He shrugs, his smile widening. “Looks like I was right. You’re screwing her and probably the whole reason she dumped me.”

“You don’t even have the good sense to look ashamed, do you?” I’m livid. My hands are shaking, and I’m clenching my fists so tight that my knuckles are white.

“I’m not ashamed,” Danny spits, stepping toward me, getting right up in my face. “If she wants to be a slut, I’m not going to stop her.”

“You little bastard!” I grab the collar of his shirt and jerk him forward. He’s not a small kid, but I’ve got a good 40 pounds of muscle on him.

“Don’t talk about her that way,” I snarl, and Danny laughs.

“Or what?”

He has no idea the kind of rage he’s stoking in me. No clue how much I’ve come to care about Noelle and the lengths I’ll go to protect her, including beating the living shit out of him. He might be my son, but he’s a grown man now. If he wants to act like one, he can take punishment like one too.

I haul Danny up until his feet are barely touching the ground, and for the first time, there’s real fear in his eyes. “I didn’t even know her when she kicked you to the curb. Noelle did that because you’re pathetic. You’re a pathetic little boy who was too stupid to keep a girl like her. And you know what?” The words come out of me hot and acidic. “I was upstairs with her. She wanted me there.”

Danny’s eyes widen, and then his face twists into a mask of anger. “You’re both—”

I don’t let him finish, throwing a punch right into his jaw and watching him crumple. Danny’s not unconscious, but he’s out

of commission. He's lying on the pavement, holding his face and staring at me.

"If you call her anything other than a beautiful, sweet young woman, the next punch is going to break your nose," I tell him, and his mouth snaps shut.

He rubs his jaw, looking up at me from the ground in disbelief. "What the hell is wrong with you, Dad?"

"What the hell is wrong with me? That's rich coming from the little brat who set a trap just to prove the point that he isn't man enough to hold on to a girl like Noelle." I laugh, but there's little humor in it. "You need to get a hold of your emotions. Grow the hell up and get out of my sight. Now."

He climbs to his feet, glaring at me. I don't give a shit, not right now.

"Fuck you." Danny spits at my feet and then walks away, getting into his car and pulling out of the lot without looking back.

"Yeah, fuck you too," I mutter, rubbing my hand and wincing.

Danny's face is red and starting to swell where I hit him, and he'll have a black eye. Good. He should have kept his mouth shut. I know the kind of girl Noelle is, and he's a damn fool for letting her go.

IT'S THURSDAY, my last English 101 class and the day before break. Storms have been gathering in the sky all day, low rumbles of thunder echoing through the campus as the clouds roll in from the sea. There's a sense of dread that comes with weather like this, but I didn't feel it at all this morning as I prepared for my lecture. I was seeing Noelle today, and no amount of storms could dampen the anticipation.

Last night all of the final essays that hadn't been turned in early to Gray before he was injured started rolling into my email. For the students with high enough grades that the final essay was negligible, I forwarded their essays to Gray's

assistant to look over. The others I had started on last night, but still had plenty to grade, including Noelle's. I had opened it first because when it comes to her, I have no self-control, but there were no special notes for me or anything else of the sort.

Despite how inappropriate it is, I couldn't resist opening her student file and getting the number out of it. Thankfully, I had the forethought to throw the number, which had an unfamiliar area code, into Google before calling it because it came up as her mother's house phone in Seattle. I've been disappointed that she didn't reach out to me over email, but it makes sense. The college monitors all correspondences, and I don't want to give them any reason to suspect her and me of some sort of misconduct. Not this close to break and my temporary stead here nearly being over.

I expect it to be a sparse class today, with nothing to go over except make-up work. I've seated myself at Gray's desk on the lecture floor, keeping myself busy while I wait for Noelle to enter. There's tension at the base of my spine just at the thought of seeing her, even knowing that we can't give off any hints of our true closeness here in the middle of class. Just to see her face, though, will be one hell of a relief.

So when it's been fifteen minutes since the bell rang and she's way past late, I feel like punching my fist through the fucking desk in frustration. She isn't here. She isn't coming.

I know this shouldn't be the end of the world, that she doesn't really need to come to the class grade-wise. Maybe she already left to go home for the holidays...except I have no idea what her plans are. I hate thinking about how little I know about her, considering how I've convinced myself that she belongs to me already.

All the times I've ever wanted to smash something are nothing compared to the urge I have now. I can't help thinking that I fucked up, that somehow her absence means she hates me.

The class is mostly empty, but the few students who are still lingering are starting to stare at me. They can sense my distress.

“Class dismissed,” I bark, and the three students scramble for the door.

“But sir, we still have twenty minutes left,” one of them protests.

I don’t even have it in me to give a sarcastic comment or glare. “Out,” is all I say.

They take me seriously and leave the lecture hall as fast as possible. As the doors swing shut behind them, I let my head fall into my hands, the tension in my shoulders almost making a headache seem inevitable. Once I’ve gotten control of myself to a point, I pull my laptop out of my bag and open my school email account. There, sitting unread in my inbox is an email from Noelle that came in just five minutes before class started.

Professor Nolan-

I won't be in class today. I switched my flight home to Washington to an earlier one to try and avoid the bad weather. I sent in my final essay last night. Happy Holidays.

-Noelle Henry

There’s not a single word in the whole email that hints at our encounter, and I can’t fault her for it. It’s exactly what she should have done, and yet, her cold, professional tone has a chill running through me. She’s acting like it didn’t even happen.

I can’t believe she’s already gone.

I know she can’t have an open, obvious relationship with me here, but if she had just said a couple more words, I would have felt less like a dirty old man. Now she’s leaving the state, and it’s my last day here, and I have no way to get in contact with Noelle. This information goes against everything I’ve been telling myself for the past two days—that Noelle is mine, that we’ll be together now that school is out.

I only know one person who knows Noelle, and hell will freeze over before I ask Danny how to contact her.

Hours pass in a sort of blur. I head back to Gray's office, nursing the slim hope that she might come to the office to see me before leaving for Washington. I know it's a long shot, but I can't bring myself to leave while there's still a chance.

I do a lot of paper shuffling before finally settling into grade essays to pass the time. The storm kicks up into high gear outside, stronger and more violent than any of the weather reports made it seem. The rain comes down in heavy sheets, and the thunder is furious, interspersed with flashes of fierce lightning.

Noelle never comes. My phone chirps again and again with weather warnings, flood warnings, and even a rare tornado watch, but I ignore it all. Finally, I'm done with my actual work and check the time. Christ. It's almost 10 PM. I'm probably the last person left on campus, and I'm not even a permanent employee.

I have a new plan to contact Noelle—calling the phone company and getting the call records from Danny's phone, which I'm still paying for of course. It might take weeks to sort through it all, but I refuse to leave things the way they are. I must have hurt her more than I thought, leaving her dorm that night. This can't be the end.

My stomach shakes me out of my thoughts with a loud rumble, and I sigh, standing to gather my things to head home. I drove the Wagoneer this morning instead of the Porsche, which should serve me well since it sounds like the world is ending outside.

Pissed beyond measure that I fucked things up so badly with the one perfect girl for me on the entire planet, I open the door to the building only to have the wind jerk it out of my hands and slam it against the brick. At the same time, a deluge of rain hits me in the face, and I hiss in annoyance. Damn. This weather is no joke.

I turn the collar of my coat up and run for the car. Once inside, the wind buffets the vehicle, pushing it back and forth, and I curse under my breath. Fuck this. Rain isn't going to be the death of me.

I turn on the radio, and the first thing I hear is a broadcast telling me, “The severe thunderstorm warning is still in effect until 9 AM tomorrow. All local flights have been canceled, and we recommend taking shelter until the storm is done.”

Half listening, I turn the engine over and put the car into reverse, backing out slowly to make sure the Wagoneer isn't pushed around. As soon as I get on the main road, the realization of what the radio just said hits me like a ton of bricks. All flights canceled? That means...

Noelle.

I turn the wheel hard, tires squealing as the car slides in the rain. I turn the opposite way of my house and start heading toward the airport. What if she's stranded? What if she's alone?

Noelle might not want anything to do with me. Hell, she probably doesn't. But I can't just leave her stranded somewhere. Especially not when the weather is like this. I'll drive her wherever she needs to go and then I'll leave. That's it.

That's the only thought in my head. I'll get her to a hotel, somewhere warm and dry, and then leave her alone. That's the only way I'll be able to let her go.

The closer I get to the airport, the heavier the rain gets. It's so thick that the beams of the headlights barely make a dent in the darkness.

I've got my foot all the way down on the gas, and my nerves are fraught with tension as I try to push the Wagoneer faster. My windshield wipers are working overtime, and still, the water is pouring down so fast that it's nearly impossible to see the road. The car slides sideways as I round a corner, and I curse, correcting the steering.

I can barely make out the shapes of the trees that line the road. Everything is covered in a dense layer of mist.

This is stupid.

I should have called the airport and checked the schedules. What if her flight was delayed or moved, and she wasn't even

there?

It's dangerous to drive in conditions like this, and it's especially dangerous to do it without a real plan. I should just turn around and go home.

Then I remember her, alone in a dark airport, waiting for a flight that won't come. She doesn't have anyone to call, no one else in the state. She could be stranded for hours, maybe days. She'll have no idea what to do.

No, there's no way I can leave her alone.

I've been in storms worse than this, and I've driven through much more difficult conditions. But as I approach the exit to the airport, the fog suddenly turns to sleet. I turn the wheel sharply to avoid the worst of it, but I lose control, the car skidding. Thank God I'm the only one on the road, and I manage to regain control at the last second, heart pounding a million miles an hour. I can see the airport less than a mile away now, and instead of making me reconsider and go home, the near-crash has only increased my determination to reach the airport. Noelle can't take a fucking Uber in weather like this, which means if she's there, she'll be stuck until morning.

Over my dead body.

I finally see the exit sign for the airport and take the exit, pulling into the nearly empty parking lot. The rain has lessened slightly, but not by much. All the lights in the place are still blazing, and I know that there has to be at least a skeleton crew still working, but there's no doubt in my mind that almost everyone is home in weather like this. Especially with Christmas being two days, no one wants to be stranded.

I park the car and then get out, heading inside the airport and immediately walking right past the security check. I get a few weird looks, but no one stops me, and I can't blame them.

The last thing the TSA needs right now is more people, and I don't exactly look threatening with my soaking-wet hair and suit.

I head into the waiting areas, which are mostly deserted. I keep scanning the seats, looking for the familiar blonde locks, but

the more I search, the more discouraged I become. I don't see her, and there aren't many places to look.

As I approach the last section, the hairs on the back of my neck stand up, and a rush of adrenaline hits my system. I turn the corner and see her, tucked into a window seat, her legs pulled up to her chest and her head resting on her knees. She's wearing a pink sweater and a white skirt, and the sight makes me want to pull her into my arms.

She lifts her head and looks over at me, and her eyes widen. She stands up immediately, and the relief I feel is overwhelming.

"You're here," I say.

"What are you doing here?" she demands. "Did you drive in this weather? You're soaked! How did you even know...?"

"I was at the school, and I heard on the radio that the airport was closed. I had to make sure you were alright. We should go."

"Go? I can't. The flights are all canceled, and the roads are flooded. No one can drive," she says, shaking her head. "I'm going to be stuck here all night. I already checked with the hotel. They're booked solid, and they can't get me a room."

"Noelle." I reach out and cup her cheek. "I can't leave you here. Come stay with me."

"Nathan..." she trails off.

"It's fine. I have an extra bedroom, and you've obviously got your luggage." Noelle opens her full, pink lips to complain, but I cut my hand through the air, silently telling her to stop. "There's no arguing, Noelle. You're coming with me. Period."

Her eyes blaze with something heated, and I know she's turned on by my bossiness. "I'll take care of you. Don't worry."

"Okay," she agrees, grabbing her carry-on. "Let's go."

The second she's close, I take her luggage and pull it behind me, holding the small of her back as we walk to the exit.

I want her in my bed. I want to strip her naked and bury my face between her thighs, but for now, I just want to get her safely back to my place. The rain has picked back up again, and the temperature has dropped.

“Come here,” I tell her, taking off my jacket and draping it over her head. “Let’s run for the car.”

Together, we sprint across the parking lot. It’s pitch black out, but we make it safely. Once we’re in the car, I turn to Noelle. “You need a seat belt.”

“It’s not like anyone’s on the road,” she mutters, but she reaches for the buckle anyway.

“Seatbelt,” I repeat, voice low.

“Jesus,” she says, buckling the seatbelt. “Okay.”

“Good girl.”

Noelle lets out a tiny, breathy gasp.

It’s not even a ten-minute drive from the airport to my place, but the road is completely flooded, and the rain is coming down in sheets. We’re both drenched, and I flip the heated seats on for the passenger and driver seats. She sighs in pleasure and settles back into the seat, reveling in the warmth, eyes closed.

I think she’s asleep when I hear her voice, small but determined. “We need to talk about the other night. Why did you leave?”

I mull over what to tell her, teeth clenched with anger recalling Danny pretending to need help just to lure me out. I’ve been wondering if he would turn me over to the school board, but it’d be hard to prove anything, and he’d get in trouble for wasting time and resources if they couldn’t find any dirt on me.

How do I explain to her that Danny was the reason I left without pushing her away from me again? The subject of my son is a touchy one, and it seems like every time she’s reminded that I’m his dad, she pulls further and further from me.

“An associate needed my help.” I keep it as close to the truth as possible without straight-up lying to her.

“Oh. Okay,” Noelle says, but she doesn’t sound satisfied. “In the middle of the night?”

“It’s not important,” I brush her off, hoping this will be the end of it. “I’m sorry I had to leave you.”

Noelle turns toward the window and stays quiet. Finally, she says, “You couldn’t even tell me goodbye? I felt so used.”

“I didn’t mean to make you feel like that. I just didn’t want to wake you up.”

“I’ve been feeling so confused.” Noelle turns to look at me. “I was so mad at you for leaving like that, but I’ve also been missing you. So much, which makes no sense considering that we barely know each other. I thought I would feel better when I got home, but then the flight got canceled, and my Mom had to leave to make the drive to my grandparents without me...” I’m horrified when I hear her snuffle and realize she’s crying softly. “Now I’m still just as confused and have no one to spend Christmas with.”

My hands clench on the steering wheel. I want to touch her so damned badly, but I can’t risk it with the roads the way they are. Instead, I turn the heat up even higher and say, “Don’t worry. You’re with me now.”

She doesn’t answer, just rests her head on the window and closes her eyes. My insides are all twisted up by the time we pull into my driveway, and for the first time since the airport, I see Noelle sit up with genuine joy on her face. I almost laugh because what she’s so amazed by has annoyed the fuck out of me all month.

I live in a gated neighborhood, in a new, modest but spacious place that I bought without even really thinking about it. I just needed a place to stay, and I’ve always loved the area. Around us, a lot of the houses have tasteful, subtle Christmas lights hung up, but my place shines like a lighthouse beacon among them all.

It's not my doing, but for the first time since my niece hung the monstrosities up, I find myself happy to have them.

"Oh, Nathan, they're beautiful!" Noelle says, grinning. "You don't strike me as a Christmas light person?"

Through the rain-covered windshield, we take in the tasteful—if over-the-top—light display installed on my house, all warm white with touches of red and green here and there. "I'm not. But my niece is going to school for interior decorating, and I've basically let her have free rein at my place since I don't care much about that shit. I didn't know that also included seasonal decor, but when she showed up with all her holiday ideas, I didn't have the heart to turn her away. So here we are. A winter fucking wonderland."

"I love it." Noelle is one hundred percent genuine, her eyes glowing. "Your niece must be talented. It looks like something you'd see in a magazine."

"She is." Then I chuckle. "Wait until you see the tree."

"You have a real tree?" Noelle's excitement is contagious, and I find myself smiling and laughing more than I have in the past year combined.

"Of course. Why would anyone have a fake one?" I say, and then shake my head at myself. What the hell is wrong with me? When did I turn into this big, goofy sap?

Noelle is beaming, all previous sins are forgotten in the face of her Christmas spirit. "What are we waiting for then? Come on!"

Hitting the button to open the garage, I pull the Wagoneer into the dry safety of the garage. I grab her luggage and lock the car. As I walk to the front door, she follows. "So," she says, biting her lip and looking at the ground. "I guess we need to figure out how we're going to get me home now, huh?"

"Home?" I ask, turning the key in the lock.

"You know...like, back to school? The roads are supposed to be flooded, and the airport won't reopen until tomorrow at the earliest, and there's no point anyway since Mom has already

left for Grandma's. We don't have to worry about that right now though, do we?"

"You're not going anywhere," I say, opening the door.

Noelle carefully dries her feet and takes off her shoes. "What do you mean?"

"It's Christmas Eve tomorrow," I tell her, walking inside.

She follows. "So?"

"I'm not letting you spend it alone. Not when there's no reason for it."

"Nathan, that's really nice, but I can't stay here. You...I..." She trails off, and then there's a flush high in her cheeks. "Isn't Danny coming home for Christmas?"

"No. He's not." The words are sharp and final. I'm not discussing this any further.

Noelle's eyebrows raise, but she doesn't argue.

I walk her inside the living room, which is decorated to the nines. There's a twelve-foot Christmas tree in the corner and a massive mantle above the fireplace. Stockings are hung, and garlands of greenery and lights are strung everywhere. It looks like Santa Claus vomited on my house but in a modern way...I guess. I don't know much about any of this shit. I'm a fucking English professor, not a Christmas elf.

Noelle, though, is utterly enchanted by the tree.

It's got hundreds of little, multicolored lights, and the ornaments are an odd assortment of antique, shiny, vintage, and glittery ones.

"Do you like it?" I ask, wanting to see the expression on her face.

"It's stunning." Noelle reaches up to run a finger along one of the delicate glass balls.

I clear my throat, wanting to ask her a question. I know she'll be honest with me, but I'm worried about her answer. I'm not sure I want to know. "Are you in a rush to get back to your

dorm?" I don't bother telling her that I'm not letting her leave either way. My girl will not spend Christmas alone.

"Not really," she admits. "I'm not exactly looking forward to spending Christmas alone."

"Is your mom gone for the entire holiday?"

She nods sadly. Her heart appears so broken that I would have flown her back to Washington first class if she wanted me to, but a small part of me hopes it's pointless. "Yeah. Grandma lives way off the beaten path, and it takes hours to get there by car. I'd never make it in time."

I'm torn between relief and horror. On one hand, the last thing I want is for Noelle to have a miserable Christmas. On the other hand, it means she's staying. Here. With me.

"Then come on. Let's get you settled."

She doesn't argue and instead follows me to the guest bedroom. She takes her suitcase and sets it down by the door. When she crosses into the room, she lets out a soft, "Oh!"

I admit I haven't looked in the guest room except once when my niece first finished it, but I'm relieved to see that it looks perfect. A four-poster king bed is made up with fluffy white blankets and a dozen pillows. A large picture window overlooks the backyard, and a small gas fireplace is lit, ready to chase away any chill.

"I'm afraid the bathroom is across the hall, but it has a huge tub if you'd like to relax," I say. "My niece was determined to make sure the place was 'chic and cozy' or some bullshit."

"Well, she did a great job."

"Would you like a bath? Maybe some pajamas? Dinner?"

She blinks, surprised by the offer. "I'd love a hot shower and some clean clothes."

"Of course. Let me show you to the bathroom."

As we walk out, I gesture at the small table under the window. "There are a few candles there if you'd like some extra light."

There are a lot of switches in this house, and I haven't bothered learning all the damn functions."

She gives me a shy smile, and a rush of emotion fills my chest. "Okay."

I lead her into the bathroom and show her where the towels are. "Here's the light," I say, flipping it on. "And the fan. Don't worry about the hot water. There's plenty, and I have the highest quality tankless water heater installed. If you'd like, we can have a late dinner."

"I'd like that a lot," Noelle says. "Thank you, Nathan. For everything. And I'm sorry about the other night. I was so upset when you left. I just want you to know that I think it's a shame you and your son aren't closer. He's lucky to have you. Not everyone does."

"I'd rather not talk about Danny."

She gives me a curious look but doesn't press the issue.

I walk toward the door. "Have a nice shower. You know where to find me when you're done."

I close the door behind me and exhale deeply. God, this is going to be hard. Seeing Noelle every day is a special kind of torture, especially knowing that she's so close and yet so far. After a few seconds, I hear the water turn on, and I'm almost instantly hard. She's naked, a single door away.

The thought is enough to make my cock throb. But it's not right. Not now. Maybe not ever. Noelle's the one thing I've been missing in life, and I can't bear to hurt her. I could corrupt her, taint her, ruin her. She's a fucking virgin, and I can't stop thinking about bending her over every surface in this damned house.

Breathing hard, I walk down the hall, trying to get my emotions under control. I head straight for the kitchen and start to cook. It's a good distraction, and I'm able to push my desires aside. Grilled cheese and tomato soup. I don't have time for much else.

Just as I finish, I hear the sound of a door opening. Noelle steps into the kitchen, her honey hair still wet and her skin

pink and flushed. She's wearing a pair of black and white polka dot flannel pajama pants and a white t-shirt, and she looks good enough to eat.

"Something smells good," she says, inhaling deeply.

"Just grilled cheese and tomato soup," I tell her, setting down the spoon and moving the plates to the kitchen table.

"I can't believe you cooked for me."

"Of course I did. Did you have a good shower?"

Noelle flushes again. "Yeah. It was amazing. Thank you. For everything."

"My pleasure," I say, pulling out a chair for her. She sits, and I slide it in before sitting across from her.

She isn't wearing a bra. I pretend not to notice.

We dig in, and she makes little noises that make me think indecent things.

"Good?" I ask.

"Delicious." She's a few bites in, and her eyes are closed in pleasure. It reminds me of the way she looked when I made her come, and my cock gets so hard that I think it might burst through my pants.

I shift in my chair, trying to make it more comfortable. "I'm glad you like it. I know it's not a very fancy meal, but it's comfort food and the kind of thing that makes me think of holidays."

"Well, I love it," she says, smiling.

We both finish our meal and set down our utensils at the same time. She reaches out, grabs her glass, and takes a long drink. My eyes are glued to her throat as she swallows. I know now is the time she goes to bed to leave me alone, and I'll probably go back to my room and jerk off, but that isn't what I want. I want her to stay with me...in my room.

She's mine, but I can't push her too fast. Soon enough, she'll be next to me every night, but I'm swiftly discovering that I am not a patient man.

“Let me walk you to your room,” I tell her before I blurt out exactly what’s in my head.

She finishes the glass of water and sets it down. “Okay. Thanks again for dinner.”

“Any time.”

I stand up, and then she does too. The house is quiet, and the sound of the rain falling on the roof fills the air. As we walk down the hallway, my eyes are glued to her body. I’m tempted to stop, to kiss her, but I restrain myself.

We get to the door, and Noelle turns around. “Um, goodnight.”

I stare at her, and then, because I can’t fucking help myself, I reach out and brush a strand of her hair away from her face. “Goodnight, Noelle.”

Her eyes close, and she leans her head into my hand. My fingertips trail down her cheek, and then my thumb brushes her lips. “Noelle.”

She opens her eyes, and then she looks up at me. The air around us is so charged, so heated, that I can barely breathe.

“Goodnight,” she says again, like she’s trying to convince herself, but it comes out breathy and low.

I lean down, my lips hovering near hers. “Goodnight.”

The kiss is soft, just a gentle brushing of my mouth on hers. It takes all my willpower to pull back and take a step away from her, but I manage it. She’s breathing so fast, her pulse fluttering in the hollow of her throat, but finally, Noelle takes a single step back into the guest room and closes the door behind her.

“Fuck,” I groan, turning around and heading to my own room.

Inside, I sit on the bed, rubbing my face with my hands. I want her. God, I want her, but I have to give it time.

Sleep comes eventually, but it’s hard-won. I don’t jerk off like I planned—the idea just seems shallow, considering the soft, sweet girl just a few doors down from me.

I think I've felt every possible emotion in the last twenty-four hours, which is why I fall asleep as soon as my head hits the overly soft pillows of Nathan's guest bedroom. I almost groan in pleasure at how wonderful it feels to be warm, dry, and not alone in the huge, cold dormitory building.

I might not be home, but this is a pretty cozy option, all things considered.

The storm is still raging outside, but a little less intense than before. Inside Nathan's house, I feel like nothing can get to me, and nothing can go wrong. After the heartbreak of realizing I'd be alone for the holiday, having him come racing into the airport like a knight in shining armor made me feel so warm and fuzzy inside. His answer for leaving me the other night was vague, but I'm willing to let it go since he did all this just to make sure I was safe and not on my own.

This sense of safety is wrapped around me like a blanket, keeping me in a deep sleep until around 3 AM. A sound like a miniature explosion comes from outside, and the glow of the Christmas lights out the window goes dark in an instant.

The power is out.

"Dammit," I mutter, tossing the comforter off. It's freezing. The fire in the room has died, and the heat cut out with the electricity.

"Fuck," Nathan groans. The sound comes from somewhere down the hall, and I realize the sound woke him too. "Are you alright, Noelle?" he calls.

“Y-yeah,” I say, teeth already starting to chatter. “Just cold.”

“It’s just the storm. Come on, come to my room. You’ll freeze in here.”

I’m a little taken aback by the offer. “I couldn’t…”

“It’s fine. Come on. We need to get you warm.”

I wrap my arms around my torso and scurry to his room. It’s just as luxurious and warm as the guest room, but instead of a gas fireplace, a large, king-sized bed is set into the corner. He’s sitting up, and I can see the outline of his muscles even under the thick blankets.

“What a storm,” he mumbles, and I can feel his gaze on me.

“Thank you for this. I really appreciate it.”

“Any time. Here, get under the blankets. You’ll be warmer.”

I swallow nervously and slip into the bed, sliding my legs between the sheets and sighing at the warmth. “It’s nice.”

“Mmm. Good. Are you still cold? You’re shivering.”

“I-I’m okay.”

“Roll over. I’ll hold you.”

“Oh, no. I’m fine.”

“We’re not getting any more sleep if you’re going to keep shivering like a scared kitten.”

“You don’t have to—”

“Noelle. Come here. I’m going to keep you warm. That’s what men do. Especially when their girls are cold.”

His words are soft, but the message is clear. He called me his girl.

I roll onto my side, my back facing him, and feel the bed shift. He moves closer to me, his chest pressing against my back.

“Relax,” he whispers, his mouth inches from my ear. His hand moves up, and he runs his fingers through my hair, massaging my scalp.

“Mmm.” I close my eyes and relax. It’s been a long, stressful few days, and this is exactly what I needed.

Nathan’s other arm slides around me, his hand resting on my hip. I feel the heat of his skin through the fabric of my t-shirt, and despite the chill in the room, I’m suddenly warm and drowsy.

He’s silent, but his fingers never stop moving. They slide through my hair, stroking and petting and rubbing. The motion is repetitive and hypnotic, and I find myself relaxing further, almost melting against him.

My body feels heavy like it’s sinking into the mattress. The sound of the rain on the roof lulls me deeper and deeper into a dream-like state, and I’m just barely aware of Nathan’s body shifting.

He moves closer, his hand sliding lower. The tips of his fingers brush the exposed skin at the bottom of my shirt. I don’t mind the contact, and in fact, it feels nice.

I hum, a soft sound of contentment, and he moves again.

Suddenly, Nathan’s lips brush the side of my neck. His breath is hot on my skin, and my heart begins to pound. It might be how sleepy I still am, or the heat that’s building in my belly and making me shift against him, but when I go to murmur his name, something else entirely comes out.

“Daddy.”

He growls, a low sound of need, and his hand grips my hip, fingers digging into my flesh.

“My girl,” he groans. “Fuck.”

I flush with embarrassment, opening his mouth to tell him it’s just a slip of the tongue, but his hands on my skin feel too good.

“My girl,” Nathan repeats, his voice low. His teeth graze my neck, and I arch back against him. His cock is hard and huge, and it’s pressing into the crack of my ass.

“Fuck, Daddy,” I gasp.

“That’s right, sweetheart.” He grinds against my ass. “You’re so beautiful. So fucking perfect. My sweet girl.”

“I-I didn’t mean—”

“Noelle,” Nathan says. “Be my girl. Just for the holiday. We can pretend.”

“Yes,” I moan. “I want to.”

His fingers slide lower, dipping beneath the waistband of my pajama pants.

“Fuck,” he groans. “Tell me you’re not wearing any panties. Please tell me that’s true.”

“I’m not wearing panties,” I whimper. “Please, Daddy. Touch me.”

His cock twitches, his whole body trembling. He slides his hand lower, cupping me, and then his finger slides along the slit of my pussy.

“Fuck,” he breathes. “You’re so wet, sweetheart. You want me to touch your little pussy, baby?”

“Please.”

Nathan slides his finger lower, and then it’s pressed against my clit. I can’t stop myself from grinding into him, desperate for the friction, the release.

“That’s right,” he growls, his lips at my neck. “Fuck my fingers, sweetheart. Make yourself come.”

His finger moves in small circles and then slides lower, teasing my entrance. I gasp, and his teeth graze my ear.

“Do you want more?”

“Please,” I beg.

“Tell me, Noelle. Tell Daddy what you want.”

“I-I want you to touch me. Put your fingers inside me.”

He lets out a strangled groan and presses his finger inside me. It’s thick, and I cry out as he fills me.

“More,” I plead. “Please.”

Nathan chuckles, a low sound of need. His teeth nip at the sensitive spot where my neck meets my shoulder, and he begins to move his hand. He fucks me, slow and deep, and I can feel an orgasm building inside me.

“You’ve got two options, sweetheart.” His words are low and strained. “You can come on my fingers, right here and now... or I can fuck you. I can fill up this sweet little virgin pussy and you can come on my cock.”

I’m overwhelmed, falling apart, all of my cells aching for Nathan to do all of the filthy things he’s saying.

“But Noelle, I’m going to warn you,” he adds. “If I fuck you, there’s no going back. If I make you mine, you’ll be mine forever. My sweet, perfect little girl.”

“Yes. Yes, please, Daddy.”

He growls and pulls his finger out of me, flipping me onto my back. I stare up at him in the darkness, his face illuminated by the glow of the moon and stars. He’s wearing nothing but a pair of silk black boxers, and they do nothing to hide the length of his manhood. A thread of fear shoots through me—there’s no way that thing will fit inside of me—but I’m too far gone. I need him too much.

“Sweet Noelle.” He leans down and brushes his lips over mine. “I’m going to have to get you ready for me. Just lie back and let me make you feel good.”

I nod, and he moves his body over mine, holding himself up on his elbows.

“I’ve wanted you for so long.” His lips are pressed against mine.

This kiss is more insistent, deeper, and more intense. His tongue pushes into my mouth, and he swallows my whimpers.

“Let me touch you, baby.”

“Yes, Daddy. Please.”

His hands move to my shirt, pushing it up and over my breasts and helping me shrug out of it. He sucks in a breath, staring down at my exposed body.

“Look at these,” he growls. “So fucking perfect. Just like the rest of you.”

He lowers his mouth to my nipple, sucking it into his mouth. He rolls the other between his thumb and forefinger, pinching and tugging. I cry out, writhing under his touch. He’s slow and thorough, taking all the time in the world to suck and lick and plump my breasts and nipples, making them hard as diamonds.

The sensation of his teeth grazing over the sensitive peak is almost enough to push me over the edge, my pussy clenching down on the terrible emptiness that I’m desperate for him to drive away.

“Daddy,” I sob, arching up, trying to get his mouth closer. “Please, I can’t wait anymore.”

He chuckles darkly. “So impatient.”

“I’m sorry. Please. It aches. Please.”

“My sweet, perfect, good girl. Begging for her Daddy’s cock.”

“Yes. Yes, please. I want it. I want it so badly.”

He gets rid of my pajama pants in a flash, and between one breath and the next, I’m completely naked below him.

“Look at this sweet little body. All mine. I’m going to devour you, baby girl.”

And then he lowers his mouth to my pussy.

I’m already worked up, so the first pass of his tongue is enough to have me nearly coming apart. He licks a long line up the center of my core, swirling around my clit and dipping back down to tease my entrance.

“You taste so fucking good.” He dives in for another long, slow lick. “Like honey. And you’re so wet, sweetheart. Dripping. All for me. But you’re not going to come like this. Not yet. Not until I’m inside.”

I want to scream in frustration. He has me so close. Instead, I scrape my nails over his scalp, caressing his muscular shoulders and arms, memorizing the feel of them as he licks at

me with painful slowness, never giving me enough to come but keeping me right on the edge.

“Daddy,” I beg, lifting my hips and grinding into his face. He lets out a low growl and holds me still, pinning my hips to the mattress with his large, strong hands.

“So impatient, my baby. Let’s get you nice and ready. Because my cock is a lot bigger than a finger. I don’t want to hurt you.”

I bite my lip, watching as he moves off the bed and strips off his boxers. In the dim moonlight, I can’t make out details, but the sight of his massive manhood has me both excited and apprehensive. He’s so big, and I’m...not.

“We’ll go slow, Noelle,” Nathan promises, crawling back over my body. His mouth brushes against mine, and then he moves lower, kissing his way down my jaw, my neck, the hollow of my throat. I take the time to explore more of his body, each little detail driving me wilder than before. He’s hotter than I could have ever dreamed, all muscle and power, and knowing that this man wants me, needs me, is all it takes to push me past the edge of sanity.

“I need you,” I gasp, my legs spreading of their own accord.

“Not yet, sweetheart. I don’t want to hurt you.”

“I can take it. I swear.”

“I know you can.” Nathan drags a hand through his hair. “Christ, Noelle. I wanted to take this slower.”

He’s about to break and give me what I want. I can feel it. “We’ve gone slow enough. Please. I need you.”

He closes his eyes, and then the head of his cock is pressed against my entrance.

“Slowly,” he orders, slowly pushing forward.

I gasp as he stretches me, and he grunts, a sound that makes my whole body tremble.

“God, Noelle. You’re so fucking tight.”

I’m trembling, and I try to relax, letting him press further inside.

“Good girl. Fuck, your little cunt is squeezing the life out of my cock.”

“I’m sorry, Daddy.”

“Don’t be. It’s exactly what I need.”

Nathan kisses me, a deep, passionate kiss, and I cling to him as he pushes the last few inches inside.

“You’re doing so well, sweetheart. Your tight little pussy is taking every inch.”

Sucking in air, feeling like I’m lifting out of my body, I realize that he’s right. The stretching borders on painful, but it’s not quite there. It doesn’t hurt. It’s just the most intense thing I’ve ever experienced. Millimeter by aching millimeter, my body relents and accepts the invasion, my channel opening for him little by little.

“God, that’s good, baby,” he growls. “Fuck, look at you, Noelle. You’re a goddess. Your little body is so good, taking all of me.”

“Daddy, please.”

“Are you ready, sweetheart?”

“Please. It’s starting to feel really good.”

He lets out a low laugh. “Good girl.” Then he’s pushing into me hard until his hips rest against mine. I’m impossibly full. Nathan is totally inside me, and I’m a virgin no longer. All I am is his.

“I’m going to start moving,” he warns me after giving me a second to adjust. “I’ll go slow.”

I nod. He pulls out of me and slowly rocks back into my channel.

“Ohhhh,” I moan. “That’s amazing. Again.”

“Greedy.” Nathan repeats the motion, pulling out and pressing back into me.

It feels like nothing I could have imagined. He’s huge and hot, and it’s the most exquisite sensation. He fills me up

completely, his body pinning mine to the mattress. The pleasure is overwhelming, and I dig my fingers into his back, holding him closer.

“That’s it, sweetheart. I can feel your little cunt squeezing my cock.”

“Harder,” I whisper, and he chuckles.

“Greedy. So eager. You want more?”

“Yes, Daddy.”

He groans and pulls out, thrusting into me again as he hitches one of my legs over his shoulder. It’s better this time, his cock hitting a spot inside me that makes my toes curl.

“You like that, don’t you?”

“Yes,” I cry as he does it again.

“My baby girl. You’re going to come on my cock. You’re going to milk every drop from me. Is that what you want?”

“Yes!”

“Say it. Tell me what you want, Noelle.”

“I want to come,” I cry, clinging to him. “I want to come on your cock. Make me come, Daddy. Please.”

“Fuck,” he curses, slamming into me, his rhythm faster and rougher now.

I love it, and I wrap my legs around his hips, digging my nails into his back. He hisses in a breath and kisses me hard. There’s a fire, a pressure, building in my core, and each piston of his hips is bringing me closer and closer to the edge of exploding.

“Come, baby. Let me feel you come. Milk me. Be a good girl and come for Daddy.”

It’s the final straw, the final thing that breaks the dam.

I cry out, clinging to him, as the pleasure overtakes me. It’s overwhelming, and I can feel tears in my eyes. Nathan roars and thrusts into me one last time, and then he’s filling me up, his cock twitching as he pumps rope after rope of hot come into my pussy.

I've never felt anything like this. Nothing in my entire life comes close to how wonderful this moment is. Nathan is on top of me, his weight pressed down on me, his cock deep inside of me, and I'm wrapped up in his arms. He's groaning and whispering praise into my ear, telling me how beautiful and perfect I am, how much he's always wanted me.

"My sweet girl." He brushes his lips against my forehead. "You did such a good job. Are you okay?"

"More than okay."

He laughs, rolling us over and pulling me on top of him. He's still inside of me, and his hand trails up and down my back, his touch possessive.

"That's good, Noelle. I never want you to regret this."

"Why would I?" I ask, leaning back and looking into his eyes. "It was...it was amazing."

He smiles and presses a soft kiss to my lips. "That's a good start."

"I..."

I can't put into words everything that I'm feeling right now. How could I? Nothing has prepared me for this.

"Shhh." He wraps his arms around me. "Don't think about it too hard. We've got plenty of time to talk about this and work things out."

I nod, and Nathan's hands rub slow, soothing circles on my back.

"Get some rest, Noelle. Tomorrow is Christmas Eve."

"Okay," I murmur, closing my eyes.

He holds me as I fall asleep, and the last thought that goes through my head is...

I'm falling for this man...hard.

IN THE MORNING, the rain has finally stopped, and the electricity is back on. I only know this because of the light coming from underneath the bathroom door. The shower is running, and while I sort of wish that Nathan had woken me up to join him, I'm also thankful for the opportunity to sleep in.

Stretching feels amazingly delicious underneath the soft sheets, all the muscles made so sore from last night releasing one by one. I can't believe what happened last night, and while a part of my mind knows that I really need to process losing my virginity to my ex-boyfriend's dad, the larger part just wants to enjoy the sweet afterglow.

Maybe I need something to keep me busy so my thoughts don't spiral. Coffee seems like a good start, and I think I saw a nice French press in Nathan's kitchen last night.

After a little bit of digging in his dresser, I find a plain white t-shirt and slip it over my head, giggling when it comes almost to my knees. After I secure the coffee, I might even have time to make Nathan breakfast!

I'm going over the possibilities in my head as I pad barefoot out towards the kitchen—scrambled eggs and toast, omelets, maybe some bacon—when I hear something that brings me to a stop. It sounds...

It sounds like someone is in the kitchen. And not just one person, a few people at least.

I swallow hard, suddenly terrified. Maybe it's the niece he talked about last night or a housekeeper or something. Either way, I don't want to be caught here in Nathan's t-shirt, obviously sexed up. But I haven't been trying to be quiet, humming under my breath as I went in search of coffee, and whoever is in the kitchen must have heard me because they've gone silent.

I see the shadow of one of the people first, coming out of the brightness of the kitchen. A chill runs down my spine, and I'm ready to turn on my heel and run back to the bedroom to get Nathan when the person fully materializes. When I see who it is, I sort of wish it was a burglar instead.

Danny Nolan stands there in his dad's dining room, dressed in sweats, with a few of his asshole friends meandering behind him. Seeing him makes my blood run cold, and the fact that he's got two of the stupid dudes he always hangs out with—Dylan and Brad—makes me feel even worse. I might vomit.

“Well, well, well.” Danny laughs, but there's a cruelty to it. “Look who it is, guys.”

“Hi, Noelle,” Brad barks out, laughing along with Danny. Dylan does the same.

“To think I was just coming to my dad's to see if he wanted to spend the holiday together, and I find you here instead. What is that you're wearing, Noelle?”

I cross my arms over my chest. I've never felt so vulnerable, and I want nothing more than to run. But I'm trapped. There's nowhere to go.

“What are you doing here?” I demand.

“Like I said, I came to spend Christmas with my dad. We didn't exactly leave off on a great note last time.” He unconsciously rubs his eye, and I see the shadow of a bruise there. It sends a wave of shame and satisfaction through me at the same time.

“So you brought them?” I gesture towards Dylan and Brad, both of whom are smiling stupidly. I've always hated them.

“Yeah,” Danny says. “You know, I was thinking a lot about what you said. About being a better person. And I realized that you were right. I should be trying harder to spend time with my dad. We've had our differences, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't try. Too bad he's apparently fucking my girlfriend.”

“Ex-girlfriend,” I correct.

Danny smirks, and then his smile drops. “Did you fuck my dad, Noelle?”

I don't say anything, but apparently, that's enough because Danny starts advancing towards me.

“You little bitch,” he snarls. “How dare you? You're supposed to be mine.”

“She is not yours,” a voice says behind Danny, and I close my eyes, relief washing over me like a cool breeze. Thank God. Nathan is here.

“Look who it is. The man of the hour!” Danny’s expression is inching towards manic, and even with Nathan behind me, it scares the shit out of me. “Why don’t we spend some quality time together now that I’m here, old man? Or are you too busy sleeping with Noelle here so she can get a better grade?”

“This is ridiculous,” I snap. “And you’re being an idiot. Get out.”

“Oh, you think so?” Danny advances towards me, and I shrink back, but there’s nowhere for me to go. “This is my dad’s house, you little slut, and there’s no way in hell you’re going to tell me what to do.”

“Hey,” Nathan growls. His hands are gentle on my shoulders as he moves me out of the way, but that’s the only gentle thing about him. He’s vibrating with fury. “You’ll stay the fuck away from her and shut your goddamn mouth. I told you before that you won’t be treating her with anything but respect.”

“Oh yeah?” Danny laughs. “What are you going to do about it, old man?”

There are a few sounds of agreement from Danny’s friends, and it hits me all at once. He brought them because he thinks things are going to get violent with Nathan. This isn’t just some happy coincidence. He was planning for a fight, and now he thinks he’s going to win.

Nathan’s jaw clenches. “I don’t want to have to hurt you. You’re not acting like a man. You’re acting like a petulant child, and that’s no way to act in front of Noelle.”

“Shut the fuck up,” Danny spits. “I’m sick and tired of your lectures, old man. You think you’re so much better than everyone else, you and your Ivy League education and your fucking big-shot job. I’m sick of it. I’m not taking it anymore.”

He lunges at his dad, and Nathan sidesteps him easily, pushing Danny forward. He trips over his own feet and crashes into the wall, his face smacking against the wood paneling. He curses loudly and scrambles to his feet, but before he can make a move, Nathan punches him in the face.

I'm horrified and fascinated at the same time, and I watch in rapt attention as Brad and Dylan hesitate before jumping into the fray.

They've got no chance against Nathan. It's like three house cats against a lion.

I can tell he's going easy on all three of them, but especially Danny, giving his son only glancing blows and knocking him to the floor again and again. He doesn't want to hurt him, I think, and that makes my heart squeeze. This is my fault, isn't it?

Danny's friends seem to realize quickly that they're outmatched, even 3 against 1. They've never had a real fight before, and the looks on their faces are pure horror. Danny, though, keeps getting back up, spitting blood from a split lip onto the hardwood floor.

"I'm not a little boy anymore," he screams, throwing a wild punch at his father.

"That's enough," Nathan barks.

He grabs Danny by the neck, pinning him against the wall. His other arm pins him there as well, and Danny kicks out, trying to break free. "Let go of me!"

"Not until you promise that you'll behave," Nathan snarls. "You'll be respectful or you can walk out that door and never come back."

"Fuck you." Danny continues to struggle, but Nathan has him held fast. Not tight enough to cut off air, but enough that he can't move.

"Brad, Dylan." Nathan sounds even more animalistic than before. "If you get the hell out of here right now, I won't tell the school that you came here to assault a professor. This is the only chance I'm giving you."

They're both sporting black eyes for their trouble, but after a few shameful glances at Danny, Brad grabs Dylan by the sleeve and hauls him out of the house at a sprint. Seconds later, we hear an engine start and the squeal of tires leaving the driveway.

"Now," Nathan starts, giving all his attention back to his son, "this is going to be a cold, hard life lesson for you. I have security cameras, and I know you had to break in. I didn't give you a key for a reason. I can either call the cops right now and have you hauled off to jail or you can listen to me."

Danny struggles a little more, but finally, he gives up, hanging limp in his dad's arms. "Fine," he mutters. "Whatever."

"First, you will accept the fact that Noelle is mine, no fucking questions asked. I don't even want to hear about your pathetic attempt at dating her. She's mine. Second, I'm going to let you go, and you're going to beg her for forgiveness. For the stalking, for the asshole behavior, for being pushy—all of it. And then you're going to get the fuck out of my house. I don't care if you have to walk back to campus. I don't want to see your face again until I contact you. Got it?"

Danny mumbles something under his breath.

"Louder," Nathan snaps. "Say it loud enough so Noelle can hear you."

"Fine!" Danny says. "Fine, I get it. She's yours."

Nathan's grip begins to relax. "And what else?"

Danny has to force the words between clenched teeth, but he manages it. "And I'm going to apologize to her."

"Good." Nathan lets go of him, and Danny slides down the wall, landing on his ass.

"Noelle, honey," Nathan says. "Can you do me a favor and grab him a bag of ice? I don't want him looking like a wreck in front of all his shithead friends."

I nod and dart into the kitchen.

When I come back with an ice pack, Danny is standing and brushing off his pants. Nathan has moved towards the door

and is holding it open, a clear invitation for Danny to leave.

“Here,” I say, thrusting the ice pack at him.

He takes it and mutters his thanks.

“Do it.” Nathan barks, and Danny looks cowed. It might be the hardest thing he’s ever done, but slowly, Danny starts to apologize to me.

“I’m sorry for showing up here,” he says. “For harassing you. For...for not treating you well. And I’m sorry for not believing you when you broke up with me.”

I can barely contain my shock. He sounds genuine.

“You’re forgiven,” I say softly. “Thank you.”

“Yeah.” Danny looks away, his face bright red, and he starts heading towards the door. He pauses, swallowing hard, and for a terrible second, I think he might cry. He doesn’t look back at either of us, but he says, “Merry fucking Christmas, Dad.”

“Merry Christmas, son.” Nathan closes the door behind him and locks it, and we’re finally alone.

The silence stretches for a few long seconds, and finally, Nathan lets out a long sigh. “Jesus, that was a lot.”

“I’m so sorry,” I say, my words coming a million miles per hour. I’ve never felt worse about anything in my entire life. I feel like I’ve torn a family apart. “Nathan, please take me back to the dorm, maybe this was a mistake and—”

“Don’t finish that sentence,” Nathan warns, his voice low and dangerous. “You are not a mistake, and nothing that happened here was wrong. In fact, I’m pretty fucking sure I owe you an apology.”

“Why would you need to apologize?” I shake my head. “You did nothing wrong. You...you defended me. Not just physically, but making him say he was sorry...”

There’s a lump in my throat, and I have to swallow past it. Looking at this man, who was only able to pull a pair of sweatpants on after his shower, still breathing just a little

heavier from the fight, fills me with such a powerful affection that I don't know what to do with myself.

Oh. Oh. I know what's happening. I thought it was just me who was falling so hard, but... "Nathan, this is more than just attraction, isn't it?"

His eyes go wide. "What do you mean?"

"I mean..." I swallow hard. It's terrifying to put myself out there, especially when my whole life has been a string of disappointments. But he's been honest with me, and I need to do the same. "This doesn't feel like it was just a one-time thing."

"I hope not." Nathan smiles. "It feels like a beginning."

"Yeah." My cheeks are burning, but it's a good kind of heat, like sitting by a fireplace on a snowy night. "It really does."

"Come here." Nathan opens his arms, and I don't even have to think twice.

He wraps his arms around me and holds me tight, and for the first time in my life, I feel safe. Cared for. Protected. Loved.

"It's not just me, then?" I ask, my voice muffled in his chest.

"Of course not." Nathan chuckles. "Why would it just be you? You're...fuck, you're incredible. Everything about you."

My stomach is full of butterflies. "So what do we do now?"

Nathan kisses the top of my head. "Let's start simple. How about a nice long bath?"

"A bath and some coffee?"

His smile turns mischievous, and he strokes one knuckle down my cheek. "Ask me the right way."

I blush, knowing exactly what he wants. It feels a lot harder to say here in the bright daylight, even more scandalous...but I sort of love it.

"Please, Daddy? Will you bring me some coffee, and then can we take a bath together?"

“Good girl.” Nathan cups my chin in his hand. “I’ll get you some coffee and then run the bath. How does that sound?”

“Perfect.”

I GET MY COFFEE, a light beige and ridiculously sweet, and a bath like I’ve only ever dreamed about. Nathan spared no expense in the master bathroom, and the tub is so big, we both fit with room to spare.

The water is steaming hot and the bubbles are so high that the water is overflowing. I can barely keep myself from squealing. “This is so much nicer than a shower.”

“I figured you’d like it. And I like the idea of having some more privacy, just the two of us.”

“Privacy.” I giggle. “I get the feeling that you’re a very private man.”

“Well, it’s the truth.” Nathan massages my shoulders, making my head fall forward with pleasure. “I haven’t had any real privacy in a long time, and the idea of having someone in my life, someone I trust, to share that with is amazing.”

“I’ve never had it,” I admit, feeling a bit shy. I take a sip of coffee and try not to let my mind go to places where I’ll feel sad or insecure. “I grew up with a single mom. She had boyfriends on and off, but it was never serious.”

“And what about you?”

“Me?” I laugh. “I was too busy being the perfect student. Too much work and too many books.”

“Hmm.” He brushes my wet hair from my shoulder and plants a kiss there. “No work or books today, okay? It’s Christmas Eve after all.”

“Okay,” I say happily, leaning back against his broad chest. Now I feel something hard stirring against my back, and it makes me almost drop my coffee. “I, um, I thought you wanted to take a bath.”

“Oh, I do.” His voice is a growl in my ear, and his hands roam across my body, touching every inch of me. My nipples are already stiff and begging for his attention, and I feel my pussy clenching, aching for him. “But there’s plenty of time to enjoy ourselves before the water gets cold.”

I whimper a little as his fingers trail down my body, dipping below the water to stroke between my legs. He pushes them apart and spreads my pussy, and I moan softly, arching my hips to give him better access.

“There’s a good girl,” Nathan purrs, and his free hand moves up to cup my breasts.

I moan louder as he plays with my clit, his other hand tweaking and pinching my nipples. I feel like he’s got me on the edge of orgasm in an instant, and I have no idea how I’m going to handle it if we do this every time we’re together. I haven’t thought too much about what his protecting me really meant, and if we’re now in a relationship or...something? I don’t know what to call it. It feels too special to think of it as just dating, but we’ve only known each other for two weeks...

“Finish your drink, and lean forward,” he rumbles. “Hands on the edge of the tub, ass towards me.”

I gulp and nod, setting the empty mug aside. It’s easy enough to comply, but it makes me feel so exposed, my pussy and asshole on display for him.

“Good.” His hands slide up and down my ass, and then one of them slides between my legs, teasing the slick entrance of my pussy. He pulls his hand back and a smacking sound echoes through the room as he spansks my ass, not too hard, but it’s unexpected and it makes me yelp.

“What are you doing?”

“Just making sure your ass is nice and pink.” Nathan’s voice is low and dangerous. He spansks me again, a little harder this time, and a shiver of excitement goes through me.

“Now,” Nathan says, and I can hear him move behind me. The water shifts and I look over my shoulder. He’s moving

forward, kneeling right behind me, and the sight of him is enough to make me squirm.

Nathan is all muscle and brooding, irresistible energy. Even with a few gray hairs at his temples and some around his eyes, he's still incredibly sexy. His broad shoulders, thick biceps, and his abs—all hard-won from working out and going for runs. I want to touch him so badly, it hurts.

“No, no,” he scolds. “Don't look. If you're a good girl and take this spanking like I tell you to, then I'll reward you. Until then, I'm not going to touch you.”

“Oh.”

I have no idea what else to say, but it's clear that Nathan is enjoying this.

“I'm going to spank you until I think you've had enough. Every time you squirm or try to move, I'll add five more. So, I'd recommend that you stay very still. And count.”

“Count?”

“Out loud,” he says firmly. “I want you to know exactly how many spanks you're getting.”

I shiver with excitement that's spiced up by the smallest thread of nervousness. I know he'd never hurt me, but this is all so new, and I'm admittedly still a little sore. But I want to do this. I want to be good for him, so much that I have to stifle an excited giggle. “Okay. I understand.”

“Good.”

His hand comes down again, this time on the opposite cheek, and I gasp, a little stunned by the impact.

“I...oh. One,” I manage, squeezing my eyes shut.

“One,” Nathan repeats, and the next blow lands, lower than the first, and the sound echoes around the room.

“Two!”

The third and fourth come in quick succession, and I whimper. It barely hurts, almost not at all, but the way his spanks are

heating the skin of my ass is making me so turned on. My legs are shaking, but I haven't moved yet.

"Three! Four!"

He pauses, his hand resting on the small of my back. "You're doing very well, baby. How are you feeling?"

"Um..." I bite my lip, trying to get my bearings. "It stings but...in a good way."

Nathan laughs, and the sound is deep and throaty. "Oh, we're just getting started. But first..." His fingers dip into my pussy, and I gasp. They feel so good, pushing into me and curling inside of me, and it's all I can do to stay still. "Do you think you can make it to ten, baby?"

"Y-Yes," I manage, even though my knees are shaking and I'm gripping the edge of the tub for dear life.

"Do you want me to stop? You can tell me, and I'll do it."

"No!"

"No, what?"

"Don't stop."

"Good girl." He pulls his fingers out, and I whine, the sound dying as the first slap lands again.

"Five," I gasp, fighting so hard not to wiggle back against him. Just five more and he'll let me come. I hope.

Slap!

"Six!"

"Seven!"

"Eight!"

"Nine!"

"Ten!"

As soon as the word is out of my mouth, his fingers plunge into me again, and I can't hold back anymore. I thrust back against him, needing the friction, and the sound of pleasure that leaves me is almost feral.

“Oh, baby, you were such a good girl,” Nathan rasps, his voice a harsh growl. “I think you deserve a reward.”

“Please, Daddy.”

“Don’t worry. I’m going to take care of you.”

He keeps fingering me, and his other hand slips under me to grab my breast. He squeezes it, kneading the soft flesh and making me writhe with need. My nipples are so hard, I’m not sure how I’m managing not to come.

“Nathan, please.”

His response is another spank, a sharp one that makes me yelp. “What was that?”

“I mean...Daddy, please,” I beg, and that seems to be the magic word.

He groans and his fingers plunge deep into me. My body is trembling, and I’m not sure how much more of this I can take. It’s all I can do not to scream.

His fingers thrust in and out. “Such a good girl. Come for me, Noelle.”

My whole body seizes, and my mind goes blank as the first wave of my orgasm hits. My pussy clenches around his fingers, and he keeps pumping them in and out of me, coaxing even more waves of pleasure through my body.

When I can’t take it anymore, he finally pulls his hand away, and I collapse back against him, boneless and breathing hard.

“There, there.” He kisses my cheek, his hands running over my body, soothing me and bringing me back down to earth. “That was perfect, Noelle. You did so well.”

I smile up at him, feeling giddy and satisfied, and a little tired. The bath has gotten lukewarm, but the water is still nice.

“Come here, baby,” he says and guides me so that my back is against his chest again, and he wraps his arms around me.

“Was that a good Christmas Eve gift?” I ask softly.

“Definitely.” He chuckles. “We’ve only just gotten started.”

AFTER REFILLING the bathtub and actually bathing, we get dry off and Nathan suggests we go to the Christmas farmer's market downtown to get a few things for dinner. I'm still floating on cloud nine, trying not to think about how long I'm going to stay with Nathan or what will happen once the holiday is done.

Thank goodness I have my luggage, so I change into jeans, a red sweater, and tall brown boots. Nathan goes to make sure the storm didn't ruin any of his light display, which I think he likes more than he lets on, while I finish my hair.

When I'm done and go out to find him, I come to a stop in the dining room, looking at the chaos the earlier fight caused. God, was that really only two hours ago? The guilt tries to creep back in, but I squash it down. Danny can't hurt me anymore.

At least I think he can't.

Trying to keep myself in the holiday spirit, I leave the house and find Nathan pulling the Wagoneer out of the garage for us. He gets out to greet me with a thorough kiss that leaves us both breathless and then opens the passenger door for me.

"So, what's at this farmer's market?" I ask. "We have a lot of food here."

"True, but nothing's local. And the best part is that all the profits go to the Children's Hospital."

"Oh, that's perfect! We're going to have a great meal. I'm not the best cook, but I'm sure we can look up some videos."

He chuckles. "Whatever you say, baby."

The drive seems much shorter in the daytime when it isn't storming like the world is going to end. The market is lively and festive, full of people and the scent of fresh pine and spices. There's hot apple cider and baked goods and music and people milling around, talking and laughing and admiring the lights.

“I’ve never been here before,” I confess as we stop at a booth selling hand-knit scarves.

“It’s always fun. And, well, I haven’t been to this one in a while,” Nathan adds, looking a bit sheepish. “Usually I’m skiing with my friends at this time of year.”

“Do you still ski?”

“A little. I prefer snowboarding.”

“You seem the type,” I tease, and he laughs.

We move on and find some handmade ornaments that we both agree are adorable. Nathan insists on buying me a few, and I don’t argue. After the ornament stall is a jewelry booth. While I’m looking at a pair of dangly silver earrings with tiny little bells hanging from the end, Nathan wanders off. I don’t see him for a moment, and I frown, trying to find him in the crowd.

He reappears like he never left, a small bag in hand. I want to ask about his secretive purchase, but when I try to, he silences me with a kiss, cupping the back of my neck possessively.

“Just a little something,” he murmurs, his nose brushing mine, “to remember this Christmas.”

“I could never forget.”

We spend the next couple of hours at the farmer’s market, eating and picking out some gifts for my mom and grandma. As much as I hate to admit it, I’m starting to get tired. Nathan picks up on it quickly.

“How about we get home and put on a movie?”

“Sounds good,” I admit.

We get in the Jeep and head home. Once we’re there, I set up a tray of popcorn, and Nathan makes us some cocoa while I find a good movie. We decide on *Love Actually* and snuggle together under a blanket.

It’s the most domestic, perfect Christmas Eve I’ve ever had, and I fall asleep halfway through the movie, tucked under Nathan’s arm.

NOELLE

At some point, I ended up in Nathan's enormous bed, cuddled up to him like he's the world's biggest heated blanket. I slept better than I think I have in years and woke up before Nathan in a total opposite to yesterday.

We're in California, so I don't expect a white Christmas, but at least the sun is shining. I eventually figure out the French press, and by that point, Nathan has woken up and joined me in the kitchen.

"Merry Christmas," he tells me, leaning down for a kiss.

"Merry Christmas." I beam at him. "Now, are you hungry? Because I'm starving."

"Actually, I'm going for a run first." Nathan takes I step back, and I notice that instead of pajama pants, he's shirtless and in a pair of black running shorts, muscular thighs on display. Now I'm hungry in an entirely different way.

"A run?"

"Yeah." He grins at me, stretching. "But I'll take you up on that offer when I get back. Make yourself at home, sweetheart, I won't be long."

And he's gone, leaving me wondering if his idea of 'won't be long' is the same as mine.

I decide to use his absence to shower and go back upstairs after I'm dry and smelling like Nathan's soap and shampoo.

I can't believe it's Christmas already. It's so different being in a house alone with him, and I'm not sure what to do. It doesn't feel real.

I know we have the whole day ahead of us, and we can just... spend it together. The thought of it makes my stomach squirm with anticipation and excitement. I've never been alone with someone before, let alone for the holidays.

I'm not sure what to do first, and I end up standing in front of the large windows overlooking the front yard, looking out at the driveway.

It's empty, and there's no sign of Nathan. He was going to run, right? I know the cars are in the garage, but the thought of him driving off and leaving me here makes my stomach flip-flop.

Don't be so stupid, I chide myself and go back downstairs.

I find a box of cereal in the pantry and, after a little hunting, a bowl and spoon. I make myself comfortable at the island, and when I'm done, I'm still not sure what to do. It's weird being here alone. It's not even ten, but I'm already getting restless.

"Okay, think," I tell myself, drumming my fingers against the countertop.

I have the whole day. Nathan's not gone forever. But the house is huge and a little eerie without him, and I end up wandering back to the living room and the tree. I grab the bags from the Christmas market, intending to wrap the little gift I managed to pick out for him in his brief absence, but I get distracted by all the other things in the bag. The ornaments we picked out yesterday are perfect, and once I finish hanging them, the tree is beautiful. I snap a few pictures of it, and I'm about to take a selfie when the door opens.

"Hey, sweetheart."

Nathan comes into the room, sweaty and breathless, and I can't help but stare at him. He's so fit, so gorgeous. He looks at the tree, and a slow smile spreads across his face.

"Looks nice."

"I love it."

“Good.” He reaches out, tugging me towards him, and kisses me thoroughly. He leaves to go shower quickly, and I manage to shove his gift in a small gift bag while he’s gone.

This all still feels strange, and I’m having more trouble with it than I thought I would. At Grandma’s, we’d bake and watch movies all day together after opening presents. With just me and Nathan, it’s so odd. I’m toying with the idea of seeing what is taking so long in the shower when, in a crazy coincidence, I see that my phone on the coffee table is ringing. It’s my mom.

A grin spreads across my face. If I can’t see the two of them, at least I can talk to them on the phone!

“Hey, Mom!” I chirp when I answer. “Merry Christmas!”

Instead of a joyful response, Mom’s voice is startlingly blank. “Noelle, where are you right now?”

A surge of anxiety hits me. Surely she can’t know I’m at Nathan’s, and it’s not like I’m going to tell her I’m spending Christmas with my ex’s dad, who just so happens to be my professor too.

“I’m...um, at a friend’s,” I hedge, and the silence on the other end of the line is so thick it could be cut with a knife.

“Noelle.” Mom layers all the years of motherly intuition into my name. “Tell me where you are.”

I’m breaking out in a cold sweat, eyes darting towards the bedroom where Nathan is still showering. I don’t think he’s going to come save me this time like he did with Danny.

“I can’t,” I whisper, and that’s apparently the final straw.

“Where are you?” she asks again, and this time there’s a hint of hysteria.

“With my...my professor.”

“What? Are you joking?”

I’m about to launch into an explanation when a sound behind me has me turning around.

Nathan's in the doorway, his dark eyes trained on me. His expression is carefully blank, and the sight of him, freshly showered and smelling amazing, is making me nervous. There's a question in his eyes, but I can't answer it right now. "I missed my flight, you know that," I try to tell her. "He picked me up, and he has this huge house, and I didn't want to be alone for Christmas—"

"One of your classmates called me!" She's almost shrieking on the other line now, and tears are pricking at my eyes. "A nice young man! He told me he was so worried about you and that you were messing around with a professor!"

My mind is reeling. I don't have any guy friends. Who the hell would call my mom? "Who, Mom?"

"That is not the important thing right now," she fumes. I've got a horrible suspicion, but I don't want to speak about it until I'm sure. Nathan is hovering, and, hoping to avoid having to go over the conversation again, I show him the name on the screen and put it on speakerphone.

"Are you...sleeping with this man?" Mom asks. "Why else would you be at his home, right where your classmate said you would be?"

"I'm not...he's not...Mom, I promise." It's a lie, but I don't know what else to do. "This is Professor Nolan, and he's a nice guy, and he was helping me."

"I don't believe it." Defeat is creeping into her tone, and it's almost worse than the anger. "You're going to ruin your entire college career. After Christmas, I'm flying over and taking you home."

"Mom, no, please—"

"No, Noelle, you're not thinking clearly."

"It's not like that, please just let me explain."

"I don't have time to hear your excuses. I'm going to call the university and tell them you're sleeping with your professor."

"Mom!"

“Do you have any idea how serious this is?” Her voice has dropped to a whisper, as if she doesn’t want me to hear. “He could lose his job, Noelle.”

My heart is hammering in my chest. I know it’s wrong, but there’s no way Mom can understand how we feel about each other. It’s not just some sordid affair.

“Please don’t,” I whisper. “We’re not...we’re both adults!”

“Noelle, I love you, but this is unacceptable.”

“Mom, it’s Christmas,” I beg.

She’s silent on the other line. “I’ll give you the rest of the day, but tomorrow, we’re sorting this out.”

“Yes, Mom.” I know better than to argue.

“I’ll call you later,” she adds, and then the line goes dead.

The phone drops from my hand, and the tears start falling.

“Baby...” Nathan whispers, and his hands come down on my shoulders, massaging gently. “It’s going to be fine. You’re an adult. You don’t have to go home. You can stay right here with me.”

Out of everything, the prospect of being pulled out of college and forced home isn’t what’s bothering me the most. “Nathan,” I gasp, fighting back a sob. “I think I know who called her. I think it was Danny!”

His grip on me tightens, and he pulls me closer to him, arms wrapping around me. “Fuck. It makes sense.”

“After you made him apologize, after he said he would leave me alone!” I’m full-on crying now, and while a part of me wants to curl into his chest and just sob my heart out, another part of me tries to shrug him off. I feel like I’m being suffocated. “I need to go back to the dorm, Nathan. I need to fix this. If he’s called my mom, then he’s definitely called the school.”

“If they believe him,” Nathan points out.

“It’s a risk I can’t take.” I push him away. “I’ve got a scholarship and I need to get my degree. If I don’t, I won’t be

able to make a career!”

“You don’t have to work,” he says, voice low and serious.
“Not if you’re with me. I’ll take care of you.”

“Nathan!” Now it’s me who’s almost shrieking. “We’ve only known each other for two weeks!”

He looks taken aback. “So? We both feel the same way.”

“It’s not fair to ask me to drop everything and come live with you.” I’m panicking now. Nathan looks completely bewildered and pissed, and my brain is a fog of anxiety. “Why wouldn’t you want to be with me? This can’t just be one-sided. You said so.”

“No, but...” I’m at a loss. All I know is that I need to go. Now.

“But?” he repeats, raising an eyebrow.

“Maybe I need some space,” I tell him, backing up towards the door. “Maybe I can’t handle all of this, not now, and not with everything going on with school.”

He steps forward, and I step back, palms pressed against the door as a panic attack starts to grip my chest. Vision narrowing, I feel like a cornered animal. Not because he would ever hurt me, but because if he touches me, I know I won’t be able to resist. I want him to hold me so damn bad.

Nathan tries to reach for me, and I flinch. His entire face shuts down, body language going cold in an instant. “Fine. I’ll call you a cab.”

“No, no, it’s fine. I can get an Uber.”

“Take the cab, Noelle.” His eyes are dark and furious.

“Okay.”

He walks away, leaving me to stand there feeling miserable and scared and unsure.

I don’t know how I’m supposed to be able to do anything other than just sit here and cry. But Nathan doesn’t reappear, and the cab is outside waiting for me before I can even get myself together enough to walk out the front door.

As the car pulls away, I look back at the house. The front door is open, and Nathan is standing on the front step, watching. His expression is unreadable, and I turn around, looking straight ahead until the cab turns the corner and the house disappears.

“Thank you,” I mutter, giving the driver a tip as he parks on the dorm’s curb.

“Merry Christmas!” the oblivious driver says brightly, and I want to weep all over again, but I manage to hold it together.

“Yeah. Merry Christmas...”

I have to fish in my backpack for a moment for the key to my dorm, and once I find it, I hurry down the hall and inside. My room is cold and feels so barren, but at least my bed is here. I make a beeline for it, collapse on the hard mattress, and sob until my voice gives out.

I SPEND a miserable day in bed, watching Netflix on my laptop and eating food out of the vending machine. Could I really have been shopping hand in hand with the perfect man just yesterday? Drinking hot cocoa and falling asleep in his arms? Losing my virginity to him while he made me come so hard I saw stars?

It doesn’t seem real. None of it seems real.

I miss Nathan so, so much.

I call my mom and we talk for a long, long time. I don’t go into detail, but she seems to relax when I explain that Nathan has only been at the school for two weeks and won’t be returning after break. Combined with a picture of me in my dorm bed, it’s enough to convince her to let me stay at school, even if she is still incredibly upset with me.

I obviously don’t tell her that Nathan is my ex’s dad, and when she demands I promise her that I won’t see him anymore, I can’t make the words come out of my mouth. Mom is

frustrated, but I've given her all the promises I can. I'm not ready to admit that I might never be with Nathan again.

Just like I'm not ready to admit to myself that I love him. Something I've only realized now that he's gone, and I'm here alone, on Christmas of all days.

"Well, at least he's not really your teacher." Mom sighs when she still can't get a promise out of me. "I just worry about you, dear."

"I know, Mom." I sniffle. "I love you. Sorry for all of this today. And sorry that a random classmate of mine called and blew everything way out of proportion."

"We would have needed to have this talk eventually either way. Merry Christmas, Noelle. I'll see you over New Year's."

I tuck the phone under my pillow and cue up another episode of *The Bachelor*, trying my best not to cry anymore. I've done so much of it that my entire face hurts. Just as I consider going to the vending machine for other Snickers, there's a knock on my dorm room door. Great. I hope one of the few other people still here didn't hear me bawling my eyes out.

It isn't a student. Of course, it isn't. I should have known exactly who was going to be on the other side of the door, but when I open it, it's still a shock.

Nathan has two dozen roses in his hands, all of them the deep red of holly berries.

"Hi," I breathe, staring at him.

He holds the flowers out. "These are for you."

"Thanks," I say, still staring.

"Can I come in?"

"Sure." I move aside to let him in.

The room is small, but he makes it feel even smaller by filling it up. I can smell his cologne, and his broad shoulders nearly brush against the walls. It's not fair, really.

"I shouldn't have pressured you earlier," he says without preamble.

“I shouldn’t have pushed you away.”

“I shouldn’t have let you push me away.”

I give him a watery smile. “It’s okay. It’s not just the...school thing. It’s that my family is the only thing I’ve ever known. The idea of disappointing my mom seems like a nightmare.”

He nods, setting the roses down on the desk, and comes to wrap his arms around me.

I bury my face in his chest. He’s so solid and strong. So warm. It’s not fair that he’s so good and perfect, and he’s not even really mine.

“I resigned,” he murmurs into my hair. “Not that I work here full time anyway, but I made it clear I won’t be teaching ever again.”

I’m startled. “Really?”

“I’m done worrying about getting in trouble over this,” he says softly, kissing the top of my head. “I called Danny, too. He was the one to call your mom, but it was before he came to the house on Christmas Eve. Before the fight. He had to leave a voicemail because apparently she had no service and she didn’t get the message until early this morning.”

“But...why would he do that?”

“Because he’s an asshole,” Nathan says flatly. “He thinks he can get away with anything. And I think he was trying to blackmail me. So I took away anything he could hold against me.” His muscles tense, showing me just how angry he still is. “Fuck this school. You’re the only thing that matters, and you’re going to come downstairs, get in the car, and come home with me. I let you leave once, I won’t do it again.”

“Are you...sure?”

“Completely sure. You’re mine, and if the world needs to burn down for us to be together, I’ll make it happen.”

“Oh.” My voice is small and trembling, but I’ve never been more certain of anything. “I’m sure.”

“Good. Because I love you.”

“You...what?”

I pull back, and he drops his arms. There’s an intensity in his eyes as he stares at me, and a part of me is terrified that this is too much, that this is moving too fast.

“I’m sorry,” he says quietly. “I know that we haven’t known each other for very long. But I can’t pretend anymore, Noelle. You’re the only woman I want. You’re the only one that I think of. Every time I close my eyes, I can only see your face. It’s why I couldn’t go through with it, and it’s why I didn’t want you to go.” He rakes a hand through his hair. “Fuck...I tried to be a good man and let you go, give you space to make your own decisions, but I can’t. So I’m here for you. And I love you. Let’s go.”

He reaches for my hand.

And I let him take it.

I can’t think of a single reason to say no. Not when he’s offering me the entire world.

“Let’s go,” I whisper.

He smiles, the most genuine smile that I’ve ever seen, and it fills me with warmth. I can’t help but smile back. He loves me, and I love him too, but I want to wait until the perfect moment to say it. Not here in my stupid dorm room.

I want to say it beneath his sparkling Christmas tree after he opens the little gift I bought him. It just feels right.

NATHAN

I can't stop looking over at Noelle in the passenger seat. There's joy on her face as she keeps dipping her face down to smell the enormous bouquet of roses, but I can still see the red rims of her eyes from where she has been crying.

Fuck. I never meant to hurt her, but it was inevitable that we would get pushback on our relationship. I just didn't expect it to be from her mom, and so damn soon.

It almost ruined Christmas, but I'm going to turn things the fuck around. My girl will not be sad today.

I'm trying not to think about how I told her I loved her and she didn't respond in kind. Just because I'm completely confident of our life together doesn't mean I should expect the same from her. I mean...of course, I want the same from her, and there's no way in hell I'm ever letting her leave again, but a little space should be fine.

Should. But it isn't. It's bugging the hell out of me. If she doesn't love me now, then I'll make sure she does by the end of the night, even if I have to make her come one hundred times before dawn. I will fucking do it.

Noelle doesn't sense my unease and all but leaps out of the car when we pull into the driveway. My house has always been just that... a house. But with Noelle here, it feels like a home.

I think she's just happy to have the hard part out of the way, but all that carefree attitude morphs into something else entirely when she opens the door.

I called in a favor, something I never do. When I left to get the roses and go find Noelle, my sister and my niece were just arriving to get the place ready. I told them both my plans over the phone, and they squealed so loud that I was sure it burst the speakers on my phone. My sister cooked dinner with all the things we bought at the market, and my niece turned the Christmas spirit up to eleven with her decorating and sprucing up the place. I thought it was gaudy before, but now...holy shit. It's a fucking lot.

It's all worth it to see Noelle's face right now and know that the tears in her eyes are from joy.

All the lights in the house are out, and everything is lit by candlelight. I try not to think about the fact my niece lit a bunch of candles and then just...left them burning in the empty house because I have to admit, the effect is pretty damn romantic.

The tree is the only thing with electric lights on, and it glows like a sun in the middle of my living room. The fire is roaring, there are steaming cups of hot cocoa on the table, and a plush sherpa blanket I've never seen before folded on the couch and waiting on us.

Dinner is in the oven, which is set to warm so it won't contribute to the massive fire hazard that my place has become, but I don't think I'm going to be able to sit through a whole meal to finish the plan I've put into action.

There's a gift under the tree for Noelle. One that is going to change our lives forever.

I have a speech prepared, closing the door behind us and leading her to the living room, but before I can start, she darts forward and grabs a magazine-sized gift bag tucked towards the back of the tree. Huh. I hadn't even noticed it before.

"Noelle—" I start, but she puts a finger on my lips to shush me, which I immediately nibble on, making her laugh.

"Wait, please open this before you say anything else." She hands the bag to me. "It's taken everything in me not to give you this early."

Puzzled but falling more in love with this girl every minute, I give in and pull the tissue paper out, making sure not to drop it on any damn candles. I reach inside and pull out a leather-bound book, the pages yellowed with age, and feel my heart clench so hard in my chest that for a second I think I'm dying.

Damn, this woman and her impossibly romantic soul. She's going to be the death of me.

She's the love of my fucking life.

"Romeo and Juliet," I murmur in awe. "An antique edition. Noelle, I—"

She stops me, rising onto her tiptoes and kissing me softly. "I love you," she whispers.

"Say it again," I demand.

"I love you, I love you, I love you," she repeats, giggling.

"I'm never letting you go," I swear, and then my lips are on hers, the kiss hot and desperate.

Her hands are clutching at my shirt, trying to tear it off. I break the kiss for a split second to start to pull her sweater over her head, all thoughts of a plan or dinner or fires leaving my mind as all the blood flow goes south. But we bump into the tree, jostling the single other gift underneath, and I stop.

"Wait," I tell her. "I'm going to fuck you until you can't see straight, but first I have to give you your gift."

"It can wait," she insists, panting, her hands all over my chest.

"It can't," I argue, laughing as I extricate myself from her and pick up the palm-sized box. I push it into her hands, and with a huff, she rips the wrapping open.

Inside is a black velvet box and a ring. A rose gold band and a halo of diamonds around sapphire as blue as her eyes. It catches the light of the hundreds of candles, and suddenly all my annoyance for my niece changes into gratitude. The effect is amazing.

"Nathan?" Noelle breathes, looking up at me.

I drop down on one knee and take the box from her, opening it and taking the ring out. "Marry me."

"Is this real?"

"As real as my love for you."

"You really love me?"

"Of course. I was just waiting for the perfect moment. So I'm asking you again. Will you marry me so we can spend the rest of our lives together?"

"Yes!" Noelle shouts, and I laugh as I slip the ring onto her finger.

She tackles me, sending me flying backward, and I hit the carpet as she kisses me. We're a tangled mess of limbs and kisses and laughter, and we can't even stop long enough to take our clothes off.

We don't light anything on fire, amazingly. It's the best Christmas of my entire life.

EPILOGUE

One Year Later

Snowboarding is my thing, sure. But I don't think it's going to be Noelle's, and that's just fine.

She looks skeptical as I unload my gear into the ski chalet I've rented for us to spend a few weeks at, high in the mountain and surrounded by honest-to-god snow. Noelle is cradling our 3-month-old daughter, looking both happy beyond measure and a bit nervous at the idea of me barreling down the mountain on the board.

"It's only for if you want to get rid of me," I assure her, laughing. "Otherwise, I plan to spend the entire time with my two favorite girls."

She nods, relaxing a bit. "Okay. Because I have no intention of being a single mom."

I grin at her, turning my attention to the bundle in her arms. "What do you think, Nadia? Do you want to learn how to snowboard, or do you want to learn how to ski first?"

The baby just giggles and buries her face in Noelle's chest.

"Ski first, then." I chuckle. "You'll want to get started while you're young, that's for sure."

"Stop planning extreme sports for our newborn, please." Noelle laughs, standing on her tiptoes so I can kiss her sweet mouth. "Let's just enjoy the peace for once, hm?"

I can't resist the urge to press her against the wall and kiss her even deeper. Her free arm winds around my neck, and her body molds against mine. "I don't think I can," I groan.

"Try."

"Never."

I take Nadia from her arms and set her gently in the bassinet we've set up in the living room, and then turn back to Noelle, kissing her again and again. She tastes like cinnamon and apples and the promise of Christmas morning.

She is my new everything, her and Nadia. My perfect wife and daughter.

We married quickly, but the ceremony was beautiful, overlooking the ocean in Washington, so her mother and grandmother could be there. Neither was thrilled about me, but I managed to turn on the charm enough to change their minds.

Not that it would have mattered if they didn't.

Nothing could stop me from being with her. I would have taken her across the country to elope if she had said yes.

"What's on the itinerary?" she whispers as we break the kiss.

"I thought maybe the spa first. But now, I'm thinking I'm going to have you instead."

"Oh, I like the sound of that," she teases. "But I think we should finish unpacking and get the baby to sleep first, hm?"

She's right, but I'm impatient. "Fine. Let's get this done, then. Nadia, time to be tired."

She just gurgles happily in response.

Even if she doesn't feel like taking a nap, I've got Noelle's mother and grandma set up in the chalet neighboring ours, and I'm sure they'd love to have some time with the baby. It seemed like an extravagant gift to bring them along, but I had ulterior motives. Those motives being lots and lots of private time with my wife.

"I'll finish getting everything unpacked. Why don't you go see if your mom is settled in? If so, tell her we're going to drop

Nadia off for an hour.”

Noelle smiles, and it’s like the sun. “Just an hour, huh?”

I growl, pulling her against me. “Make it three,” I tell her before crushing my mouth against hers. One hour, three hours, an entire day—it will never be enough. But we have our entire lives together, and I plan to take advantage of it, every single minute.

EXTENDED EPILOGUE

Ten Years Later

Sending the kids to summer camp might send Nathan into a spiral the likes of which I've never seen before. I get it. I'm stressed too, but they're going to have the best time ever. Not to mention that what we paid for it would have been enough to pay for a small house, but of course, it's nothing but the best for Nathan's little angels.

The oldest angel, Nadia, is eleven and was packed and ready to go at 5 AM this morning. Nadine and Nina, our nine-year-old twins, were a bit harder to get going. They were not thrilled to have to leave their entire doll collections behind, but after some convincing, I think they might finally believe me that there will be plenty more to do at camp.

Nathan and I are standing on the porch, waving them goodbye as the white bus, covered in flower decals, drives away with our precious cargo aboard, along with at least twenty other kids their age. We gave them a thousand kisses, and they were very brave.

But now...now it's just Nathan and me for an entire week. It's been a long time since we've had this much privacy.

For once, I don't think sex is at the forefront of Nathan's mind, though. He looks forlorn as the bus disappears down the road.

"They're going to be fine," I assure him. "The camp is an entire 3.5 miles away. Stop worrying so much."

"They'll have everything they need, right?" he asks, still tense.

“Everything and probably more.”

“It’s only a week.”

“It’s only a week, and then you’ll get them back.”

He sighs. “I know, I know.”

I loop my arm through his and lean my head against his shoulder. “Let’s go make out,” I whisper.

“It’s the middle of the day.”

“So?”

Now there’s a hint of the Nathan I know—scandalous and sexy as hell—when he cups my chin and raises my face to look him in the eye. “I just needed to make sure I wasn’t dreaming. That’s all.”

“Oh yeah? And how can you tell the difference between a dream and reality?”

He smirks, leaning closer to me. “I’d be happy to show you. But first…”

“But first, we should move into the bedroom,” I suggest, not wanting to have to move once we get started.

“Mhm.”

The bedroom isn’t much different than when I first saw it 10 years ago, except with some of my personal touches added. It was perfect that Nathan’s house was big enough for us to raise a family in, and the place has served us well.

I finished my classes online after we got married and I discovered I was pregnant, but I only work part-time these days as a graphic design freelancer. It’s more of a hobby than anything else. There’s apparently never a lack of textbooks needed for college and universities, so Nathan stays plenty busy and makes enough for both of us and then some.

After the birth of the twins, we heard from Danny for the first time since the blow-up between him and Nathan. He, too, had finished school online and went on a cross-country road trip once he graduated to “find himself”. There he met an adorable, free-spirited girlfriend that he’s still seeing to this day. We

only see the couple on the holidays, and after a few awkward years, I can mostly make it through without cringing a single time. But having the family reunited makes Nathan happy, and to me, that's worth a million uncomfortable moments.

It's been a bright and shining decade, and I know I'm the luckiest woman alive. Nathan is bossy, pushy, and possessive, but I love every minute of it. When the lights go out and it's just the two of us, things are just as steamy as ever.

Today, though, there's no need for the lights to be out. We're alone, and it's only noon.

Once we make it into the bedroom, Nathan has me pushed up against a wall, kissing me like it's our first time all over again. I have a little surprise for him—a seductive little lingerie number under my clothes—and I've been excited to see his reaction. But as we kiss and his mouth moves from my jaw to my neck, I start to have some hesitation piercing through the lust.

It's so bright in here, and I know he can see everything....and I'm not the trim figure I once was. Ten years and three kids will do that to a woman. I'm curvier than ever before, and a rare moment of self-consciousness washes over me.

I don't say anything, but Nathan knows my body well, and he feels me stiffen. "What's wrong?"

"Do you want to pull the curtains closed a little more?" I suggest, not wanting to ruin the momentum.

He looks baffled. "Fuck no. I want to see you."

"Nathan, please?"

"I'll consider it if you tell me what's wrong."

I bite my lip, not wanting to ruin the surprise but also not wanting to lie to him. Finally, I just come out with it. "I bought some lingerie for you, and I'm wearing it, but...I'm suddenly feeling like it might be too much. I'm not...as fit as I used to be."

Nathan's gaze is thunderous like he can't believe what I'm saying. "Noelle," he rumbles. "You're hotter than ever to me,

you know that right? I fucking love your curves, and I love being able to be rougher with you because of them. You've never been more beautiful, do you understand?"

"Yes," I breathe, knowing he's speaking the truth.

He grins, looking pleased. "Good. Now, can we go back to the part where I was taking your clothes off?"

I giggle and nod. "Yes."

"Perfect." He pushes the sundress I'm wearing off my shoulders, and I shimmy my hips so the fabric pools around my feet. Then he pauses, his gaze roving over me like I'm a feast and he's a starving man.

I've got on a red lace corset, thigh-high stockings, and a thong to match.

"Do you like it?"

"You are stunning, babe."

I beam at him, feeling more confident. "Thank you. Now, it's your turn."

He doesn't have to be asked twice. Soon enough, he's shirtless and barefoot, but the pants are still on...for the moment, anyway.

We tumble into the bed together, kissing and touching, and soon I'm on top, riding him with abandon. I know he'll want to take charge eventually, and I'll let him, but for now, I love the view from here.

"You are the sexiest thing alive," Nathan groans, his fingers digging into my hips.

I moan his name, arching my back and letting him take control, just a bit. Just enough to know who's really in charge.

"Bend over," he growls. "I want to fuck that tight little ass of yours while you're wearing these stockings."

My eyes flutter closed, and my pussy clenches. I love the dirty talk. Nathan is the perfect man, in every sense of the word. Older, dominant, and sexy as sin.

When he bends me over and fucks my ass, I forget how to breathe. He lubes up, but it's still a tight squeeze at first, almost painfully so. But I adjust soon enough, and his thick girth slides inside. I'm stretched and filled completely. My body trembles, and he grips my hair, pulling it so I'm upright and my back is against his chest.

"How do you like this?"

"It's perfect," I gasp, rocking my hips against him, feeling him slide deeper. "Oh God, it's amazing."

"I thought so." He kisses my neck and thrusts his hips.

With him in my ass, he slides his hand down my belly to tease my clit. The sharp burst of pleasure has me so close. "I'm going to come."

"I know, baby," he grunts, his pace quickening.

I don't even know which way is up or down. Everything is a haze of pleasure and heat.

"Oh!" I gasp as his teeth nip my neck, and I come.

"Fuck," Nathan hisses, his hips slamming into mine. I cry out his name as he pulses inside of me, filling me with his seed.

We collapse onto the bed, a tangled mess of sweaty limbs and satisfaction.

"I'll be back in a minute," Nathan says, pressing a kiss against my temple.

"Where are you going?"

"To clean you up, gorgeous."

I can't protest, can't even form a coherent thought. I'm in a state of euphoria.

Nathan comes back with a damp washcloth and takes his time cleaning every inch of my skin. When he's finished, I curl up against him and sigh contentedly.

"The sexiest thing alive, huh?" I tease, and Nathan nips at the back of my neck, making me giggle.

“Yes, and I’m going to fuck you until you believe it. We have a week, right?”

“Yes,” I confirm, warm and sated.

“That’s a long time.” Nathan chuckles, but there’s an edge of darkness that has me shivering in anticipation. “That should be enough to drive the point home.”

“I look forward to your efforts...Daddy.”

I barely get the word out before Nathan has his mouth crushed to mine, and I smile happily against his lips. It’s going to be a long, delicious week.

The End.

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