



MY

*Sweetheart*  
SURPRISE

JACEY DAVIS

# MY SWEETHEART SURPRISE

SWEETHEART ESCAPES

BOOK TWO

# JACEY DAVIS



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# SYNOPSIS

## **Parker**

Everything was going fine. So what if my ex-boyfriend cheated on me and then took everything that wasn't nailed down when he split? I could run my business just as well sitting in a lawn chair in the living room as I could a desk, and the air mattress wasn't that uncomfortable. The constant calls and text messages were getting old really fast, but I'd still take it over another day with him.

So, yeah, I was totally fine, but I wasn't ready to meet anyone or start dating again. Maybe ever. When my friend Bailey told me about the Sweetheart Escapes charity auction, I thought he was nuts. I didn't even want to get coffee with a guy, let alone spend a weekend away with one.

But, the charity was one that was important to me, and a weekend out of the city might be exactly what I needed. So despite my better judgment, I found myself scrolling the profiles on Carousel and bidding for a date.

My luck was terrible, though, so I wasn't even that surprised when my date ghosted me. I was destined to stay single forever, I guess. Then I met the sexy manager of Paradise Winery and found myself questioning everything. Maybe something was missing from my life, after all.

*My Sweetheart Surprise is an insta-attraction, high heat MM romance with a dash of hurt/comfort. It is a part of the Sweetheart Escapes multi author series. It can be read as a standalone, but why not grab them all?*

# DEAR READERS

Thank you for picking up *My Sweetheart Surprise*. For those of you who've read my other contemporary work, you may be surprised this is much lower angst and lighter than most of my other stuff. But I'm still me, so there's a couple things I want to just touch upon.

Parker and Teo engage in a consensual Daddy/boy relationship with no age play. It's light daddy kink and mainly in the bedroom, but if that's not your thing, you might want to skip this.

Also, Parker has ADHD. I'm not a doctor or a medical professional, and I never claimed to be so. Everyone experiences ADHD differently, and Parker is based largely on myself and how it manifests for me. If you have different experiences, then that's ok! I am not trying to offend or negate anyone else's experiences.

And now for the content warning. If you don't need triggers, and don't want to be spoiled about major parts of the plot, please stop reading now.

Parker is dealing with a toxic ex who was emotionally and verbally abusive throughout their relationship. They are no longer together at any point in the book though pieces of their relationship are referenced and discussed. There is also an element of stalking and harassment, mainly through texts and phone calls, though not exclusively by the ex. Parker also experiences anxiety due to this.

*My Sweetheart Surprise features a consensual Daddy/boy relationship and some light kink, including spanking and lots and lots of dirty talk, as well as explicit content that may not be suitable for some readers. Warning for an emotionally and verbally abusive ex, stalking by ex (mainly through calls and texts), and mentions of gaslighting and other toxic behaviors in a previous relationship. There is also a brief mention of homophobia by parents and being kicked out by them in the past (nothing on page), and some on page anxiety. Please see detailed content warning in front of the book for more information.*

My Sweetheart Surprise is part of the multi-author series Sweetheart Escapes. Each book can be read as a standalone, but why not read them all?

Happy Reading!

Jacey



*This is dedicated to everyone who listened to be vent when I  
struggled writing this for an unreasonable amount of time.  
Thank you all for helping keep me sane.*

# CHAPTER ONE

# PARKER



The sound of my phone buzzing dragged me out of the haze I'd found myself in as I focused on work. I blinked heavily, realizing just how dry my eyes were. My contacts felt glued to my corneas. How long had I been staring at the screen for?

My phone started buzzing again and I forced myself to look away and grab it, groaning when I saw it was my ex-boyfriend. Again. I couldn't figure out what his problem was. He broke things off with me, not the other way around. He cheated on me. I didn't do shit.

When he left three weeks ago, I thought that would be the end of it. I felt adrift and completely hopeless. I mean, five years with the same person was a long time. We lived together. Our whole lives were intertwined. I had nothing but this apartment and my business when he moved out. Most of my friends were his friends, and I lost them when I lost Collin. Any of my friends I had before Collin were long gone before we broke up. Sure, my brother and parents were still there for me, but they don't count. Besides, even my brother was tired of my sulky self.

Even with how lonely I felt, I never reached out to him. I never gave into the urge to drunk dial him at 3 am when I was sitting alone on the lawn chair in my living room—since Collin took our couch—drinking straight from a bottle of whiskey. My brother, Pierce, had deleted Collin from all my social media on the second day and I didn't look back. As much as I wanted to, I moved on. Or at least left him alone.

But then last week, Collin started to call and text me again. Told me how much he missed me. How he regretted ending things. How he wanted to talk. Fuck, was I tempted to answer. But three weeks alone in a practically empty apartment was a long time to think. Especially when the only person I had to speak to was my protective brother who never liked my ex to begin with.

Things started to become clear that weren't while I was neck deep in the relationship. I started to see all those red flags that Pierce had been complaining about for the last few years that I always brushed off. After I was no longer suffocating underneath Collin's presence, I began to realize just what type of controlling bastard he was.

I might be miserable and lonely. My life might be in shambles. I couldn't remember the last time I showered or when I last ate a meal besides cereal. But I didn't need to ask permission to see my parents or brother anymore. I was able to leave the house to pick up dinner without being questioned for twenty minutes afterwards about where I was and who I was talking to. No one went through my texts and DMs accusing me of cheating any time I spoke to anyone that wasn't him.

And now that I was free of that and could see just how bad it had gotten, I wasn't going back to it.

I dreaded looking at my phone, but I forced myself to see the damage. It was getting worse. Every day there were more texts, more calls, even emails. I knew I should block him, but I just couldn't force myself to take that step yet. I was sure I didn't want to get back with Collin, but I still wasn't able to sever all connections.

Five missed calls since 9 am. I glanced at the time and realized it's just after two. Fuck, had I been staring at my computer all this time? My stomach growled, confirming that I had. I knew I skipped lunch, but did I eat breakfast? I tried to think back but I couldn't remember. I ate some boxed mac and cheese for dinner last night. The pot was still on the stove with the leftovers as a reminder. But breakfast...I was just drawing a blank.

Shaking my head, I once again ignored the shit storm of my life and turned back to my phone. After I dealt with this, I'd eat something. I'd been working on a marketing package for a brand-new client, and it was a big one. One that would make or break my brand-new business, and yeah it was important, but I still needed to take breaks sometimes, otherwise I'd make mistakes. My phone buzzed again. Fuck.

Since all the calls, and missed voicemails were from Collin, I ignored them and checked my texts. 42 missed text messages. Fucking A. At least one was from my mom and one from Pierce. The other 40 were all from Collin.

I couldn't deal with that right now, so I looked at Mom's and Pierce's.

Mom: Hi honey. We're having a family dinner for dad's birthday on the 26th. I hope you can make it. We all miss you.

Guilt churned through me. It had been a long time since I'd been the son my parents deserved. First it was Collin. He hated my family, and without even realizing it, I let him push me away from them. Luckily, they were too stubborn and loved me too much to completely leave my life, but it wasn't the same as it was pre-Collin.

And the last three weeks I just hadn't been able to deal with anyone. Pierce demanded attention, but my parents were more laid back. They wouldn't push. Which meant I'd been ignoring their calls and messages while I wallowed in self-pity. I was an asshole.

I quickly texted her back, even as another message came in.

Me: I'll be there. I'm sorry for being a dick lately. Or really for the last few years. But no more.

The three little dots popped up almost immediately. Damn, was my mom just staring at the phone waiting for me to respond? That didn't assuage the guilt at all.

Mom: You were only a little bit of a dick. It's ok, though. We understand. Well, maybe not Pierce, but your dad and I do. We're just happy you're back to us.

Was it really that bad? Thinking back on it, I knew that it was. It was the reason most of my friends washed their hands of me, and I couldn't even blame them. I was lucky my family didn't do the same.

We texted back and forth for a few more minutes before I told her I was gonna go grab some lunch. I didn't tell her about Collin. She didn't need to know my drama.

Pierce's text wasn't nearly as polite.

Pierce: No more fucking sulking, bro. I'm coming over tonight at 7 and taking you out. You better have fucking showered. I'm not dealing with your smelly ass. And no excuses. I don't want to hear it.

I couldn't help but smile down at my phone. He was a bit of an asshole, but I didn't know what I'd do without my little brother. I wasn't sure what to think when my parents brought him home when I was fourteen. He was two years younger than me, but so much smaller I thought he was even younger. He was so fucking skinny and covered in dirt. But he hid his pain and fear under a snarky attitude. Once I got under the surface though, and Pierce began to trust us, he quickly became my best friend.

I texted him back.

Me: No excuses. I'm looking forward to it.

The message had barely sent before Pierce started typing back.

Pierce: Who are you and what have you done with my brother?

Shaking my head, I felt myself smile for the first time in weeks. I didn't answer him though, because my phone buzzed two more times. Fucking A. I couldn't keep ignoring this.

Hands shaking, I pulled up Collin's text thread. They started harmless enough.

Collin: Hi sweetheart, please call me when you get this. I regret how we ended things and think we should talk.

Collin: Parker, you know how much I hate when you ignore my calls. I know I messed up, just give me a chance to explain. Please. I think with our history, I deserve at least that.

They escalated quickly though, and by the time I got to the last few, my eyes were blurry with tears and my chest was tight.

Collin: You fucking ungrateful bastard. After everything you put me through for the last five years the least you could do is fucking hear me out. But you always were so fucking selfish.

Collin: I don't even know why I'm bothering with you anymore. If you want to make the biggest mistake of your life because you're a stupid little shit who refuses to call me, then fine. Destroy your life. I'm not saving you anymore.

I was this close to responding. I even started to type up a response before deleting it. No, I wasn't getting caught up in the trap that was my ex anymore. I had work I needed to finish, and a shower I desperately needed to take before Pierce showed up. Collin wasn't worth it. I'd keep ignoring it and eventually he'd get tired of me and move on. He even said he didn't know why he was bothering me, that must mean he was going to stop, right?

Determined to ignore him and finish my tasks, I put my phone on silent and flipped it over so I wasn't able to see it light up if any more messages came through. Then I sat back down at my computer, completely forgetting about food, and let myself get caught back up in the project so I wouldn't be thinking about Collin.



A few hours later and I'd all but forgotten about Collin. I had gotten my initial proposal finished and sent it off to my new client, and now was in the shower half an hour before Pierce was set to show up. After years of working in the marketing department of a big publishing firm here in the city, I finally got the courage to leave my job and start my own company about nine months ago. It was fucking terrifying, but so far I was doing really well for a brand new start up. And if everything worked well with this client, that could be my big break to take my career to the next level.

I showered quickly, still running over the proposal in my head to make sure I didn't miss anything. It was perfect, I was sure of it. It didn't stop me from second guessing every single thing and wondering if I'd just royally fucked myself.

Once I was washed and smelled like a human being again, I shut off the water, and stepped out, drying myself off and wrapping my towel I had draped over the shower bar around me. I gave myself a mental reminder to toss it into the hamper because I had no idea the last time I washed it.

The mirror was fogged but I wiped it with my hand and got a look at myself. My not quite blonde hair looked almost brown when it was wet, and now stuck to my forehead and into my eyes. I really needed a haircut but kept forgetting to go. I'm sure Pierce was going to say something, but whatever. That was the least of my worries.

Maybe I should shave? My beard was becoming a little more than a five o'clock shadow, but...I really didn't feel like it. Who was I trying to impress anyway? I wasn't planning on trying to get laid or anything tonight. Or anytime soon. Just the thought of opening up to another person, even for just a night, made me sick. Collin was sure I'd crash and burn without a keeper, and I was determined to prove him wrong. And ok, maybe I wasn't doing so hot right now, but I was hanging in there. And I'd get better. Without Collin or anyone else.



In the end, I didn't bother shaving. I just brushed my teeth and threw on some deodorant before going back into my bedroom to get dressed.

As far as apartments in New York go, mine was sizeable. It had an actual bedroom, and two full bathrooms, something that was unheard of in most of the more affordable places in the city. It was the reason Collin moved in with me, because my apartment could comfortably fit two people while his was a glorified box. He pushed to be added to the lease, but I'm fucking grateful that was one thing I drew the line on. Otherwise, I'd probably be living with my parents or brother right now. Bad enough he took all the furniture. Which I was reminded of when I walked into my empty bedroom and came face to face with the air mattress I'd been sleeping on for the last three weeks. I didn't even have a sheet because he took all of them. All I had was one throw pillow he must have forgotten and the quilt my grandmother had made for me when I graduated college. Getting a bed was on the ever growing list of tasks I'd probably never get to.

I sat down on the edge of the air mattress and picked up my phone for the first time since I checked Collin's messages this afternoon. I would have avoided it even longer, but wanted to make sure Pierce hadn't messaged me.

I had two unread texts. I clicked on my messages noticing I had one from Pierce saying he was on his way. But I was focused on the other, one from Collin. I shouldn't click on the message. I just knew it would be fucking bad. But I ignored all the warning bells going off in my head and pulled up the message anyway.

Collin: You're going to regret this. I hope you enjoyed being a business owner for as long as it lasted. When I'm done with you, you'll be lucky if you'll be able to get a job at McDonald's. You're fucking ruined you ungrateful cunt.

I forgot about everything as the message ran on repeat in my head. I lost all track of time and everything else I was supposed to be doing. I didn't even remember that my brother was coming over. All I could do was stare at my phone,

reading the text over and over. Which was exactly where  
Pierce found me when he showed up ten minutes later.

# CHAPTER TWO

## PARKER



“Parker. Parker, are you with me man? Fuck, I don’t know what to do. Should I call Mom?”

It was the threat of calling my mom that finally knocked me out of my stupor. Blinking, I looked up at the face of my brother, who was kneeling in front of me looking freaked the fuck out.

“Pierce?” I asked dumbly. It was obviously him, but I was having a hard time processing what was happening. “When did you get here?”

“Bro, like ages ago. I knocked for like five minutes and called you multiple times. Then I remembered I had that spare key for emergencies and used it. Then I’ve been in the room with you for a few minutes, but you were in a trance.” Pierce’s annoyance evaporated, and concern filled his blue eyes. “What happened, are you ok? And why the fuck don’t you have any furniture?”

I winced. I’d forgotten I’d been avoiding Pierce or my parents coming over since the breakup so they wouldn’t see how I was living right now. Still, it was the easier of his two questions. “Collin took it all when we broke up.”

Rage filled my brother’s expression. He always had the most expressive face. Mom said it made things easier when he first joined our family and kept trying to hide how he was feeling because he was afraid he’d be kicked out.

“He fucking what? That fucking asshole.”

I laughed harshly. He thought that now, wait till he saw the messages. Pierce came and sat next to me on the mattress, unbothered by me still being in a towel. While we weren't blood related, Pierce and I always looked enough alike to pass as bio brothers. While my unruly curls were this awkward color that wasn't quite blonde but not brown either, his were slightly darker, making his hair firmly in the brown category. His blue eyes were bright, more expressive, than mine, but we had the same oversized almond shaped ones and full lips. Pierce had maybe an inch on my 5'9 height and was way more fit and muscular. But we spent our teenage years being asked if we were twins because we were almost the same age, once he gained some weight, so we must look similar enough.

“Clearly, it's not the furniture thing that bothered you now, though. Since you've been living like this for weeks now.”

I shrugged. “I've been meaning to go shopping for more, but things kept coming up.” I also dreaded digging into my savings for this. I had saved all of my first big check from my business to go on a big trip, not buy new furniture.

Pierce rolled his eyes, obviously not agreeing, but let it go. “I don't have the brain space to try and pick that apart right now. Let's focus on whatever was on your phone that put you in a fucking trance.”

I thought about telling him to mind his own business, but truth was, I was in over my head and needed help. I handed my brother the phone.

Within seconds he was on his feet pacing the room, cursing under his breath. I could feel his anger. If this was a cartoon, he'd have fire coming from his ears. I kept quiet and let him process, since anything I said would probably make it worse.

I actually flinched when those rage filled eyes turned toward me. Pierce wouldn't hurt me, but I knew what he was capable of. Everyone underestimated him because of his size, but he was on his way to a professional MMA career when a ruptured Achilles and torn ACL ended that dream. Even still, he owned his own boxing/MMA gym and was quickly

becoming one of the most sought out trainers for aspiring fighters. He could easily kick my ass if he wanted to, and I was a little scared for Collin's well-being right now.

"Parker," he snapped, his voice harsh, "how long has this been going on? The whole fucking time?" He was talking through gritted teeth, and I could just tell he was seconds away from smashing something. I guess it was a good thing my room was fucking empty.

"Uh, no. It just started the last few days. I don't know why."

"Have you answered this fucker at all?"

I collapsed back on the mattress, suddenly exhausted. "No. I kept thinking if I ignored him, he'd get bored and stop. But it hasn't worked."

"Clearly. And you haven't blocked him, because?" I shrugged. There was no good answer there.

Pierce groaned, clearly fed up with me. He started to fiddle with my phone.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm screenshotting all these messages, then adding them to a Google Drive and sending them to myself. Then I'm fucking deleting all of them and blocking this asshole's number. You don't need to see this shit. I'm gonna do the same to the voicemails and missed calls."

I propped up on my elbow to look at my brother. "What are you going to do with them?"

"It depends on the fucker. I'm assuming you don't want to go to the cops?"

I shook my head, "Not particularly."

"Figured. There's a detective that uses my gym that I'm friendly with. I'm just gonna run this by him, casually, see what they think you should do. I get there's probably not much they can do now, but I want a record of this, Parker. You can't just ignore it."

“Do you think he’ll really try to ruin my company?”

Pierce leaned against the wall. I just realized he was dressed up, for him anyway. He was wearing dark jeans with strategically placed tears, and a form fitting silk shirt that showed off all his muscles. His usually unruly hair was parted to the side and slicked back. Oooh, I liked that style. Maybe I should try that? My hair was curlier though, so I didn’t know if it would work.

“I doubt he has a leg to stand on,” Pierce began reminding me that we were in the middle of a conversation, “but I wouldn’t put it past the fucker to try. He didn’t help with anything, right? His name is on nothing, or loaned you money or whatever?”

“No. He offered, but it just didn’t feel right. And now I’m glad I didn’t. I used funds I saved up, plus that small inheritance we got from Grandpa.”

Pierce tilted his head in acknowledgement. He used his to open the gym, so he understood.

“Ok, then I’m sure you’re fine. But I still want your bases covered.”

“Pierce, I don’t know if I can do this.”

“Just let me handle this for you, P. Just promise me you’ll keep his number blocked and not fucking reach out to him.”

I groaned. How did this even happen? Never in a million years would I have imagined Collin to be this kind of ex.

“Trust me, I won’t. I’ve realized a lot of things after he left. He was a toxic piece of shit. I just hate it took me so fucking long to see it. No way do I want to get back with him.”

Pierce exhaled, and the tension visibly left his shoulders. “Ok, good. Then don’t worry about this. I got your back. But, um,” He shoved his hands in his pockets and suddenly looked unsure. My stomach twisted, it was never good if Pierce was nervous. “Don’t take this the wrong way, but have you considered getting back on your meds for a bit?”

I shrugged noncommittally and chewed on my lip. I hadn't been consistently on medication for my ADHD since I was a teenager. And Collin hated whenever it was even brought up. *It's a kids thing Parker. You should've outgrown it by now. I'm sick of you using that as an excuse for your pathetic behavior. Suck it up and start acting like an adult for chrissakes. You're embarrassing.*

So, of course, I shut up about it and any time I struggled I just ignored it and kept pushing on. For the most part I stayed quiet and avoided anything regarding it for the last five years, because Collin was right, wasn't he?

He wasn't, I knew that now. I also knew that Pierce was making a good point and I should at least talk to my doctor. Things had only been getting harder to manage since Collin left. But I really didn't want to talk about it now.

"Can you just give me a little bit more time, and then I'll talk to my doctor if I can't figure it out. I promise."

It was clear Pierce didn't agree, but he still let it go. "Ok fine. I'll let it go for now. But now it's time for you to get some clothes on."

I scrunched my nose. "Huh? Why?"

"One, because I love you, but I don't want to see you naked, and you've accidentally flashed me three times already." Oops. "And two, because we're going out, remember?"

Honestly, no I forgot. Glaring at Pierce, I wonder what the chances are of getting out of this? The last thing I want to do is leave my house. Pierce stared me down, non-blinking, and I knew I was going to lose. I always gave in. Just as I was about to concede, my stomach growled, causing Pierce to scowl.

"Dude, when was the last time you ate?"

I swallowed hard under his disapproval, "Um...breakfast maybe?"

Exasperated, Pierce threw his hands in the air. "Go get dressed, Parker. O'Malley's is still selling food for a while. We'll go there."



Mouth watering, I finally stood up. He knew damn well I wasn't going to protest once O'Malley's was on the table. Their burgers were insane, and I hadn't gone there in a while. Collin hated that place, and never liked me going out without him. When I still worked for the publishing company, my work buddy Bailey and I used to go during lunch, but I hadn't found a way to sneak there since I started my company.

And yes, I realized how crazy that fucking sounded. A little too late, but I saw it now and I was never fucking going back to that life.



*Collin stood at the front door of the apartment, grinning sadistically. Next to him stood a severe looking man in an equally severe suit. He had a briefcase, and a manilla envelope in his hand.*

*“Parker Miles?” The suit asked, unblinking.*

*I turned towards Collin who was still just standing there grinning.*

*“Collin, what’s going on?”*

*“Just answer the man, Parker.”*

*My heart was pounding as I turned back to the man. I knew whatever was about to happen would be bad. Collin was way too happy for this to be good news for me.*

*“Yes?” I reluctantly asked.*

*The suit handed me the envelope in his hand. “Parker Miles, you have been served.”*

*I blinked, still not sure what was happening. “Collin, what the fuck is this?”*

*“I’m taking your business. You don’t want to be with me anymore? Fine. But I’m going to destroy your life. If you won’t be with me, you get nothing.”*

*“What? Collin you can’t fucking do that! It’s my business, not yours. Your name isn’t on anything!”*

*Collin just shrugged. His eyes were cold. Colder than I’d ever see them before. I could barely maintain eye contact with how uncomfortable his gaze was making me.*

*“Watch me.”*

A high pitched ringing sound ripped me out of my dream, and suddenly I was sitting up on the mattress, panting and trying to figure out what the fuck was happening.

The sound went off again and it took way too long for my hung over, stressed out brain to realize it was a phone ringing. Without looking, I grabbed my phone from the floor next to the mattress and hit accept. It wasn’t until the call was already coming through that I remembered I was supposed to make sure it wasn’t fucking Collin trying to call.

Oh well, too late now.

“Hello?”

“Guess what!” The overly excited man just about screamed into my ear. I slammed my eyes shut, as if that would somehow block the voice and stop my head from pounding. I shouldn’t have drank so much last night. What kind of brother was Pierce? Shouldn’t he be stopping me from making poor life choices, not encouraging it? My mouth felt like cotton. Did I have any bottled water left? Or maybe Gatorade?

Finally, I remembered I was on the phone and recognition hit me. Only one person could be this cheerful at...what time was it anyway? “Um...Bailey?”

The man scoffed. “Yeah. Of course, it’s me. Now guess what!” Yup, it was definitely Bailey.

I chuckled at his enthusiasm. I met Bailey at my old job for the marketing department at a publishing house. He was a few years younger than me and started working there a year or so after me. I kind of showed him the ropes and soon we developed a friendship.

I quickly checked the time, 8 pm. Alright, I wasn't expecting that. And then I remembered that I had been getting some work done but must have dozed off. How long was I asleep for?

“Ok, I'm not sure. What?”

“Do you remember telling me to apply for that promotion like... months ago?”

“Uh, yeah.” I said before I actually registered what he was saying. It was way too early for all these questions. Ok, so maybe it wasn't early. But my head was pounding and I was too lethargic to be thinking so much. I could practically hear Bailey vibrating with excitement on the other end, and I knew if I didn't get my shit together and realize what he was talking about, he'd explode. And then I remembered.

“Oh shit! Did you get it?”

Somehow, Bailey's tone managed to go up another few octaves. I held the phone away from my ear, but it still felt like he was screaming. “Yes! You're talking to the new Head of Social Media Marketing! OMG... I still can't believe it, but it totally happened. Joaquin—because Mr. Silva and I are on a first name basis now—called me into his office and gave this long ass speech about how my less than professional work attire was what made me great at my job. And then he offered me the promotion.”

I laughed and collapsed back onto the bed. I was thrilled for him. I knew how badly he wanted that promotion, and Bailey absolutely deserved it. “That's great, Bailey! Seriously, I'm so happy for you. I knew you'd get it, even if Mr. Silva is a hard ass about your clothes. You'll do great.”

“Nah, it's fine, I can keep the clothes because our TikTok followers love me.” He giggled. “The best thing? I get a raise. Like... double my current salary. It's amazing.”

I smiled wide, truly feeling happy for my friend. Bailey's excitement was contagious, “Look at you, living the high life now. Next time we go out, burgers are on you. After all, I'm a struggling business owner,” I joked. We both knew I was

doing fine, though I was pretty sure he was now making more than I was.

“Of course, the burgers are on me. It’s the least I can do. I’m still convinced I wouldn’t have gotten the job in the first place if it wasn’t for you. Anyway, when will you be able to sneak off to have burgers again?”

All the happiness and humor drained from me. I knew Bailey didn’t mean anything by his words, but it was just another reminder about how fucked up my relationship was. How did I let it get so bad? “Fuck, man. When you put it like that, I realize how screwed up things were.”

“Were?” Bailey asked, almost cautiously. A lot of the giddiness from earlier seemed to have left him as well.

“Yeah. Collin and I—we broke up.”

“Thank god!” The little shit sighed loudly in relief. Not that I blamed him. Bailey was one of my biggest points of contention when it came to Collin. He hated, and I mean fucking *hated* that I was friends with a single gay man. Like I had no morals or self-control and would just jump the guy because he was also gay? Don’t get me wrong, Bailey was cute, but we were and always would be just friends. With or without Collin. We just weren’t compatible.

Bailey seemed to realize what he said and attempted to backtrack, “I mean... I’m really sorry for you, Parker, I know you loved that douchebag,” So much for backtracking, “but... yeah... I’m sorry. What happened? How are you? Do you need a night of heavy drinking instead of burgers? Because I’m in.”

Before I realized what was happening, I started to laugh. Like truly, cramping inducing belly laughs. Tears were rolling down my face before I was finally able to answer.

“Wow, tell me how you really feel, man,” I started to laugh again and had to bite the back of my hand before I set myself off again, “But yeah, I know you never really liked him. Neither did my brother. I should’ve listened to you two. I clearly was fucking blind.” No longer laughing, I took a moment to get my thoughts together. How was I? That was a

fucking loaded question. “I’m doing ok. With the breakup at least,” I decided not to keep all the texts and calls to myself. Bailey called about a promotion. Not my shit show life. I didn’t need to throw that at him. “Things are becoming clearer, now that I’m not caught up in it, you know? I’m starting to see just how much of a controlling dick Collin really was. And you know, him taking all my fucking furniture when I was out for the day was a big wake up call.”

“He did *what?*” Bailey gasped, and I could just imagine him clutching his chest in shock like one of those southern belles from an old Antebellum movie. “That’s crazy. How did he even... wait, that’s not important. The important thing is that you got out of that relationship. And, hey, now you can start fresh. Get new furniture, maybe paint your apartment and style everything the way *you* like it, not him. If you need someone to go to IKEA with you... I’ll go. And because I love you, I’ll even go on a Saturday.”

“Wow, you really must love me. And I might take you up on it. Pierce offered, but I’m pretty sure we’d just end up killing each other. I’m just glad I listened to my family and never put Collin on the lease like he wanted me to.” That would’ve been a fucking nightmare.

“Otherwise, you’d have to move in with Pierce, and if you think you wouldn’t survive a visit at IKEA with him, you definitely wouldn’t survive living with him.” He laughed, but he’s not wrong. Pierce would be ready to strangle me within days. Bailey’s tone got serious as he continued, “But... seriously. Can you take a little time off work to clear your head? I’d tell you about this great bachelor auction where you bid for someone to go on a mini-vacation slash blind date with, but I do actually know that’s too soon. So I’ll just throw the weekend-getaway part in the room.”

Wait, what the fuck just happened? “Um, ok...that was a lot to unpack, and I have no idea what you’re talking about? Blind date auction? I’ve been out of a relationship for less than a month, Bailey...” The idea of going on a basic date was—ugh. Shudder inducing. Let alone some kind of weekend away

with a total stranger. I was still dealing with the fallout from my old relationship.

Bailey sighed impatiently, like I wasn't understanding a basic concept. Which I mean, fair. "Yeah, I get that. That's why I said it's too soon for you."

"Ok...sorry, spell this out for me, man. I'm not following."

"Okay, so... I was telling Evan, my yoga instructor, about wanting to treat myself, you know, for getting the promotion and everything. And I told him I wanted to go on a mini-vacation, but not alone and... anyway, you don't want to hear all that. The gist is: he told me about a charity bachelor auction on Carousel—the dating app, you know?—and I looked it up. It's neat. You can bid on people, and they go on a weekend-long blind date with you. Like a mini-vacation. I'm actually currently browsing through the profiles, and I might go for the axe murderer for funsies, but... yeah, you don't need to know that either. I just thought that you might want to get away for a weekend to... relax. Minus the blind date part."

I shook my head even though Bailey couldn't see me. I was pretty sure that salary increase caused him to lose his mind. "That sounds awesome, Bailey. For *you*. You really should do it. You deserve to treat yourself. Maybe skip the axe murderers, but yeah, it sounds like fun. But, I think I'll skip this one. A vacation sounds nice, but I don't think I'm in the headspace to deal with all that right now. Plus, I just started my own business. It's doing well enough, but I don't know if this is the best time to get away." That last part was an excuse, and I'm pretty sure he knew that too.

Bailey whined. "But the axe murderer is hot." I didn't even want to know. He sighed dramatically again, "Maybe you're right. I haven't placed a bid yet, but I definitely will. Especially since it's a win win win situation. I get a hot date, a vacation, and the money will help homeless queer teenagers. It's a no brainer for me. But I totally get why it's too early for you. I'll just invite you to the pub for burgers next week."

Bailey's words broke through my defenses. Had he just said this was a charity thing and the money goes to homeless

queer teenagers? I wanted to ignore it and change the subject, but I couldn't. "Fuck, you play dirty, Bailey. The money goes to homeless queer teens?"

I could tell that Bailey was confused, and I got it. I knew he wasn't trying to manipulate me, but I was all over the place right now. "You do know I'm not trying to play dirty, right?" He drifted off, distracted by something, "Wait, I'm reading up on this right now. To be honest, I skipped a lot of the charity part. I did read about... yeah... here it is: fifty percent of the money goes to a charity organization that helps homeless LGBTQ+ teens."

Fuck. Maybe I could just donate the money but skip the vacation part? Or...I don't know. But I knew I was being an asshole to Bailey, and he didn't deserve that. "Sorry. I didn't mean to snap at you. My head is a mess. I'm not gonna get into it, because it's not my story to tell, but I've told you how Pierce was adopted right? Well, his birth parents kicked him out when they found out he was gay. He got lucky that my dad was the one who found him. But it doesn't always work that way. Now, any organization like that is special to all of us. Damn it, Bailey," I scrubbed my face with the heel of my hand, "What's the name of this site again?"

"I'm sorry that happened to Pierce. I'm glad your dad found him. It's Carousel. A dating app... or I guess dating site if you want to use your laptop. But Parker, I really didn't mean to push you into dating again. I know you loved Collin." He lowered his voice but not enough for me to miss his next words, "*For whatever reason.* I was just trying to find something that might help you or cheer you up."

I ignored the dig. He wasn't wrong. It was getting harder for me to see why I loved Collin in the first place. "I know and I appreciate it, but I'm definitely not promising anything. You're right though I can at least look into it. I could use a weekend away. And besides, it's not like I'm committing to anything, just a good time, and maybe getting laid if things go well." I wasn't sure if I was ready for that, I barely had the energy to jerk off these days, but you never know. Maybe a hot stranger was exactly what I needed. "With the plus side of it

going to charity. Thanks Bailey, I'll let you know if I end up doing this damn thing."

"Okay... but I call dibs on the axe murderer!" He giggled again. "You'll know it's him if you see his profile. He looks like he wants to murder you—with the ax he's holding. But I kinda like that... Damn, that sounds messed up, but it's not, I promise. Anyway... What do you say? Let's hit the pub next week?"

"No judgement man. I don't kink shame," I laughed, "But I promise the ax murderer is all yours. And yeah, that sounds perfect. Text me later to make plans? Because you know me well enough to know I'll forget the other way around."

"Will do. Bye."

"Take it easy, man. And congrats again, Bailey. You completely earned that promotion." My phone buzzed in my ear. I pulled it away and saw it was from an unknown number. A lump formed in my throat but I ignored it. Poor Bailey was still on the line. "Alright, I'll talk to you later." I finished awkwardly and quickly hung up before I could make more of a fool of myself.



# CHAPTER THREE

## PARKER



I downloaded that app Carousel two days ago, about an hour after I spoke to Bailey, but I still hadn't found the courage to open it. I wasn't sure what I was waiting for, but every time I tried, I panicked and quickly closed it before the app even loaded. I knew I was being ridiculous. It wasn't like downloading the app and setting up an account automatically signed me up for the auction. It wouldn't hurt to look, right?

I needed to do something, though. Either delete the app and move on from this idea, or open the damn thing and check it out. This limbo I put myself in wasn't working, and I was driving myself crazy thinking about it.

I closed my eyes and clicked the app, only opening it once the log in screen was loaded and I clicked the option to create an account before I chickened out. Creating an account turned out to be no big deal. The app asked for all the basics any dating app asked for, name, age, city, likes, dislikes, looking for, you get the idea. I didn't put too much thought into my answers. I was honest, but just wrote the first thing I could think of. After all, I had no intention of dating anyone. Even if I did do this auction, I was going to bid on someone I was reasonably attracted to that I wouldn't mind sharing a room with for the weekend. I wasn't looking for a deep connection right now, or maybe ever. Dating fucking sucked.

The one thing I hesitated on was a picture. I thought about putting nothing, or a picture of my parents' dogs or something. But at the last second I changed my mind and posted a picture of me on the boardwalk down the shore last summer. My

whole life my parents had rented a house down the shore for a week every summer. It was a tradition they kept up, even after Pierce and I grew up. Collin was invited of course, but out of the five summers we were together, he only came once, and made everyone miserable the whole time.

Last summer Collin didn't go. I remembered we got in a huge fight about me going alone, instead of staying home with him, but that was the one thing I refused to give in to. There happened to be sailboat races happening the day the picture was taken, so my mom snapped one of me with the sailboats in the background.

I wasn't shirtless, but the tank top I was wearing showed off my arms. My sunglasses were on the top of my head so my blue eyes, my only interesting feature, honestly, were on display. And I was smiling and seemed genuinely happy. That had been before Collin left me multiple voicemails screaming at me and calling me ungrateful, so I was truly happy. As far as pictures of me go, this was probably as good as it was going to get.

Once it was uploaded, I was brought to the home screen, and sure enough, a banner for the Sweetheart Escapes charity auction was right on top. I took a deep breath and clicked it.

It was overwhelming at first, just hundreds of profiles of people who put themselves up for auction. I almost clicked out and deleted the app. Instead, I got a grip on myself and started using some of the filter features.

I had already decided if I was to do this, I was going to be a bidder. I did not have the confidence to put myself up for auction, and besides, the charity portion was the whole reason I was considering this crazy idea. I had been holding onto my first big check for exactly this purpose. Well, not exactly a charity auction for a dating app, but a vacation.

Once I filtered the auctionees down, I found myself caught up in the whole process. Not everyone had full face pictures, some just had profile or body shots. I decided to skip those completely for now. Maybe I was shallow, but I wanted to see who I was bidding on. As I was scrolling, I came across a man

scowling at the camera with an ax thrown over his shoulder. Grinning, I shook my head. This must be Bailey's axe murderer. Honestly, I could sort of see the appeal, but the man screamed complicated, and I was not about that life anymore. Plus, I promised Bailey. I skipped ahead.

Some of the men were attractive, but no one was really hitting me strong enough to actually bid on them. After scrolling through way too many profiles, I finally found an attractive man I might be interested in spending the weekend with. His tanned skin and bright green eyes caught my interest immediately. I scanned his profile. We had enough in common that I thought we'd be okay keeping up conversation for a few days; hopefully. He was the only one I saw I had any interest in, so I decided to just bite the bullet.

I knew if I didn't bid now, I never would. I went in and put the maximum bid of 5k down right away. I knew you were supposed to go back and forth in a true auction, but that sounded exhausting. I just wanted to move on to the vacation portion. As soon as I filled out my information and placed my bid, I closed the app. I'd be notified if I won the date, but if I didn't look away now, I'd keep obsessively checking until I was contacted.

I flipped my phone so I wasn't distracted and went back to work. It had been blessedly silent since Pierce blocked Collin. I didn't know why it took Pierce taking over for me to finally take that step. I was able to breathe, and for the first time since the break-up, I was feeling hope. I still hadn't gotten around to getting furniture, but baby steps. I swore to myself I'd buy new furniture when I got back from this trip, whenever that would be. That would be the starting point to this new chapter of my life. The *Parker learns who he is* chapter. I wished I did it when I was younger and not 32, but it was better to start late than never.

It was about an hour after I placed the bid that I received a notification that my bid was accepted, and I was the winner. I'd be getting an email from Smooth Getaways, the travel agency working with the app in the next few days as well more information on the man I bid on.

Grinning, I read over the notification a few times. I was still a little apprehensive, but the excitement was starting to override my nerves. I couldn't believe I did it. I joined a dating app and fucking bid on another person. I was going to leave the suffocating apartment, even for a weekend, and go away on a trip. I'd be spending the weekend with a complete stranger, something I never thought I'd have the courage to do, but actually found myself looking forward to it. Maybe we'd at least remain friends if nothing else.

So, with hope in my heart for the first time in a while, I turned back to work, but my mind was already planning the trip.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## PARKER



One month later, I found myself in a rental car taking the long ass drive to Virginia to spend a weekend with a man I bid on during a dating app auction. Fuck, saying that out loud made this whole thing sound even more insane. Why was I doing this again?

I almost bailed on this thing more times than I could count since I got the confirmation email that I won. It was Pierce who convinced me to go, after he researched both the app and the travel agency and decided it was legit and safe. So here I was, chugging coffee, eating bags of sour cream and onion chips, and navigating the dark two-lane roads that were straight out of a horror movie. At least it was light out. There was no fucking way I'd drive this at night.

I was a nervous wreck about meeting my weekend date, but I was excited for the trip. Smooth Getaways had paired up with Carousel and LGBTQ friendly destination spots throughout the country, giving the participants plenty of places to choose from. I was surprised how extensive the list was.

Paradise Winery and Vineyard was the perfect option, in my opinion. It was close enough that I didn't need to fly, because planes and I didn't mix. But far enough away that it was a totally different world than the hustle and bustle of New York City. I hadn't even arrived yet, and I already felt like I could breathe. Despite how huge New York was, it had been feeling suffocating lately. Everywhere I looked, all I saw was Collin, and it was fucking exhausting. A weekend on a

vineyard, one with nature, and of course lots and lots of wine sounded fucking awesome.

All the pictures of Paradise Winery made the place look beautiful. In addition to the vineyard and winery, there was also a bed and breakfast that was located on the upper floors of the main building. All the reviews were excellent and there were some fun excursions planned. So even if the date portion was a complete bust, I had hopes for the location.

My phone buzzed with a message while I was driving but I ignored it. Everyone I cared about speaking to knew I was driving and could wait till it was safe for me to check my messages. It buzzed again but I pushed my phone out of my mind and focused on my audio book as I pushed through the last hour of the drive. Part of me was worried it was an emergency, but if it was, my mom or brother would be calling me so I could answer it through Bluetooth.

I soon forgot all about my phone going off as my audio book got to the dirty stuff. Collin used to hate my gay romance books, especially when I listened to them. So, I'd been going nuts with them since the breakup. Just another fuck you to the man who I wasted five years of my life with.

My GPS alerted me to turn down a farm road coming up on my right. A mile down and I would be coming face to face with my vacation destination. I was supposed to meet my blind date here, though I didn't exactly know where. Apparently, the manager of Paradise Winery was aware that we were coming and how we found them, so hopefully he'd be able to help me out since I had no fucking clue what I was doing.

I gasped out loud when I got my first glimpse of the vineyards and the building that held the restaurant/winery/bed and breakfast portion of the property. Though a building didn't do it justice. It was a freaking mansion. The whole property was expansive with a view that took my breath away. I wasn't sure I ever saw something so open and with so much green in my life. The main building itself was three stories, with a wraparound porch covering the entire first floor. Instead of walls, the bottom levels were mostly floor to ceiling glass windows. I couldn't be sure from this distance, but I was



pretty sure they were privacy glass so that guests could see outside but I couldn't see in. The land itself was landscaped beautifully with colorful flowers I'd never be able to name surrounding the main building. As I pulled into the gravel lot, I noticed a gazebo in one area that was decorated in these huge white flowers. On the other side was a gated patio area that looked like it held a fire pit. Nice.

It was a miracle that I managed to drive safely into the parking lot in front of the mansion since I was so distracted by all the sights around me. I somehow managed it though, and threw the car into park. I was so anxious to get inside and see if it looked as beautiful as the outside that I once again forgot to check my phone, just shoving it in my pocket and exiting the car.

The humidity hit me as soon as I exited the car. Don't get me wrong, New York gets fucking miserable in the summer. The heat and the smell could be oppressive, and inside wasn't always much better. It felt different down here though. I couldn't really explain it, but I had to take a moment to get used to it before popping my trunk and grabbing my duffel.

My phone vibrated in my pocket just as I was about to walk inside. Fumbling for it, I dug it out and hit accept as soon as I saw it was from the travel agency. Why could they possibly be calling me already? We were told they'd call and check on us throughout the weekend to make sure we were ok and felt safe with our dates, but they should know I hadn't even checked in yet, let alone met my date. Butterflies fluttered in my stomach as I answered.

"Hello?"

"Oh thank goodness, Mr. Miles?" A relieved sounding woman answered.

"Yes...who is this?"

"My name is Darcy and I'm from Smooth Getaways. I'm acting as the liaison for the Sweetheart Escapes getaway participants. I've been trying to reach you for a while now regarding your date."

Oh God, this couldn't be good.

“Ok?”

“We really apologize for the inconvenience, Mr. Miles, but we were notified earlier today by your date that he would not be able to attend the trip. I was hoping to reach you before you left, but I'm assuming that's not the case anymore?”

My head was spinning as I collapsed into one of the Adirondack chairs that lined the wrap-around porch.

“I'm sorry, I don't think I'm following. My date—the guy I bid on—he's not coming?”

“No. I'm so sorry Mr. Miles, but he has decided not to come at this time.”

It was ridiculous, but I felt tears start to well up in my eyes. I didn't even know this guy, but it felt personal. Of fucking course.

“But I'm already here. I just arrived. I drove here. From New York—and he's just not coming?”

The woman, Darcy, cleared her throat. “Again we really apologize, Mr. Miles. We already reached out to Carousel, and they will of course refund the totality of your bid. And—“

“Hold up,” I call out, interrupting her. “No, I don't want a refund. Part of it is still going to charity right?”

“Yes, it is.”

Then yeah, I wasn't going to be the asshole to demand a refund and take the money away from kids who desperately needed it. I had no fucking idea what I wanted to do, but I knew for sure I wasn't going to demand a refund.

“Then, yeah, tell them to keep it.” I ran my fingers through my hair as I tried to think. What was going to happen now? Was I just supposed to go home?

“Thank you, Mr. Miles. I can promise you it's greatly appreciated.”

I snorted. “That's fine. I just... What the fuck am I supposed to do now?”

Darcy sighed, and I could tell she was as frustrated as I was.

“It’s up to you, Mr. Miles. You are welcome to stay and continue to enjoy the weekend. We have already notified the manager of the issue and he is aware you may choose to stay and is willing to adjust some of the activities to work as solo outings.”

Oh great. So I’m going to be the sad, pathetic man who was ghosted by the dude I paid 5 grand for. I could just imagine the staff whispering about me and shooting me looks of pity as I go on one man picnics and solo hikes.

“What’s my other option?”

“To leave. I understand how frustrating this is, Mr. Miles. If you don’t feel comfortable staying at Paradise, I can find you a hotel to stay at for the night, that we of course will cover, and then if you still want to leave, you can do so.”

“I-I don’t know what I should do.”

“That’s completely understandable. I don’t need an answer right now. If you want to go inside, get yourself a glass of wine, and get your bearings. Then whenever you decide, you can call me back on this number.”

Wine sounded really good right now. “Ok, yeah. I think I can use a glass of wine. Or two.”

Darcy laughed heartily. “Honestly, me too, Mr. Miles. It’s been a bit of a day here.”

I snorted again. I could imagine. “Yeah, I think I need a little time to think. I’ll call you back in an hour or so?”

“Take your time. And please try to relax and enjoy yourself.”

Yeah, easy for her to say. But I kept that to myself. None of this was her fault. “Yeah, I will. And thanks, Darcy. I know this isn’t your fault.”

“Thank you. Have a nice afternoon, Mr. Miles. I heard the wines there are delicious. Drink an interesting one for me.”

“I will. I’ll call you later once I can get a handle on things.”

I hung up but didn’t move to go inside. What was I going to do now?

# CHAPTER FIVE

# MATEO



I watched the man as he slumped back in the chair, cradling his head in his hand while he stared at his phone. It had been about twenty minutes since he hung up with whoever he was speaking to and he still hadn't moved.

It didn't take a genius to know this was the poor guy who was just bailed on from the Sweetheart Escapes auction trip. Darcy hadn't given me any details on why the guy canceled, but I did know he was the one who was up for auction and this guy sulking on my porch shelled out some decent money to come here.

I dragged my eyes away from the floor length glass windows that I had been watching him from and tried to focus on work. He was probably going through it right now and didn't need the manager of this place creeping on him too. Besides, this inventory wasn't going to do itself.

It was early enough in the day that everything was still quiet. We had a wedding going on tomorrow, but nothing today, and most of our guests were out and about, leaving the large main area basically empty. I had an office in the back, but I preferred to be out here when it was quieter. When it came close to the time the guest from the Sweetheart auction was expected to show up I brought my laptop out to one of the tables so I could watch for him. I was glad I did.

I didn't know why, but I hoped he stayed. I hadn't even gotten a good look at his face, but I felt some kind of pull to him. Maybe it was because I knew what it felt like to be ghosted, or maybe I just pitied him. Either way, I hoped he'd

stay, and I could make sure he still had a good time. The man looked like he needed to relax.

I tried desperately to focus on this inventory, but I kept finding myself staring out the window at the man. Maybe I should go out there and talk to him? He'd been sitting there for a long time and hadn't seemed to come any closer to making a decision.

"You know you can go talk to him right? It's way less creepy than staring at the guy for half an hour."

I turned to glare at Melanie, my assistant manager and event coordinator for the tasting room. She was standing behind the bar grinning at me knowingly. Melanie had been with Paradise for nearly as long as Liam, the vineyard manager, had been. She had already been here on the floor and as the owner's office manager for a few years by the time Marshall, the owner, took me under his wing. She could have easily taken over the place instead of me, but her kids were young and she didn't want to deal with all of the responsibility and stress.

So now she just helped me keep my sanity and kept me in check. Melanie was like a surrogate mother to me, and I'd have run this place into the ground if it wasn't for her. Normally I valued her opinion, but right now, not so much.

"I don't know what you're talking about," I grumbled, and tried desperately to focus on the screen in front of me. Was the guy texting with someone, or was he just staring at his phone hoping it would give him answers?

Melanie snorted, a foreign sound coming from the usually poised fifty-something year old woman. I eyed her above my reading glasses, my lips pursed in annoyance.

Of course, the woman wasn't even phased and raised a perfectly groomed eyebrow at me. She kind of reminded me of my own mother back in Texas if I was basing them solely on appearance. My mother always looked completely put together no matter what, dressed like she was going to church even while cleaning the house or running after her kids. That's where their similarities ended, though. Melanie would never

abandon her child for being gay just because her husband told her to.

I shook my head, clearing those negative thoughts. I was not thinking about my parents right now. I'd found my life here and I was happy. "If you want to act like you haven't been staring at that poor man then fine. But, still, as the manager of this place and the person who's in charge of reservations and the liaison with Smooth Getaways, it is your responsibility to check in with him. So, you know, maybe do that."

I rolled my eyes. "It's a good thing I love you, Mel."

She smiled warmly at me. "You know I love you too, Mateo. You're like another son to me. I'm just giving you a hard time."

Sighing, I stood up from the table, closing my laptop. It wasn't like I was getting anything done anyway. I scooped it under one arm and walked up to Melanie, wrapping her in a hug with my free arm, squeezing her petite frame. "I know Mel. You're the closest thing I have to a mother these days."

"Oh honey," Mel replied sadly. She always got like that whenever I talked about my family. Mel's youngest child was non-binary and she went to battle for them against some of their family and her ex-husband who refused to acknowledge their child's pronouns. It was hard for her to understand how my mother just rolled over and let my father kick me out and erase me from their lives at eighteen.

I gently pulled myself out of her hold and smiled warmly at her. And then I noticed the man stand up. He was still staring at his phone, but was now pacing the porch. My stomach clenched. Mel was right, I needed to speak to him.

I went back to my small office to put my laptop away. I stuck my reading glasses in the top drawer, and did a quick glance to make sure everything was in order. I straightened out my black jeans and smoothed down the black *Paradise Winery* t-shirt, making sure I looked presentable. I told myself it was because I was representing our business, not any other reason.



I'd barely even seen the guy's face, I was definitely not attracted to him.

I ignored Melanie's smirk as I walked through the tasting room, and pushed open the glass door.

The man didn't notice my presence at first. He was muttering quietly to himself as he typed furiously on his phone. I couldn't help but smile. He was so freaking adorable. He was maybe about 5'9 or 5'10 with a fairly average build. In fact everything about him could be considered average. His light brown, almost blonde hair was cut shorter on the sides and longer on top, pieces sticking out all over the place from him running his fingers through it out of frustration.

After a couple of minutes of watching him pace and quietly mutter things like "Fucking Pierce," and "Dammit, Bailey, read your text messages," it was clear he wasn't going to notice me on his own.

I cleared my throat. The man jumped, nearly dropping his phone in the process. I pressed my lips together to keep from laughing out loud. He spun around, his cheeks bright red and his large eyes huge and round as he realized he wasn't alone.

"Oh God," he whispered under his breath and covered his face with his hands. Fuck, this man was cute as shit. "How long have you been out here?"

I smiled warmly. "Not long," I lied, not wanting him to be more embarrassed, and not wanting to share just how long I'd been watching him.

"I'm Mateo, I run this place." I stepped closer so that I was only a few feet away. "I'm assuming you're Parker?"

Parker groaned and peeked out at me between his fingers. He was probably in his late twenties or early thirties, but the way he was acting made him seem a little younger. Finally, he let his hands fall to his sides, but his face was even redder than before if it was possible. It really accentuated his bright blue eyes. "Is it that obvious?"

I shrugged again, not trying to make him uncomfortable. "It was just an educated guess. Don't worry, it's still early

enough that most people aren't around. I was the only one who saw you." I figured I'd leave Melanie out of this for now.

Parker was silent for a second, and I could tell that he was truly seeing me for the first time since we started talking. His pupils dilated and there was a sharp intake of breath as his eyes landed on my chest and arms. I knew how I looked. My black t-shirt was tight and accentuated my muscular figure. I worked hard on my body, and I liked showing it off, sue me. I especially liked seeing this man's reaction to it.

I have no idea what it was about Parker, but I wanted to wrap the guy up in my arms and promise I'd take care of him. There was just something about him that spoke to that side of me I usually had to keep buried during my casual hookups that I indulged in during my monthly trips to Asheville. But as crazy as it sounded, Parker was already awakening that deeply hidden side of me. I took a step back, needing some space.

All the man's facial features were exaggerated. His blue eyes were a little too big, almond shaped and tilted just a bit down. His lips were as big as his eyes and I could just imagine those lips wrapped around my—*No, Teo, get a fucking grip. You do not fuck the guests.* But hell, I was tempted to make an exception for Parker.

Shaking those thoughts away, I continued to check out the man while I waited for him to say anything. His cheeks were round, like he never lost all his baby fat, and he was free of any facial hair. I couldn't tell if that was natural or he shaved. Parker was so far from my usual type, yet my dick didn't seem to care and it pulled inside my jeans as the man licked his lips.

At some point he realized he was just staring and cleared his throat and looked away, embarrassed. I just stopped myself from tucking my fingers under his chin and forcing him to look at me, as that would be wildly inappropriate.

"S-sorry," he stuttered. "I guess you know what happened?"

I nodded. "Yes, Darcy from the travel agency called me earlier. I'm really sorry that happened, but you are of course

welcome to stay. I've already looked over the scheduled excursions and we can adjust the activities to fit a solo trip."

Parker ran his hand through his hair again, causing even more pieces to stick up. Fuck. My nails bit into my fingers to fight the urge to smooth them down. What the fuck was wrong with me? I never reacted like this to guests, and there were plenty who were objectively more attractive than Parker, but none ever spoke to me like him.

"I really don't know if I could handle an entire weekend of being the loser who was ghosted. You all probably think I'm so pathetic."

I growled lowly in my throat, but quickly covered it with a cough when Parker's eyes widened in surprise. *Mierda. You're a grown ass man, Teo, get ahold of yourself.* Still, I couldn't stop myself from stepping closer; way closer than was appropriate.

"Hey," I said firmly, using my deep Dom voice, that I barely utilized these days. "There's no reason to talk about yourself like that. You did nothing wrong. From what I understand the other guy had a family emergency. And even if he didn't, none of this was on you. You are not a loser."

Parker snorted, his expression doubtful. "No offense, but you don't even know me."

I nodded affably. "True. But I've been doing this for a long time, and I'm a good judge of character. And I could just tell, you're not a loser."

One side of Parker's lips tilted up in a half smile. It wasn't much but I'd take it. "How many people know what happened?"

"Just me and my assistant manager. And I promise she won't be judging you."

"Yeah?" he asked reluctantly.

"I swear. It's up to you of course, but I think you should stay."

For some reason, Parker seemed to settle at those words. His shoulders, which were nearly up to his ears, relaxed and his smile seemed more genuine. “Really? It won’t be weird?”

“Not at all. Plenty of people book a room and take advantage of our amenities as a solo trip.” While that was true, I’d have said anything to make sure Parker stayed. How this guy got under my skin so quickly, I had no fucking clue, but I’d be devastated if he just hopped back in his car and left.

“Um, ok. I’ve never done that before, but I guess it won’t be terrible.”

I gave him my warmest smile. “No, it’ll be the opposite of terrible. And worst outcome? You spend the weekend drinking the house wine and lounging in the hot tub in your room.”

His eyes lit up with that. “Hot tub?”

“Yes, your room has a private jacuzzi on the deck.”

Parker tilted his head up to the sky and whispered something under his breath. Then he made eye contact with me, something like hope in his expression.

“Ok, I’ll stay. Thank you, Mateo.” *Mierda*. I loved how he said my name, even with his American New York accent. My parents would be cringing like they always did when non native Spanish speakers said mine or my siblings names, and usually I agreed. But I kind of loved hearing it in Parker’s accent.

I swung my arms wide, indicating the landscape around us. “Welcome to Paradise, Parker.”

# CHAPTER SIX

## PARKER



**M**ateo Cruz. That's what his name tag pinned to the ridiculously tight shirt said, anyway. His name rang through my head on repeat as I scoped out the beautifully decorated space and through to a small office towards the back. There was a regular reception type area that I assumed most guests went to, but Mateo bypassed it completely. If it meant I got to be alone in a small room with this man I wasn't going to complain.

Because fuckity fuck, this guy was hot. Hot wasn't a strong enough word. Sexy. Like bend me over this desk and have your way with me sexy. Which, what? I was not that type of guy. In fact, I could never remember a time I had those thoughts before.

Don't get me wrong, I liked sex. Or I used to, pre-Collin. The last few years with him though, sex had begun to feel like a chore. Half the time I didn't even cum until after he was done and I'd sneak into the bathroom and jerk myself off. And he'd freak out anytime I mentioned topping, so I gave that up years ago. I preferred bottoming, but every once in a while, I got the itch to top, but after a handful of meltdowns, I kept that desire to myself.

And post-Collin, I barely even masturbated, let alone wanted to fuck anyone. Sure, I was lowkey hoping it might happen this weekend, but I had my doubts. Mateo, though. Yeah, this man reinvigorated my sex drive. And I just knew he was a good lover. I bet he always made sure his partners got off too.

Once we reached his office, Mateo opened the top drawer of the old desk and pulled out reading glasses. Holy fuck, that just made him hotter. The man was half bent over his desk while typing away at the keyboard of his computer, his amber colored eyes squinted in concentration.

Mateo was every wet dream I had, built into one man, and the exact opposite of Collin looks wise, which was a win in my book. He was probably just about 6 feet tall with broad shoulders and sculpted biceps that were highlighted by the tight black *Paradise Winery* t-shirt. Did all the employees wear their shirts this tight? Because if they looked even a fraction as sexy as Mateo did in it, then yes, please. At least I'd have eye candy throughout the weekend even if I'd be spending it alone.

His dark hair was shaved on the sides and longer on the top. It looked thick, and soft, and I really wanted to run my fingers through it. *Damn it, Parker. You can't be crushing on this guy.*

His tanned skin was covered with tattoos. Dark colored sleeves peeked out of both arms of his shirt and the tattoos ran all the way down to his wrist. I could see one or two additional tattoos peeking out of the top of the shirt too, one running along his collarbone and maybe there was another one on his chest. I had a weakness for tattoos.

Mateo muttered quietly to himself under his breath, his focus entirely on whatever he was doing on the screen. I squirmed awkwardly in the hard plastic chair across from him. Just watching him concentrate was getting me hard.

"Ah, there it is," Mateo finally looked up, turning his attention to me. I swallowed, trying not to fidget under the intensity of his gaze. What the fuck was wrong with me?

He smiled, and yeah, that didn't do anything to ease my attraction, or my growing hard-on. I wanted that smile directed at me always. And his scruff. Would it scratch my face when he kissed me...

*Slow your roll, Parker.* The guy didn't want to make out with me. He clearly felt bad for me and seemed really nice, but

that meant nothing. I wasn't even sure he was gay. Chances were high, since this place was known for being LGBTQ+ friendly and worked with a gay dating app, but I couldn't assume. Straight guys worked at gay bars after all. I really hoped he wasn't, though.

“Ok, so I just switched out the wine tasting for two to a private tour of the vineyards with one of our vineyard managers. Liam runs it with his wife and partner. You may get just one of them, or all three, or a combination. But they'll take good care of you.” Mateo smirked, and a dimple formed in his right cheek. Hot damn. I bit the inside of my cheek. “And don't worry, you'll still get to sample plenty of wine. If it's Jake giving you the tour, you'll be getting a lot more than a sample.” Mateo laughed and shook his head, like he was thinking of an inside joke.

I was so damn distracted by this man, that it took me a while to work out exactly what he said. Liam, his wife, and his partner? Like a business partner, or...more? I couldn't think of a way to ask without being incredibly rude, so I just let my mind wander through all the possibilities while Mateo continued to change my itinerary from a romantic weekend getaway to a sad lonely man traveling alone schedule. Fuck, what was I doing, staying? Just because the cute manager asked me to? This was going to be a mistake. I needed to just get up, apologize for the trouble I caused Mateo and get in my car and leave. Maybe I could convince Pierce to meet me somewhere halfway and get wasted with me. Did any of his students have fights this weekend? I really need to keep track of his schedule. But I can barely keep track of my own schedule, so—

“Parker?” I startled at the sound of Mateo's voice, so lost in my own thoughts. His eyes were twinkling with amusement, and by his tone, I knew he must've called me a few times. Damn it.

My cheeks heated as I looked down at my lap, unable to look him in the face. “Sorry,” I muttered, “I get lost in my own thoughts sometimes.”



“Parker, look at me please.” Something about his tone made me obey right away. My head shot up, and maybe I even straightened up a bit. There was this commanding undertone that was impossible to ignore, but he didn’t sound annoyed or frustrated, like Collin always did when I went into my own little world.

I sucked my lower lip in between my teeth and fidgeted in my seat but kept eye contact. I was rewarded with a brilliant smile. “Good b-good. Thank you, Parker. There’s nothing to be embarrassed about. We all get caught up in our heads sometimes. And it’s been a long and stressful day for you, so it’s completely understandable.”

I relaxed slightly, though I was still waiting for the but. It was crazy, because I didn’t know this guy at all, but I didn’t want him to be disappointed with me. And that always comes next when I get distracted. Even my parents had a hard time hiding it sometimes. *“Oh I apologize for Parker. He has ADHD and even with the medication, he struggles to behave sometimes.”* It became habit to apologize after that, and I just stopped myself from blurting out that exact sentence, even if I wasn’t on any meds anymore.

“Ok—“ I replied when it became clear Mateo was expecting some kind of response. One of his eyebrows raised, clearly a little surprised but he just shrugged and moved on. “Well anyway, I’ll let you get to your room and get some rest.” Mateo pushed his rolling chair out and turned to the table behind him. He came back with a key card. I won’t lie, I was a little surprised it wasn’t an old school key.

Mateo chuckled, seeming to understand where my mind went, “We modernized a few years ago and started to use key cards like most hotels. They are a lot easier and cheaper to replace than a key, if a guest loses it.”

Made sense. I accepted it with a quiet thanks.

“Come on, I’ll show you to your room.”

Mateo stood, and I followed him, throwing my duffle over my shoulder as I did. Mateo spoke the entire time as we walked through the main room and then back through the

lobby where a grand staircase led upstairs. I knew he was telling me important things, like activities I could do, and what time meals were served, but all I could focus on was his ass in those tight black jeans.

I didn't even realize we'd reached my room until we stopped moving, and Mateo turned towards me. "You didn't hear anything I just said, did you?"

Fuck. "Um—no. I'm sorry."

Mateo took a step towards me, he started to outstretch his arm, and then his eyes widened and he immediately brought it to his side. What was that? Was he about to touch me? "You apologize a lot, don't you?"

I groaned. Damn it, could this whole thing be more embarrassing? "Yeah, I guess. I'm s—" I stopped myself before saying sorry.

Mateo nodded approvingly. And why the hell did that give me flutters in my stomach? "Good...Parker. There's no reason to apologize. I tend to babble when I talk about our amenities. I'm proud of everything we've started offering in the last few years. I think we should have your number downstairs. Would you rather I text everything to you?"

I sank against the wall, relieved. That was so much better. That way when I forgot fifteen times, I had something visible to refer to. "I'd like that, thank you."

Mateo's warm expression nearly melted me. "You're welcome, Parker. Ok, well, here's your room. I'll leave you to get settled. Will I see you tonight for dinner?" Was that hope in his voice? No, no way.

"Um. Yeah, of course."

"Perfect." He began to lift his arm again and once again stopped himself. "Alright, I'll leave you to it." Suddenly his expression turned more serious, and less customer service, "I'm really glad you stayed, Parker."

He shook his head, as if clearing it, said goodbye again, and then left me standing in the hallways alone. Ok...what was that?

I did not have the headspace to worry about that right now. Palming my key card, I tapped it against the door and slid inside. Mateo was right. I needed some time to myself to get my shit together. Plus, I had tell both Pierce and Bailey I decided to stay. I could feel my phone vibrating in my pocket this whole time and they both had to be updated before they decided to just drive down here. So, I'd deal with that first and hopefully get Mateo Cruz out of my head. Yeah, right.

# CHAPTER SEVEN

# MATEO



“Welcome to Paradise Winery, I hope you enjoy your stay.” I smiled at the couple celebrating their anniversary standing on the other side of the check-in desk and handed them their key cards.

They took it with a ‘thanks’, and just like that I was left alone with my own thoughts again. That was dangerous, because they were solely focused on Parker Miles.

I don’t know what it was about that man but for the first time in a long time, I felt my guard going down. I wanted things I hadn’t allowed myself to have in years. I still couldn’t fucking believe I almost called him boy. Twice. I had never made that mistake with a guest before. And in one ten-minute conversation I almost slipped two times. He just brought that out in me.

Once all the behind the desk responsibilities were done, I moved on to helping get the dining room set up for dinner and everything ready for the tasting this evening. I tried to focus on my tasks, meeting up with my employees and making sure everyone was good for tonight. We do tastings all the time but once a month we hosted a special themed one, often with games and prizes. It was purely coincidental that it matched up with the times the Sweetheart Escapes couple was supposed to be here.

As I went over the wine list for tonight, I once again started thinking about Parker. Was he a white or red guy? I’d put money on sweet white wines or rosé but sometimes I still got surprised. Would he even show up tonight? He said he

would, but he seemed sort of reluctant to participate and was spiraling some. It wouldn't be a big surprise if time alone in his room caused him to panic and he avoided joining the others. I told myself I'd let him be, after all it's way beyond my job duties to check up on him, but I already knew I'd be knocking on his door if he didn't come on his own. This man I'd known for about ten minutes was already causing me to lose control.

It didn't take long for the guests to trickle in for dinner. This was my favorite part of the night, getting a chance to chat with the guests and see how everyone's day went on their trip throughout the property.

When Marshall took me in and under his wing as a terrified and angry eighteen-year-old, Paradise ran like most wineries and vineyards. It was all day tours of the vineyard, small tastings, and an occasional wedding or private event here or there.

But as I learned more about the business and my role evolved from washing dishes and wiping tables to more of a leadership role, I began to get ideas of how to make the business grow. I suggested the overnight stays and with Liam, the vineyard manager, the two of us developed the idea of different tours as well as picnic hikes, nature walks, outdoor tastings, kayak tours and more. Paradise had slowly become a popular vacation destination in Virginia over the last few years and I couldn't be prouder. One of the things that set us apart was how personal the staff was. Some people liked to be left alone to do their own thing, which we respected, but for everyone else, we kept up a family atmosphere where everyone sat together and chatted openly. I loved it.

My relationship with my birth family was...strained... putting it lightly. I wasn't exactly disowned for being gay, my family would never do something that scandalous. But their intentions became crystal fucking clear when my dad handed me \$500, a packed suitcase, and a phone number and address for a buddy in Virginia—half the country away from my hometown in Texas—on the day of my high school graduation. The last words my father ever said to me were, “It

would be better for everyone if there was some distance between you and the rest of the family.” I still kept up with my youngest sister, Marcella, but hadn’t seen another family member in nearly seventeen years.

So, these people became my family. First it was Marshall, who literally saved me. The buddy of my dad ended up being a bust, and I was sleeping in my car when Marshall happened to find me. Then he introduced me to Liam and his wife. A few years later their partner joined the scene, and we became a family. And to a lesser extent, our guests felt like they were part of this found family and I cherished the community we’d built.

Today though, I was focused only on a certain guest. One who still hadn’t come down. As more and more people trickled into the dining room, I found myself constantly watching the stairs. Where was he? Even if he chose not to stay for the tasting later, he needed to eat.

The dining room was just about full, and the food was ready to be served. Still no Parker. I was two seconds away from going up to his room and knocking on his damn door, when someone rushed into the dining room. Parker. He stood in the middle of the space, looking positively disheveled. He had changed into a wrinkled pair of jeans and way too loose black t-shirt that said *Miles Maniacs* written in white box letters on the front. His hair was wet and stood up in all different angles. My dick twitched.

Parker was frozen, unsure what to do next. His feet were planted in place, but his head was on a swivel, his eyes wide and near panic. I wasn’t sure what he was looking for, but there was no way I could just sit here and watch him floundering like that. I politely excused myself from the conversation I was having with an older couple who visited us a few times a year and quickly made my way to the man.

Parker didn’t notice me walking towards him, so lost in his own head. I called his name when I got close so I didn’t startle him.

It didn't work, and the poor guy jumped nearly out of his skin when I said his name. His head whipped towards me, the panic only growing until his eyes met mine and he visibly deflated. My eyes narrowed as I closed the remaining distance. What the hell was that about?

"Oh, Mateo," he stammered. He ran a nervous hand through his hair, somehow making himself look even more disheveled, "I-I'm sorry I didn't see you there."

I pursed my lips as I tried to figure out what was going on. The poor guy was clearly rattled but I didn't know why. Did something happen? "You looked a little lost. Were you looking for someone?"

Parker's face went ghostly white as his eyes dashed towards the phone that he was holding so tightly in his fist, I was surprised he hadn't broken it. I frowned, wondering how much I could push. The answer was not at all. He was a guest, nothing more. But he seemed scared, if he was in danger...

*No, Teo.* Get a hold of yourself. This place was perfectly safe, how could he be in danger? But I couldn't deny something had him spooked.

"Um...what?" He still seemed focused on something else. While he was looking in my direction, he seemed to be staring beyond my shoulder. I bit my lip to keep myself from calling him on it. He didn't answer me for such a long time I thought he forgot the question. He glanced down at his phone three separate times. Then it seemed to come back to him. Parker jumped and finally made eye contact with me. "Oh. Sorry. I'm just-uh. No. No I wasn't looking for anyone. I just-uh wasn't sure where I should sit."

It was a lie, but I let it go. It wasn't my place. I hated how much I had to battle my instincts with this man. I smiled warmly, "You can sit anywhere, Parker, we're one big family here. Come on, I'll introduce you to some of our regulars."

I really wanted to seat him somewhere private and spend the meal with him. But I didn't want to leave him alone, and I never was able to sit through an entire dinner without being needed for something. He'd be better off with some company.



I headed towards the table I had come from, and Parker followed. Jody and Robert Swanson looked up as we stopped, their expressions welcoming.

“Mr. and Mrs. Swanson, would y’all mind some company?” I asked, leaning into my Texan accent, knowing that Mrs. Swanson melted from it.

Mr. Swanson rolled his eyes good naturedly as his wife of fifty years practically swooned. I didn’t turn on my deep South charm very often, but I had no problem using it when I needed to.

“Of course, Teo. You know we always welcome your company.”

Mr. Swanson snorted and took a hearty sip of his wine.

Parker’s shoulders shook with humor, allowing me to relax some. I spread my arm out, gesturing for him to step forward. “This is Parker. He’s a first time guest here and just arrived a few hours ago. Would you mind if he joined y’all this evening? Show him the ropes?”

“A handsome young man like you joining us for dinner? I don’t mind at all.”

Mr. Swanson finished his wine. “Jody stop flirting with men younger than our son.”

She shrugged unapologetically. “It’s harmless, dear. You don’t mind, do you sweetie?” she asked Parker, who looked like a shell-shocked tomato, with how red his cheeks were. Fuck.

“Oh. Uh, no ma’am. Thanks for letting me sit with you.”

“Please call me Jody. No need to be so formal.”

I stifled a laugh just as Melanie caught my eye and jerked her head, indicating she needed to speak to me. Of course.

“I’m sorry to run, but duty calls.” I turned so I was facing Parker, my attention only on him. “Will you be okay?”

Parker swallowed, his Adam’s apple moving up and down with the nervous gesture. His eyes flicked down before

making eye contact, and—was he looking at my bulge? Damn, I hoped so. “Yeah, I’ll be fine. Thank you, Mateo, seriously.”

“Of course.” I gave a polite head nod towards the older couple and then left before I was even more distracted. He would be in good hands. I had nothing to worry about.

I only got to stop by Parker’s table once during the whole meal. Of course, the day I wanted to sit down and eat was the day disaster after disaster struck. First, one of our new servers dropped an entire tray of filled glasses, leaving a mess of glass and wine across the dining room floor. Then one of our refrigerators crapped out. After Liam looked at it and determined we needed an actual repairman, I then helped get everything out of the fridge and dispersed between the others. By the time I called a repairman to come in tomorrow and handled various other tiny fires, dinner was over and the tasting had started.

I glanced over at where Parker was still sitting with the Swansons. The couple of times I managed to snatch a glance his way, Parker was smiling and laughing, clearly charmed by the older couple. And it seemed to go both ways as they animatedly chatted with the younger man.

But something had clearly changed since the last time I looked in that direction. Parker was on his phone again, his body tense and his jaw tight. Mrs. Swanson lightly touched his shoulder, and he jumped out of his skin.

His head snapped around, like he was expecting someone to be standing behind him, and he flushed crimson when he realized it was just Mrs. Swanson. Fuck. I put down the bottle I was holding and stalked over to them, unable to stay away. “Hi Parker,” I said as casually as I could manage as I walked over.

Once again he jumped at the sound of his name, and a pit formed in the bottom of my stomach. Something was making him extremely jumpy. He wasn’t like this when he arrived this afternoon. A little scattered, yeah, but not the fear he was clearly dealing with now. I wracked my brain wondering what

could have possibly happened in the last few hours to cause such a shift.

“I apologize, I didn’t mean to startle you,” I told him gently. “Is everything ok?” It was directed towards him, but my eyes fell to Mr. and Mrs. Swanson. They both looked concerned, but Mr. Swanson shrugged, clearly not knowing what happened.

Parker sucked in his bottom lip. “S-sorry.” He glanced over at the older couple. “I’m sorry, that was incredibly rude.”

“Don’t worry about it, sweetie. We just want to make sure you’re okay?”

“Oh. Um. Yeah. That’s really nice of you, but I’m okay.”

“Bad news from home?” Mr. Swanson asked, genuinely worried.

“Uh, sort of? Just some messages.” Parker suddenly shut his phone off and shoved it in his pocket. Looking up, he forced a smile. “It’s no big deal. This is vacation right? There’s supposed to be that special wine tasting, right? Let’s drink.”

Clearly, he was deflecting, but I bit my tongue. It was none of my business. I was already inserting myself in this man’s life more than was appropriate, but I couldn’t seem to stop myself. Yes, I was attracted to him, but this went further than wanting a quick fuck. Don’t get me wrong, I absolutely wanted to do that too. But not quick. Oh, no I’d take my time with Parker Miles, make sure he remembered me long after he left Paradise Winery. But I’d never been so obsessed with a guy I just found attractive before. No one’s ever been so far under my skin so fucking fast.

Still, it didn’t give me the right to intercede into the guy’s personal life. But I couldn’t walk away either. So I did the only thing I could do. “Sounds perfect. I have just the one to start with. It’s a house wine we only sell to our exclusive members and never serve during a tasting. But I think I could make an exception tonight.”

Parker grinned, his eyes lighting up and some of that heaviness easing. The stone that settled in my gut lightened

with that smile. That smile was dangerous. That smile could break me. It would get me to agree to all kinds of things that I shouldn't. I already knew I'd do anything I could to keep that smile on his face, at least until the weekend was over.

# CHAPTER EIGHT

## PARKER



“And then—get this—I came home and all my furniture was gone. All of it!”

Mrs. Swanson gasped, and Mateo looked outraged. But I was too drunk to think too much about his reaction. Speaking of drinking—I grabbed my half filled wine glass and downed the rest. There, perfect.

“He took all of your furniture?” Mateo asked, his voice very quiet and even. I nodded.

“Yup, all of it. Is there more wine? This is so good!”

“Here you go honey,” Mrs. Swanson said, pushing the bottle towards me. Mateo gave her a look, but I couldn’t figure it out. Why did he look angry?

“Thank you, Mrs. Swanson, you’re the best!”

She laughed heartily. “Maybe that should be your last glass, Parker. You’ve had quite a bit of wine.” Mateo told me, his voice a little strained.

I rolled my eyes at Mateo. “Why do you look so grumpy? Maybe you need some wine?”

Mateo snorted and shook his head at me, but I saw the small smile on his face. He found me entertaining. He wasn’t wearing his sexy glasses right now, but I wish he was. Maybe he would if I asked him nicely.

“I think you might be right.” Mateo poured himself a glass. He wouldn’t drink with us until the official tasting was over, and even now he insisted he was only drinking one glass

because he was driving. Everyone had left except me, Mrs. Swanson, and Mateo. Even Mr. Swanson had gone back to their room. So now we were drinking all the good wine, telling stories, and I was trying desperately not to blurt out loud how sexy I thought Mateo was.

“So what did you do when you got home?” Mateo asked, seemingly out of nowhere. I blinked slowly, turning my head to look at him. His lips were pursed, and fuck, I wondered what he tasted like? What his lips would feel like against mine.

He was waiting for an answer though, of that I was sure, but for what, I couldn't remember.

“Huh?”

He smirked as he gently pushed my glass away from my hand. Hey! I opened my mouth to complain but when he handed me a water bottle instead with a raised eyebrow and for some reason, I just took it.

“After you got home and saw your furniture gone, what did you do?” He gently reminded me of his question.

“Oh. I got an air mattress and borrowed a card table and folding chair from my parents.”

Both Mateo and Mrs. Swanson seemed horrified, but I couldn't figure out why. Maybe I did drink too much wine.

“What?” I asked them.

“Just, you didn't say anything to him about it? Was he the one to buy everything?”

I squirmed in my seat, wanting to move on. “Nah, most of it was already there when he moved in. It wasn't worth it though. I just wanted to move past it all. Which I would've if he didn't start stalking me.”

Mateo stilled, “What?” Oh crap, did I say that out loud?

I grinned and shrugged. I was drunk, but not drunk enough to get into that. “Oh nothing. So—what's on the schedule for tomorrow?”

Yeah, I changed the subject, but it was my right. Collin had already taken up way too much of my headspace. I thought I was done with him when Pierce blocked his number, but when the messages and calls started today from a blocked number, I knew he found a way around it. Maybe I'd change my number when I get home, but for now I was gonna have fun and forget about Collin. Fuck Collin.

I thought at first that Matteo wasn't going to let it go, but Mrs. Swanson squeezed his arm and shook her head. Thank you, Mrs. Swanson, you are a real one. Mateo's jaw was tight, and it was sweet, since he was a total stranger, but it wasn't his problem.

"On that note, I'm going to head to bed." Mrs. Swanson stood up and covered my hand with hers. "It was nice to meet you, Parker. I'll see you tomorrow at dinner?"

She really was the nicest lady. "I'll be there." The older woman said her goodbyes to the two of us, and then we were alone.

I swallowed hard and looked down at the table, suddenly feeling awkward. Mateo was watching me intently, and it was making me uncomfortable, but in a good way. In the *my dick was getting hard and I was insanely horny* type of way.

The silence carried on for too long. Clearing my throat, I finally met Mateo's eyes. And holy shit. The look he was giving me was sinful. "So, um, thank you, for all this." *Jeez, Parker, that's the best you can do?*

Amusement sparkled in his eyes. "It's my pleasure, Parker." Fuck, the way he said my name.

I shifted in my seat. "Ok, well..."

I went to stand up but a hand on my arm stopped me. I looked at Mateo. "I'm crossing so many lines, but I can't let you go back to your room without trying." Mateo paused and looked up at the ceiling. He muttered something under his breath that sounded like another language. "I'd really like to kiss you, Parker. Would that be okay?"



My brain shut down. I must have drank more wine than I thought, because there was no way I heard Mateo correctly. There was no way he wanted to kiss me. But there he was, just inches away from my mouth, his eyes focused solely on my lips.

“Why?” I blurted. What the fuck? Of all the things I could say, I said why? “I mean yes. It’s definitely more than okay for you to kiss me. Like very okay. But why? You must have noticed I’m a hot fucking mess. You have a hotel full of people to choose from. I just don’t get it.”

“Parker. Look at me please.” His voice was gentle, but so full of authority that I of course obeyed. As soon as I looked up, his hand cupped my cheek and before I even blinked, Mateo’s lips were on mine.

In movies and romance novels you always heard about these magical kisses that change the main character’s life. Kisses that override everything else and have them falling in love on the spot. The whole thing was bullshit. I knew this. I still knew this, but if any kiss would make me believe in that fantasy, it was this one.

Mateo had full control, but it wasn’t aggressive in any way. He wasn’t forcing anything, I think it was just his nature to lead, and I would gladly let him. I opened up for him as his tongue peeked into my mouth. His hand slid from my cheek to the back of my neck, pulling me even closer to him, and I melted. Before I even realized what I was doing, my arms wrapped around Mateo’s neck and I pushed my body against his, eliminating all space between us.

Mateo pushed back though, and I found myself pushed up against the wine bar, my back pressing into the walnut countertop.

He muttered into my lips. This time I was sure it was another language. Spanish. I had no idea what he said, but I vaguely remembered high school Spanish class enough to recognize the language. Mateo’s pupils were blown and he was staring at me with such an intensity I could barely stand still. My dick was threatening to burst through the seams of

my jeans. “You’re driving me fucking crazy, darlin’. What are you doing to me?”

Thankfully that was a rhetorical question because I couldn’t begin to answer it. Mateo didn’t even give me a chance to answer it as he fisted my hair at the back of my head, fixing me in place, and kissed me again.

I was driving him crazy? Well, the feeling went both ways. “Mateo,” I whispered, my voice raspy with need. “I need—“ I didn’t finish my sentence, since I wasn’t sure what I needed. Just more than this.

“What do you need, Parker?” Mateo’s lips moved from mine to my neck. Each time they brushed up against the sensitive skin they left a trail of goosebumps in their wake.

He was still gripping my hair, and that little bite of pain only made me harder. I thrust my hips up into him. “More,” I finally managed to say, “I need more.”

The sound that escaped Mateo was practically inhuman. For one split second, he pushed harder into my thigh, making his erection clear before pulling away. I never had a chance to protest though, before his hands moved down to the buttons on my jeans.

I took the hint, and as Mateo desperately fumbled to pull my dick out of my pants and underwear, I did the same to him. I needed more than that though, and even as we were desperately reaching for the other’s cock I leaned back over and captured Mateo’s lips again.

We were frantic and distracted, but eventually my cock sprang free, and Mateo’s followed shortly after.

Mateo broke the kiss. I pouted but soon his hand was in front of my face. “Spit, darlin’.”

I didn’t think twice and spat in his hand. My mind went briefly to Collin and how he would’ve died on the spot if I ever dared do that during sex, but quickly pushed that thought down. Collin had no place here.

As soon as I did, Mateo’s hand wrapped around my cock. Not wanting him to be left out, I did the same, holding my

hand out to him. It was weird as hell, honestly, but also hot in a dirty way. And getting my hand around that thick member was fucking worth it.

Mateo moaned and threw his head back as I began to jerk him off. I found myself following the tempo he had set with me, in sync with each other.

I was still pressed up against the bar, Mateo's head bent so his forehead was touching mine, his free hand, balancing himself against the bar top, to my side. Needing to do something with my other hand, I gripped the back of his neck, keeping him close to me, because for some reason that felt really important.

“Fuck darlin’, that’s it. You feel fucking fantastic.”

He did too. Mateo picked up the pace, jerking me roughly. I was biting my bottom lip so hard I was afraid I was going to bite a hole in it, but it was all I could do to keep my sounds in.

“None of that, *cariño*. Let me hear you. The dining area is closed, no one is coming down here again tonight. You’re safe.”

I whimpered. Honestly, the thought of being caught hadn't even crossed my mind. It added to this whole thing, really. How fucked up was that? Collin used to hate how loud I got in bed sometimes. He said it was obscene. So, I got used to keeping quiet. And after five years of that, that habit wasn't easy to break.

But then Mateo sucked on my neck and cupped my balls with his free hand, and I couldn't stop the sounds no matter how hard I tried.

“That’s it. You sound so beautiful when you moan. Cups my balls. Mimic what I’m doing to you.”

Groaning, I obeyed. “That’s it. You’re so fucking good for me.”

Oh. Oh fuck. My dick twitched in his hold from the words, and a stream of precum leaked from the tip.

Mateo's grin was feral. He nipped at my lips, and I groaned again. "Do you like when I call you good, *cariño*?"

I shook my head in denial, because damn that was embarrassing. I was a grown ass man, I didn't need to be praised like a child. At least that was what I kept telling myself. I mentioned it once to Collin and his reaction was enough to bury that shit deep.

Mateo raised an eyebrow, doubtful. "There's no shame in liking what you like, darling. No shame in wanting to be a good boy."

My hips stuttered as a wave of arousal shot through me. The bastard smirked, knowing he was right.

I decided to ignore him completely. "I'm close," I told him instead.

"Just a little longer, Parker. We'll come at the same time, okay? You can be good for me, right darling? I know you can be a good boy and hang on for a little longer."

Not if he kept talking like that, the fucker. I bit the inside of my cheek and focused everything on the dick in my hand, determined to give Mateo all the pleasure I was feeling, even if it was just so I could come too.

"You asked before why I wanted to kiss you," he said casually, like I wasn't on the verge of spilling my seed all over his hand. I blinked trying to follow the change in conversation.

"Um, yes?"

"I don't know why. But I couldn't keep my eyes off you from the second I saw you panicking on the front porch."

I pouted. I wasn't panicking, was I? "You awaken these instincts in me I haven't let myself indulge in for a long time. I have no fucking idea why. But as much as I should back off and let you enjoy your trip, I just couldn't."

"I-I'm glad," I panted, barely keeping it together. "Please, Mateo, I need to come."

Mateo licked his lips, and then one more time, he brought us together in a kiss. When we finally separated, I could see

just how gone he was, and I was sure I looked the same.

“Call me Teo, please. I want to hear my preferred name on your lips before we go over the edge.”

“Teo. I need to come. Please.”

“You beg so nicely, darlin’. Come with me, Parker.”

It was like a dam broke. The fragile control I was holding on to collapsed with those words and I was spilling all over his hand. Only a second later Teo followed me, his eyes closed in pleasure.

Once I was spent, I collapsed back against the bar. Laughing roughly, Teo dropped his head onto my shoulder.

“Well, shit,” he muttered after some time.

I snorted. “Yeah.”

He pulled himself off my shoulder, meeting my eyes, his dark eyes serious. Touching my cheek, Teo had me captivated. “Come back to my place and spend the night with me?”

There were so many reasons I should say no, but I couldn’t think of any of them as I stared at Teo, his cum drying on my hand, while mine covered his and cooled on my dick and thighs. All I could think of was how it would be impossible to go to my own room now, after I got a taste of Teo.

“Okay.”

# CHAPTER NINE

# MATEO



I'd lost my mind. That was the only explanation for why I was now leading Parker to my Jeep to take him to my cottage at the end of the property. Once the lust died down, and the cum was cleaned off the side of the bar, reality started to hit about exactly what I'd done. Fuck, never, and I mean never – even when I was a horny teenager still trying to figure out my sexuality – did I ever have sex in the main rooms of the winery. I always had more self-control than that. Yet here I was, at fucking 35, breaking all kinds of rules and probably health codes.

I almost changed my mind and told Parker never mind. Every time I opened my mouth to say something, though, no words came out. And before I knew it, I had my hand at the small of his back while I guided him through the field that the employees used as a parking lot.

Despite still living on the property, it was nearly a mile from my home to the main areas of the estate. Most days I walked or biked the trek, but this morning I had inventory I had to deliver, so I drove.

“For some reason I expected you to live in the house here.” Parker's fingers tapped a nervous pattern on his thighs over his jeans. He kept looking out the window and I was wondering if he was having his own doubts.

I realized I wasn't going to win against my desires with this man, so with one hand on the steering wheel, I placed my other hand right over his on his thigh, stilling his hand, at least one of them.

Parker sucked in a breath and from the corner of my eye, I saw his flash towards me. He didn't pull his hand away though, so I stayed where I was.

"No. I did when I first came here, but honestly, I needed a little space from all of that. Our cottages are still on the property, but it's far enough away that it's easy to forget."

"You said ours. Who else has a cottage over there?"

"Oh, just Liam and his two partners. They've built onto theirs over the years so it's more like a full house now than a cottage."

Parker shifted in the passenger seat to look at me. "You never added on to yours?"

I shook my head. "No. Mine used to be Marshall's, the owner. But when he decided to move further down south a few years back, I took it over. I never bothered making many changes to it."

I didn't explain that it always just felt weird to change things. It had always been Marshall's place, and I kind of felt like I was doing an extended house sitting and it wasn't truly mine. Parker didn't need to know all that though. All he needed to know was that I had bought a new bed when I moved in, and my sheets were clean.

We pulled off the main road and down the long gravel pathway. Most of the mile long route was just driving down the unpaved path. It was one of the ways we kept people from traveling down this way and to our private homes.

Parker turned towards the window and pressed his face against the glass. "I didn't even see this road."

I grinned, glancing sideways at him. "Kind of the point. We don't want the guests stumbling onto it accidentally."

"Makes sense. Though you're letting me see it." I could hear the doubt in Parker's voice and I hated it, even if I kept second guessing myself.

"Yes, I am."



“Are...you sure? I mean we had a good time in the bar, sure. But we were drinking and—“

“I wasn’t drinking, Parker. I wouldn’t be driving if I was. I had one glass of wine, sure, but it had been a while. I was sober for everything we did. I was sober when I asked you to come here.” I paused, unsure if he was worried I was going to back out, or if he was having his own doubts. “But, if you’ve changed your mind, I will drive you back to your room. Or we can just hang out, watch some TV and talk for a while before I drive you back. No pressure. Anything you don’t want, or anytime you want to stop, just say so.”

I didn’t get into the whole safeword thing, because this wasn’t the time, but I wanted to make sure it was clear that there were no expectations.

Even with my eyes still on the road, I could see Parker’s head shaking rapidly. “Nope. I didn’t. Change my mind, I mean. I just-I just wanted to give you an out if you realized how out of my league you are.”

I bit the inside of my cheek, to keep myself from saying something way too extra about Parker talking down about himself. Something like, *My boy doesn’t talk badly about himself*. Because, one, Parker wasn’t my boy. Two, I met him a few hours ago. Three, just because he wanted to fuck and liked a little praise, didn’t mean he was kinky or wanted anything kinky. And it certainly didn’t mean he wanted me to interfere in his life, even if it’s to correct opinions about himself. Bad enough I had to force myself not to find this ex-boyfriend of his and give him a piece of my mind. Because that would be fucking crazy. I was aware of that, even if the urge was practically unbearable.

So instead of doing any of the over-the-top things I wanted to do or say, I clenched my jaw and said, “Just so you know I have never done this before.”

Confused by the apparent change of subject, his head whipped towards me. “Huh? Never did what before? Have sex?”

I snorted. “No. I have definitely done *that* before. I mean I have never once brought one of my guests back to my house. In fact, I’ve never hooked up with a guest before. Ever. So before you go thinking I’m out of your league or that you’re just another weekend fling for me, remember that you are not only the first guest I’m bringing back to my home, but the first person ever.”

I finally pulled up in front of my small cottage and put my jeep in park. I turned my body to look at Parker. In the dark, I couldn’t make out his expressions, but he seemed, I don’t know — shocked, doubtful, confused, all of the above?

I decided not to delve too deep into whatever he was thinking. This was a hookup, right? In two days he was going back to his furniture-less apartment all the way in New York and I’d be back to anonymous hookups in Asheville once a month. We don’t need to get all lost in each other’s feelings.

I smiled at him. “Are you ready?”

Parker blinked, shaking himself out of his stupor. “Oh yeah. I’m so ready.” He was so fucking cute.

I got out of the car and he followed suit. He stayed close to me as I walked up the little paved path lined with potted plants, and solar powered lights.

“These are so pretty, did you plant them yourself?”

I shrugged. “Yeah. My mom was into gardening when I was a kid. I used to help her every spring, and I guess the interest stuck.”

“Well they look good. I can’t keep anything alive. I’ve killed every plant I’ve ever had. In a pathetically quick amount of time too. It’s probably a record.” He grinned sheepishly at me, and of course that smile went right to my cock.

I walked up one step to my home and unlocked the door. My horniness had died down some when we were driving and because of all my nerves, but it ramped right back up as soon as I was in the entryway. Parker followed me inside and closed the door. I didn’t wait another second before pushing him against the wall.

He let out a woosh of breath, his hand going to my shoulder to steady himself.

“Fuck. I want you so much, *cariño*.” I buried my face into the side of his neck. He smelled like wine, and a little bit like the jalapeño poppers he was snacking on earlier. But it didn’t detract from how badly I needed him.

“So, take me, Teo. I’m ready.”

“*Mierda*.”

Parker touched my cheek, bringing my head towards his, and I took the hint, taking his mouth.

I completely lost myself in the kiss. All I could focus on was the heat of Parker’s mouth and his soft lips brushing against mine.

“Where is your bedroom?” he whispered when we finally came up for air.

“Eager, are we, darlin’?”

“Yeah, for your cock.”

Parker blushed immediately, his hand covering his mouth like he couldn’t believe he said that out loud, but I wasn’t willing to let that one go. Not when it caused that adorable as fuck blush to spread across his cheeks and down his neck. I squeezed the back of his neck, my eyebrow raised.

“You want my cock, *cariño*? Where do you want it? In your hand again?” Parker pouted, knowing I was playing with him. “How about your mouth?” The pout disappeared, and he sucked his lip in between his teeth. Judging by the shine in those blue eyes, the idea intrigued him, but I knew that wasn’t what he meant.

“Somewhere else, darlin’?”

“Teo, stop playing with me and show me where your bedroom is before I shoot my load right here. And let me tell you, I will not be happy if that happens.”

I grinned and nipped his neck. “So feisty.” I licked the spot I just bit at.

Parker whined and pushed up into me. He was clearly hard again. Hell, so was I.

“Mateo,” he groaned as I sucked a bruise into his neck.

“What’s the matter, darlin’?”

“Stop teasing me.”

Oh if he only knew. But Parker was right about one thing. If I didn’t stop teasing him, we would both be blowing our loads in the front room, not just him.

I finally forced myself to pull away and took his hand. “I guess you don’t mind if we skip the tour for now?”

Parker scoffed. “No tour, please. I’m sure your home is lovely, but not as lovely as your dick.”

I stopped in my tracks, so thrown off by his statement before bursting into laughter. What the —

I turned towards Parker, who grinned and waggled his eyebrows playfully.

I couldn’t take it anymore. I needed this man under me. Now. Taking Parker’s hand again, I led him to the bedroom. My cottage was small; one large open room with an island separating the kitchen from the living area, one and a half bathrooms, one master bedroom, and a small second room that I converted into an office. I didn’t need more, and at the moment I was thrilled with how small my house was, because it was only a handful of steps before I was opening the door and practically dragging Parker into the bedroom.

“Clothes off,” I growled, as soon as I kicked my door shut. I always kept my room clean, so I didn’t have to worry about being embarrassed by piles of dirty clothes or an unmade bed, but Parker’s heated gaze that was glued to me made it clear he didn’t give a fuck about how my room looked.

His fingers fumbled on the buttons of his jeans as he tried to hurry and take them off. I stepped into his space and gently removed his fingers. “Here, let me, baby boy.” I hadn’t meant to call him that, but his breath hitched so I didn’t take it back.

Parker let his hands fall to his sides as I unhooked his pants, but I focused on his face. “Do you like when I call you baby boy, darlin’?”

He shook his head, but the way he shivered and leaned into my touch told a different story. I dragged my teeth along his jawline. “That’s nothing to be ashamed of, *cariño*.” I slid my mouth down to his neck and sucked. Parker let out a breathless whine, his head tilting, naturally giving me more access. Fuck. I nuzzled back up his face, letting my scruff scratch up against the sensitive skin, enjoying his reactions. “I happen to really like calling you baby boy.” I liked it too much.

“Really?” he asked, unsure.

All this time I had been playing with him. I released his trapped erection and let my still clothed one rub against it just to drive him crazy. But I stopped and tipped his chin up so Parker realized how serious I was. I hadn’t wanted to get into my kinks too much. I never did anymore during my weekends in Asheville, but it felt important to share at least a little with this man.

“Yes.” As I talked I slid his pants and underwear down his legs, and squatted in front of him to untie and remove his sneakers before helping him out of his clothing. Parker watched me with such amazement and confusion I knew I had to take a chance and tell him more.

“How familiar are you with BDSM, specifically a Daddy/boy relationship?” I stayed on my knees below him but Parker was still held captive to my gaze. I said the words confidently and didn’t back down, but honestly, I was freaking out internally. I hadn’t always had the best reaction to that admission, which is why I stopped ever mentioning it. I could just only hope my instincts were right with Parker.

Parker took an involuntary step back, his eyes wide. “Like diapers and stuff?”

I stood up. “No, *cariño*. Well, there are people who are into that, and there’s nothing wrong with that. But I mean more of a caretaker relationship, not necessarily any age play

or regression, unless that's something my boy is interested in. I don't need that."

Parker blinked heavily at me. I couldn't decide if I should give him space or get closer. Eventually my own desires gave in and I stepped in, my hands sliding up and down his naked thighs.

Thankfully he didn't pull away, so I kept going on with the soothing, and somewhat erotic motions.

"I wouldn't want that."

He wasn't clear on what he meant, so I pushed a little further. "Want what, baby boy? To participate in age play or have a caretaker dynamic with the person you are with." I leaned in a little further and kissed his cheek, just below his ear. "Remember there's no wrong answers. And nothing you say will change my mind about bringing you to my bed tonight, as long as you still want it too."

Could Parker hear how fast my heart was beating? How nervous I was? I almost wished he could, that way he would understand how vulnerable I was being right now. It might not seem much, my mini confession. It wasn't like I'd gone into a lot of detail, but just admitting this part of myself, something I'd tried so hard to bury, felt extremely exposing.

Finally, after ages of silence, Parker's hand went to my hip, and some of that snarky confidence he had when we first got home returned. "I-I don't think I'd want to be little or anything. But, yes to the other part."

Grinning, my whole body relaxed and for the first time in ages, I finally felt like myself. "Do you want me to take care of you tonight, baby boy? I can make you feel so good."

I dragged my hands from his hips to his ass, my fingers just grazing his crease. He groaned and pushed back into my touch. "P-please. Please take care of me, Teo. I'll be so good for you."

*Mierda.*

# CHAPTER TEN

# MATEO



“Lift your arms for me, *cariño*,” I whispered huskily against Parker’s ear before stepping back to allow him to complete the task. He looked a little dazed, and it wasn’t from the wine. Still, he lifted his hands above his head. He was leaning against the wall of my room, naked except for his t-shirt, and swayed slightly.

I paused and purposely looked him up and down, making sure Parker could see just how much he turned me on. I didn’t know much about his asshole ex, but it was obvious the fucker did a number on his confidence, and I wanted to do my part to eliminate his doubt.

“You’re such a good boy for me. Fuck, look how sexy you are. Perfect.”

Parker shuddered, even as he shook his head in denial. That wasn’t going to fly.

Stalking towards him, I took both his outstretched arms in one of mine and slammed them against the wall. My body pressing against his, so there wasn’t an inch of space between us.

“Do you feel that, baby boy?” I pushed my erection into his muscular thigh, making it clear what he was doing to me. “Do you feel how hard I am? That’s all for you. That’s what you do to me. I lose all control with you.” Parker groaned, his head rolling to the side.

“Fuck, every inch of you turns me on. From the second I saw you outside I knew I wanted to get you underneath me.



Damn, baby boy, I can't wait to see what you look like sprawled out in my bed, needy for me."

"Teo, please."

I slowly dragged my hands down from his wrists, trailing them across his outstretched arms, and then down his sides until I got to the bare skin below his t-shirt. My hands touched everything I could get my hands on as I slid his shirt off his body and over his head. I was stuck somewhere between wanting to toss him onto the bed and fuck him into oblivion and taking my sweet time, exploring every inch of Parker until I had him memorized. By the time he was standing naked in front of me, I had decided on somewhere in the middle.

"Teo," Parker groaned, need heavy in his voice.

"What do you need, darlin'?"

"You. Can I touch you?"

I sucked in a breath. "Of course. Anywhere you want."

His tongue peeked out from between his teeth, concentrating like this was the most important task he'd ever done. His hands reached out to the band of my jeans and carefully, almost reverently, began undressing me.

I cursed quietly under my breath as Parker pushed my pants and underwear down my thighs, kneeling as he did so.

His hands caressed my thighs, which were as heavily tattooed as my arms and back. "Look at all these tattoos. I've never been with someone with so many before."

I looked down, watching the man as he tapped my ankle, asking me to raise it so he could remove my clothes. I did that and then ran my fingers through all that wild hair. I had been dying to get my hands on it from the beginning, and it was everything I hoped it to be. His strands were thick, but soft, and my fingers combed through it easily.

"Do you like them, darlin'?"

He nodded heavily as his hands ran back up my legs and to my cock, that was sticking out proudly like a beacon. "So

fucking much. Oh—holy shit—” he replied. I grinned. He just found my piercings.

Parker’s eyes flicked up to mine. “Can I touch them?”

“Go ahead. It feels so fucking good when they’re touched. They’re sensitive.”

“Fuuuck.”

He was driving me insane as he curiously played with my cock and balls, using enough pressure to bring me to the edge but not enough to bring me over. His thumb caressed up and down the underside, fingering my Jacob’s Ladder piercings. He looked up, and lust drunk blue eyes met mine.

“Can I taste you?”

*Mierda.* “I will never say no to that, *cariño.*”

Parker didn’t waste a second, and he did a lot more than take a taste. His sweet mouth and full lips enveloped me as he swallowed nearly half my length in one shot. My fingers curled into his hair.

“Ungh, fucking A that mouth on you is sweet, darlin’. You’re so fucking perfect.”

Parker groaned around my cock, the vibration going right to my core. “Baby boy, it’s like that mouth was made for my cock. I could do this all day. Have you under my desk warming my dick while I get some work done. Would you like that, darlin’? Being my good little cock sucker?”

He made some type of agreeing sound in the back of his throat as he took me even deeper. Parker squeezed the back of my thighs, giving himself more leverage.

“If you keep that up, I’m gonna come, darlin’.”

Parker lifted his eyes, letting me know he was very much okay with that. I did some mental calculation in my head. I wasn’t a kid anymore. Chances were if I shot my load now, I wouldn’t have another in me for quite some time.

Tightening my grip in his hair, I gently pulled him off of me with a sloppy plop. Parker whined and tried to lean

forward to get his treat again.

“Hang on a second, *cariño*. You have a choice. We can continue this, just like this, we can sixty-nine, or we can fuck. What would you like, baby boy?”

Parker froze, a bit of fear growing in his eye. Shit, that was not what I was going for. I gently pulled him up from his knees so we were both standing. Instinct told me that space was a bad idea, so I stayed firmly in his space, my hand dragging down to the back of his neck and squeezing, firmly but not so tightly it would cause pain.

“Talk to me darlin’.”

Parker shrugged and buried his head in my chest, his erection flagging slightly. “S-sorry.”

“Hey, Parker, look at me darlin’. There’s nothing to be sorry for. We don’t have to do anything. If you changed your mind, or want to stop at any time, just tell me no, or stop, or red, and I’ll stop. No hard feelings, no explanations. We can stop right now, I won’t be mad.”

Parker shook his head rapidly and pulled away from me. “No! I definitely don’t want to stop. I’m sorry for my reaction. I just panicked for a second.”

“Can you tell me why?” I kept my voice calm and confident, careful not to let any emotions come through and influence his answer.

Biting his lower lip, Parker gave me a half shrug again. “You gave me choices and I didn’t want to pick the wrong one.”

I tilted my head, trying to process what he was telling me. I was well aware that things were getting way too complicated and deep for what this was supposed to be, but I couldn’t just let it go, either. Clearly there were some deep seated issues here, and the Daddy side of me was screaming not to continue until I at least had an understanding of it.

“The wrong one? There wasn’t a wrong choice, darlin’. I know you don’t know me well, but I’m not one to set someone

up for failure. I promise I'd be 100% happy with any of those options.”

Parker didn't seem so sure. He had curled in on himself, much like he was when he first came down for dinner earlier today. His arms were wrapped tightly around his bare torso, shoulders hunched, and while he wasn't looking down, he couldn't quite look me in the eye, either.

“Yeah, ok, like I said it was just a moment.” He forced himself to look up at me and smirked, though it wasn't totally authentic, “Can we forget about it please? Maybe move on before I completely lose my erection.”

He was teasing, but still, call me a masochist, I couldn't let it go until I made sure he was truly ok. Something about the whole situation wasn't sitting right with me. Though he wasn't wrong; we'd both gone about halfway soft during this conversation.

Making a decision, I stepped back into Parker's space, close enough that it forced him to tilt his head slightly to look at me. “I'm all for moving on *cariño*, but call me a pain in the ass, I need a little more clarification before I do. What did you think I was going to do if you picked an option I didn't like? Because I know you don't know me enough to trust me completely, but I don't feel comfortable going further if you don't feel safe enough to know I won't hurt you if I get annoyed.”

Parker shook his head. His body was stiff and I could tell he was fighting the instinct to back up and leave. “No, it's not that. It was just something my ex did sometimes. Like I said, it was just a gut reaction.”

Yeah, there was no fucking way I could move on until I had found out more. I might be killing any chance of getting laid tonight, but suddenly protecting and caring for Parker seemed much more important.

“Darlin' I respect you not wanting to tell me more, and if you want to end this now, all you have to do is say the words, and I promise I'll stop asking questions. But I can't in good

conscious fuck you, or do anything else like that until I get a better idea of your headspace.”

Parker sighed heavily, a bit overdramatically. Yet he still didn't step back. “Really it's nothing. Fucking Collin ruining more good shit.” He was mostly talking to himself, but I was getting more information, so I considered it a win.

Finally Parker did step back. In fact he walked completely away until he was sitting on the edge of my bed. Still naked, with his hands propped behind him to hold himself up and his now soft cock resting between his legs, he looked like a wet dream; under any other circumstance. Now though, I just wish he'd close his legs so I didn't get hard again in the middle of a serious conversation.

“Collin—he would just—sometimes he liked to test me, I guess? He said it was to see how well I knew him. But basically, he'd give options, and make it seem like I had a choice. But if I picked the choice he didn't want, he'd lose it. He'd either start screaming that I was selfish and never paid attention to his wants or needs or he'd just go completely silent, ignoring me and refusing to talk to me until I got so anxious and felt so guilty that I'd apologize and beg him to tell me how to fix it.” Parker's tone was casual, like all of this was no big deal, and it made me wonder if he even realized he was in an abusive relationship.

But he kept speaking. It was like I broke a dam, and now Parker couldn't stop spilling his secrets. Realizing I was towering over him, I came and sat down on the bed next to him, but with enough space it didn't seem like I was crowding him or trying to demand anything.

“Sometimes, when he did that, he'd accuse me of cheating on him and would say that I picked the choice my other boyfriend liked,” he laughed bitterly. “Like I ever had an opportunity to cheat, even if I was that type of person. Which I'm not,” he quickly added with a side glance at me. I squeezed his thigh in support. “That would require not having him up my ass 24/7. Checking my messages, insisting I put GPS on my phone, checking my bank statements, God I was a fucking idiot.”

Parker stopped suddenly, burying his head in his hands. Suddenly, sex was the furthest thing from my mind. I slid closer to him so that our bare thighs were touching. I put my hand, palm up so that it was lying on top of both our legs as an invitation. His breath hitched as he stared at my hand before tentatively placing his inside. I squeezed, something settling inside me. I was trying so hard not to let my rage show. If I ever met this ex of his—I shook my head. That didn't matter right now. All that was important was Parker.

For a moment, we sat in silence, Parker holding onto my hand for dear life. My mind was racing as I tried to figure out what to say. I had plenty of opinions, and my instincts were to correct his opinion that he was stupid or at fault in any way for that fucker's actions. But was that really my place? The last thing I wanted was for him to push me away or to shut down if I said something he wasn't ready to hear.

Just as I managed to work out some kind of response, Parker choked on a sob and burrowed himself into me.

“Fuck, I-I'm sorry.” He half laughed-half sobbed, “I-I'm such a mess. I-I'll go. Just—”

I held him tighter. There was no way I was letting him go anywhere unless he specifically said he wanted to leave. Not like this. My insides were screaming to fix this, and I doubt I could ignore it even if I wanted to.

“Shh, you don't need to apologize baby boy. I'm not upset. It's okay. Thank you for telling me. You were so good, telling me what was going on. I'm here.”

Parker shuddered but didn't let go. Once he calmed down some, I maneuvered us so that we were lying down in my bed and he wrapped around me like a spider monkey. This was the last thing I expected when I invited him over tonight, but I found myself not caring. The draw I had to this man was insane, and if all that happened was us cuddling in bed, then so be it.

I kept Parker close to me, my hand rubbing soothing circles on his back as I buried my face in his hair. My own emotions were all over the place, but I did my best to keep

them in check, focusing solely on Parker. I was crazy. I hadn't even gotten off, not the second time anyway, and not much had happened. But being here, comforting Parker, was the most like myself I'd felt in years. It was like his mere existence reminded me of who I truly was. It was equal parts thrilling and terrifying, because I knew that even when he left and went back home, I'd never be able to go back to vanilla hookups in Asheville. Somehow, in just a few hours, Parker Miles managed to push my Daddy side back to the forefront, and it wasn't going anywhere any time soon.

# CHAPTER ELEVEN



## PARKER



My phone buzzing woke me up. I groggily stretched my arm out to the side, coming into contact with something solid and hard. A nightstand maybe. My eyes were still barely open as I found my phone. I didn't remember putting it on the side table, or—wait, was it plugged in? Yeah, I definitely didn't do that. I was still half asleep and some of my memories from last night were fuzzy, but I very clearly remember freaking out and having a damn meltdown right before getting laid. I also clearly remember not getting laid as intended and instead sobbing into a near stranger's shoulder until I must've passed out. Not my best moments.

Yet—despite my less than stellar impression, Mateo must've plugged my phone in for me. Warmth grew in my belly at the kind gesture. The light blinded me as I grabbed my phone. 4am. Lovely. There was a soft moan to my left, reminding me I wasn't in the bed alone. I threw the soft comforter over the screen, hoping to block some of the brightness.

The text left me feeling cold and hollow again.

Collin: Please, babe, can we just talk? I promise if you just let me say my piece, I'll leave you alone after that.

Fuck. Yeah no. I shut off my phone and turned towards Mateo, nearly jumping out of my skin to see his eyes open and watching me.

“Hey, darlin’. Is everything ok?”

“Yup, it’s all good. I’m sorry for waking you up,” I lied with fake cheerfulness. I felt bad lying to Mateo, but I wasn’t about to make this even more awkward. I was surprised he even let me sleep here after that disaster earlier, but I doubted I’d get more time than this.

Teo squinted at me and gently placed a stray lock behind my ear. “It’s ok. As long as everything is good.”

“Perfect.” I hesitated. I was suddenly overcome with need and was desperate to get my hands on Teo. I ruined our time earlier, but maybe, we’d have a second chance now?

I decided not to squander my opportunity. I combed my fingers through his thick hair and touched my head to his. He chuckled hoarsely, his voice still rough with sleep.

“Do you want to go back to sleep, darlin’?”

I shook my head. “No.” I looked pointedly down. The lights were off, but the room wasn’t pitch black. There was a light from outside that shined through the blinds just enough for us to see each other. And I could see how turned on he already was. I purposely slid my knee closer so it was just touching the underneath of his dick. I swore I could actually feel the cool metal against my leg. “Do you?”

Smiling widely, Mateo nipped at my lip. “Nope.”

Before I could even blink, Teo had me on my back and pinned to the bed, as he straddled me. I managed one strangled gasp of breath before his mouth met mine in a bruising kiss.

All my worries and panic disappeared. Of course it would, as my thoughts were consumed by Teo’s lips on mine. I wasn’t passive for long though. Once I had my wits about me enough to function, I wrapped my hands around the back of Teo’s neck, holding him in place.

He dominated the kiss, like before, and like before, it didn’t overwhelm me or disgust me. I hitched my hips up, reminding Teo that I was hard as fuck and wanted some attention elsewhere. He pulled away.

Unfortunately for my dick, it wasn’t just lust and dominance swimming in his eyes. There was some real

concern and doubt. Fuck. “Teo,” I whined before he even spoke. I had an idea of what he was about to say and I’d like to avoid that altogether, please and thank you.

“Parker,” he replied sternly, every bit the Daddy he alluded to earlier. “I’m all for this, but I just need to hear you say the words first.”

“What words? Whatever they are, I’ll say them.” I could tell I amused him, and he leaned down and gave me a chaste kiss.

“What do you want to do now, *cariño*? We could continue just how we are now or we could—”

“Fuck me,” I blurted before he could finish. “Please. Fuck me.”

Teo fixed me with one of the pseudo-stern looks that went straight to my cock. “Can I trust you to stop me if you need to? Stop or no will work today. Or if you’re familiar with the stoplight system, red works too.”

I was familiar. “I’ll stop you if I need to, I promise. Now, Teo, please. Green. Yes. All of the above. I need you.”

Teo growled, but finally, finally seemed ready to move forward.

“I’ll take care of you baby boy. I’ll make you feel so good.”

I’ll admit most of my experience with BDSM came from porn and some research online. Collin had said he was a Daddy when we first met, but even before I realized how much of a controlling asshole he was, I understood he was full of shit and what he claimed was a power exchange relationship was nothing of the sort. But in just this short time with Teo, I knew he was different. He was who I always imagined in my wildest fantasies. The face had always been blank as I tried to silently jerk off in the shower, but I knew I’d never be imagining a nameless, faceless entity anymore. Nope. That top role in all my wanking fantasies would be filled by Mateo Cruz for the foreseeable future.

Teo was kissing me again. But before I knew it, he was pulling away. With a small whimper I tried to chase his lips. That was, until he leaned over me, rummaging in the drawer, and came back with a bottle of lube and a condom. I shuddered as Teo palmed his cock, his fingers playing with the PA as he came to kneel in between my legs. He kissed the inside of my thigh.

“Knees up, baby boy.”

I rushed to comply, desperate to give him room.

“That’s it darlin’. *Mierda* look at the fucking sexy hole. Hold your legs up for me. I want to get a better view.”

Damn. I couldn’t get my hands under my knees fast enough. I wasn’t super flexible, but I sure as shit made that work. I wanted that sexy monster inside of me. Quickly. Teo palmed my ass, spreading me open. Then he shocked the fuck out of me as he buried his face in between my cheeks, and his tongue lightly grazed over my hole.

“Oh God.” My fingers were turning white with how tightly I was gripping my legs. And when his tongue pushed in, I almost lost it.

No one had ever rimmed me before, and I hadn’t realized what I was missing. But fucking A, I was addicted. I was also really glad I had cleaned myself thoroughly earlier. I almost didn’t, since you know, I was ghosted by my date. But at the last second I changed my mind, and I was feeling really good about my decision just about now.

“Teo—” I had no other words. The other word, the Daddy word, was on the tip of my tongue, but every time I tried to say it I choked on it. I didn’t know if it was nerves, the fact that I knew this would never amount to anything, or that it just didn’t quite feel right. But regardless, it wasn’t coming out, and since Teo didn’t seem to mind—

“Oh, holy fuck.” My thoughts were completely shut off as Teo used his thumbs to push my hole a little wider, piercing it even deeper.

Finally, when I thought I was about to come untouched just from that, he pulled away, his expression was total bliss. “Fuck, baby boy, I could make a feast out of you. “He palmed my cheeks, squeezing and pinching, just a little. I wiggled in his touch.

“I could do that all night, but I think you want more, don’t you darlin’?”

I nodded rapidly. “Yes. More. I need that dick inside me, please.”

He laughed, squeezed my cheek. “I got you, *cariño*. But first I need to stretch you out nice and good. Get you ready for this.” He squeezed his cock.

“I don’t need to be stretched, I’ll be fine.” I felt loose and sloppy from his tongue, but he squeezed my cheek again, clearly unimpressed with that suggestion.

He grabbed the bottle of lube that was lying next to me on the bed. It opened with a snick. He kept my attention the entire time, never looking away from my face as he poured a generous amount of lube into his hand.

“Can you lie on your stomach, darlin’?”

He may have phrased it as a question, but there was an air of authority to it that was impossible to ignore. I let go of my legs and flipped to my belly, immediately bringing my knees underneath me, exposing myself completely to him.

It was such a vulnerable position, yet with Teo I felt completely safe. It was insanity, but it felt right. And it was even more right as one big hand covered one of my cheeks and his scruff scratched my lower back as he kissed the end of my tailbone.

“Relax, baby boy. All you need to do is relax and let me in. That’s it. So fucking perfect.” I took one deep breath and suddenly a well lubed finger was pressing against my hole and sliding in.

“Look at you taking my finger so well. Can you take more for me baby boy?”

I groaned even as I nodded. Teo had pushed his finger in past his second knuckle, and between his spit and the lube it had slid in easily, even if it's been a while. Teo curled his finger and I pushed back into that glorious feeling. He pulled out, but I didn't have a chance to mourn the loss before he was back where he belonged and this time with a second finger.

Teo scissored his fingers, stretching me wide before fucking me oh so slowly. My dick was rubbing against the comforter, causing glorious friction. I began to slide my hand underneath my body to reach for my poor neglected cock, but was stopped by Teo's free hand.

"For tonight, that's mine, baby boy. I'll let you know when you can touch yourself. And it's not yet."

Why, oh why did that turn me on even more? I should protest, I should just do it anyway. But that spurt of pre-cum made it pretty fucking obvious how much I liked his words.

It didn't go unnoticed, either. Teo brushed up against my prostate with his fingers, just barely touching it as he continued his excruciatingly slow pace. "You like that baby boy? The idea of me controlling your orgasms?"

My cheeks heated but I still nodded into the comforter. No point denying it. "Y-yes."

"Good boy. There's nothing wrong with that. Nothing wrong with liking someone to take the decision from you." Teo pulled out one final time, and when he pushed his fingers back in there were three of them.

I groaned obscenely and pushed back, unable to help myself. I felt so full, yet not enough. I still needed more.

"And if you hadn't noticed, I fucking love the idea of taking control of your orgasms. For tonight, at least." He added that a little late, but I didn't get to analyze or freak out because Teo removed his fingers I heard the tearing of the condom wrapper. By the time the words made sense in my brain, something hard was pushing up against me. His piercing?

Ohhh— oh yeah, that was his piercing alright. Teo gripped my hips in a bruising hold as he pushed in steadily. I felt every one of those fucking piercings as he went in, even through the condom. I never thought I had a piercing kink before, but after this? He wasn't even halfway inside me and somehow I already knew Mateo was going to ruin every other guy for me. Eh, I guess I'll just have a relationship with my hand from now on. It would be worth it.

Teo leaned forward and kissed my neck, even as he continued to push in. How was he not all the way in?

“Teo—”

“Does that feel good *cariño*? Are my piercings driving you crazy?”

I could tell he already knew what they were doing. “Ugh, yes. I never felt anything like it. So fucking full.”

“You look so sexy like this, baby boy. Stuffed full of my cock. You're so fucking tight, it feels amazing. So perfect, darlin'. So right.”

His words got to me nearly as much as his dick did. And I needed him to move and now. I wanted to touch myself so badly, but for some reason I just couldn't get myself to do it. Teo told me not to, and now I had to wait. It sounded crazy but it would've been wrong to touch myself now.

“Please, Teo, I need you to move.”

Teo licked the edge of my ear before biting down lightly. That little bite of pain nearly did me in. I could no longer wait, and pushed back.

“Eager are we?” But thank fuck, Teo began to move. Slowly at first, but sped up quickly.

Nearly all his body weight was pressed against mine, which made it even more perfect. I began meeting his thrusts, pushing back, and inadvertently humping the bed. There had to be a wet spot on the sheet, but I didn't care. I'd offer to wash his sheets or something. It was worth it.

Teo's hands slid from my hips to trap mine up above my head, his fingers intertwined with mine. I turned my head, my focus on the muscular arm holding me in place as he picked up his cadence, fucking me with quick thrusts that kept dragging along my prostate.

It was too dark in the room to make out his tattoos, but the patterns went all the way down to his wrist and distracted me for a moment. But then Teo pulled all the way out and then slammed back in, burying himself all the way in with one thrust.

“Oh, fucking A!”

Teo's body shook; was he laughing? “That got your attention, darlin’?”

“Ugh, yeah.”

Teo did it again. And then again.

I was near tears with desperation. The bed wasn't cutting it anymore. I needed to touch myself, or Teo needed to touch me; I wasn't picky. But he still had my arms pinned above me. And don't get me wrong, I kind of fucking loved that but—Teo pegged my prostate directly. I cried out, unable to hold it in anymore.

“Teo, please, touch me! I-I need you. I need to cum. Teo!” Was I whining? Most likely. Did I care? Nope, not even a little bit. If it gave me permission to come, I'd do anything.

Teo sounded amused. “I love the way you say my name when you're begging, baby boy. You sound so needy and desperate. It's so unbelievably sexy. Everything about you is so sexy. Everything you do turns me on. I think I could listen to you beg all day.”

Teo slowed down slightly, with two long drags, allowing me to feel all his jewelry. And then finally, when I was about out of my mind with need, Teo released my right hand, but I didn't get to move it before he slipped his hand in between my body and the bed and took me in hand.

It didn't take long. Just a few strokes and I was ready to shoot.



“Teo, I need to come.”

Teo growled, his pace speeding up. I could tell he was also close. His movements were getting erratic and his thrusts shorter. “Ask nicely, baby boy.”

Oh well, shit. I barely got the words out, “Teo, can I please come?”

“Yes, darlin’ come for me.” Thank God, because I was shooting before the second syllable of darlin’ came out of his mouth with just a hint of southern drawl.

I squeezed around his shaft, and then with a grunt, Teo jerked and began filling the condom with his own release.

My eyes closed as he collapsed, half on top of me. Neither of us moved for a long time, but I didn’t mind. I could feel him softening inside of me, but I was dreading when he finally slipped out. I didn’t want him to get up, to move over, or to leave me alone on the bed. If he let me stay at all. Fuck, what if he wanted me to go back to my own room? I had fallen asleep earlier and he was too nice to tell me to leave, but now that we fucked, he might want me gone— which was reasonable, sure. Of course it was. I’d be fine, I’d...

Soft kisses to my shoulder and arm ripped me out of my spiral. “Shh, you’re ok, darlin’. You did so good. Just rest for now. I got you.”

Mateo slipped out and I nearly cried from the loss. What was wrong with me? I received another gentle kiss.

“I’ll be right back, *cariño*. I’m just throwing away the condom and getting a rag. I’m not going anywhere.”

I still felt a moment of panic, but he was back before it could truly take hold.

A man of his word, Teo came back with a cloth and quickly cleaned me up. As he did, he continued to whisper sweet nonsense and praise and sprinkled my body with light kisses. I never felt so loved and cared for. And then, once he was done, he didn’t turn me away, or turn his back on me, like Collin used to do when he was done. Instead, Teo pulled me close to him, so I was back on my side, and out of the wet

spot. He molded his front to my back. His grip was tight and secure and just everything.

“That’s it darlin’. Get some rest now. I’m right here.”

And in that moment that was all that mattered. Despite the craziness that was waiting for me when I woke up, I drifted off, finally feeling at peace.

# CHAPTER TWELVE

## PARKER



As soon as I opened my eyes in the morning, two things became immediately apparent. One, I was definitely not sleeping on my air mattress, and two, there was someone lying next to me. I felt the heat of another body, and a body part, a leg maybe, was brushing up against mine. I couldn't quite bring myself to turn my head and confirm as the events from the night before really happened.

I was in Mateo's bed, wasn't I? It was a rhetorical question, because I hadn't been that drunk and I knew damn well I never made it back to my room. Ever so slowly, I turned my head, and sure enough there was Mateo, the sex god himself, lightly snoring next to me.

Last night seemed both like it was the longest night of my life and yet, only lasted seconds. Some of it would live in my memory and spank bank for a long time as some of the best moments, and others— were better left buried forever. Mortification blended in my brain with horniness, lust, affection and just pure bliss. It was hard to make out what was the strongest feeling. Because after that nightmare where I freaking panicked, we managed to still have the best sex I ever had in my life.

Anybody who saw my porn history wouldn't be surprised to learn I had a Daddy kink. Still, knowing I liked something and actually experiencing it are two different things. I didn't have a ton of experience outside of Collin, but it had always felt like something was missing, until last night.

Maybe it was all a dream. Between the stress from the texts and calls from Collin and all that wine, it only made sense that I conjured up the most magical sex dreams ever, right? Man, my sixteen year old self would be jealous as fuck. But no, Mateo was naked, and oh— so was I. And was that dried cum on the sheets? Yeah, ok, I guess this wasn't a dream.

The panic started to set in then. What was going to happen when he woke up? He hadn't seemed upset about my panic attack earlier during our late night fuckfest, but things sometimes look different in the morning light. What if he looked at me with disgust? Or thought I was pathetic? Or worse, pity. I couldn't handle that.

And even if he didn't reject me for being a fucking shit show, it didn't mean he still wouldn't want me out of his space and his face immediately. Last night he had said I was the first man he ever brought back here, but was that really true? There was no way. He had to be saying it just to make me feel better. But it didn't feel like a lie.

And even if it was true, what did it mean? This was just a one-night stand, wasn't it? It had to be. I'd be on my way back to New York in a few days, and Mateo would move on and find another guy to warm his bed. One who was much more attractive than I was and wasn't such a walking disaster. No, I would take it for what it was. A really fabulous night and the best sex of my life, and then I'd enjoy the rest of my weekend before going back to the city and working on getting my life together. In fact, it would probably be better for both of us if I snuck out now. I'd take a shower in my room, and then spend the rest of the trip trying to avoid Mateo. Totally possible.

“Where are you going?”

I froze as Mateo's arm snaked around me, pulling me closer. Without consciously thinking about it, I pushed back into his hold, my ass grinding into his front. Was that? Oh yeah, he was hard. Fuck.

“Oh, um, the bathroom?” Somehow it came out more like a question.

Mateo chuckled and nuzzled my shoulder. “Are you sure about that?”

Scowling, I twisted my head to glare. “Yes, I’m sure.”

Amusement glinted in Mateo’s brown eyes. I never realized how expressive eyes that dark could be. There was something so alluring about them.

Laughing, he kissed my bare shoulder. “Alright, darlin’. Go ahead and do your thing. We’ll take turns and then I’ll make us some breakfast. I got the morning rush off today.”

I blinked, trying to process his words. He was going to make us breakfast?

“Why?” I blurted. That was a habit I really needed to kick.

Mateo’s face scrunched in confusion. “Why do I have the morning off? We take turns so no one is stuck opening and closing every day.”

Laughing, I buried my face in the pillow. Why was I like this? “No, why are you making us breakfast?”

That didn’t clear up Teo’s confusion. “Um, because it’s 7:00 am and I’m hungry? Why, do you have something against breakfast?”

“No, I love breakfast,” I mumbled into the pillow.

Mateo draped himself over me, his mouth close to my ear. “Then it must be that you’re afraid of my cooking. I assure you I can be a kick ass cook when I want to be.

There was a teasing lilt to his voice. The fucker was messing with me.

“You’re teasing me,” I whined.

Mateo kissed the base of my neck. And then again. A shiver ran through me from his touch. “Only a little.” But then he sat up and lightly touched my chin.

“Talk to me, darlin’, what’s going on in that head of yours?”

Did I have to? From the brief conversation we had yesterday before he fucked my brains out, I knew if I set my limits and told Teo no, he'd drop it. For some reason, I didn't do that. This was why I couldn't get involved with anyone right now. Apparently, some good dick, and I was putty in their hands.

I dramatically flopped back down on the bed. "I'm just confused. Isn't breakfast the morning after serious?"

Teo laughed and kissed my cheek. He stretched and climbed out of bed. "I guess breakfast could mean something more. Or it could just be breakfast. Don't overthink it, *cariño*."

Sure, easy for him to say. He wasn't the one who turned into a pile of goo every time he heard *cariño* said in that sexy accent.

"Just breakfast?" I asked cautiously, "Because I wasn't so drunk that I forgot what I told you last night about my ex. I can't do anything more than sex."

Teo grabbed a pair of sweats from the drawer and put them on without bothering to get underwear. I swallowed. Holy shit. All those memes about gray sweatpants weren't lying. It was almost more erotic than him being completely naked. I wrenched my eyes away, but judging by the smirk and the raised eyebrow, Teo didn't miss it either.

"I get it, darlin'. I'm breaking all of my own rules, too. But this is just a fun weekend. No commitment, no promises. Think of it as a rebound weekend."

I grinned, wrapping my mind around it. A rebound weekend. I could get behind that. This was already supposed to be my chance to breathe and get away from the dumpster fire of my life, but now I had the chance to do it with the sexy winery manager? I was trying hard to see the downside to this, but it wasn't coming to me.

"Breakfast sounds nice."

Teo's smile made it worth it. "Great. I'm craving some comfort food. Do you have any allergies or dislikes I should worry about?"

I shook my head. “Just no mushrooms and I’m golden.”

Teo shuddered. “I promise I will never make you anything with mushrooms. If I could ban them from the entire vineyard I would.”

I laughed. “Good. Otherwise I might have to rethink this whole weekend.”

Teo glared at me with hooded eyes. Within a blink of an eye he went from standing about a foot away from the bed and then he was on top of me straddling my hips.

He lowered himself slowly, his eyes never leaving mine, until his clothed bulge was pushed against my still exposed and hard one. He nipped at my jaw. “Do you really think you could ignore me for the next two days, *cariño*?”

Fuuuck. I tilted my hips slightly, attempting to discreetly rub against him. Who was I kidding? This man could eat nothing but mushrooms and I’d still be happy if he chained me to his bed for the weekend.

“No, Teo,” I said quietly, my voice filled with need.

He sucked in his bottom lip with a hiss while his dick very obviously twitched against mine. Damn, it was barely any friction, and yet I felt like I could burst at any second. From the bit we talked last night, I understood just what my submissive tone did to him. So maybe I turned those natural tendencies up a notch or two? Sue me.

Teo rested his forehead against mine. “You’re killing me darling. I’m close to saying fuck food and just eat you instead.”

I’d be very much ok with that. “So why don’t you?” I asked, a bit of challenge in my tone.

Teo lightly kissed my lips before pulling back with a heavy sigh. “Because baby boy, I just made a promise to you to keep things light with no strings. If I don’t get a little space, it will be very hard to remember that promise.”

And with those parting words, Teo climbed off me and headed to the door. “I’ll get started on the food, you can take



the bathroom, right there. The top drawer of the dresser has some sweats, feel free to grab a pair if you don't want to wear your clothes from last night."

And then Teo left, still shirtless with all those sexy tattoos on display, while I was left reeling.



"C'mon Bailey pick up the damn phone." I was sitting on the closed toilet in Teo's master bathroom. The water was running in the shower to cover the sound of my voice. Hopefully he wouldn't realize I wasn't using it. How did I go from happy, relaxed, and horny, to a breath away from a crisis in a matter of seconds? Though I was still fucking horny. I wish my dick would get the memo that this wasn't the time, and I was in the middle of a meltdown here. Unfortunately, the note must have gotten shredded somewhere along the way, because my cock was not coming down no matter what.

I stared at my phone as it continued to ring. If Bailey didn't answer I'd have to call Pierce. I wasn't even sure why I called him first. Maybe because he was the one who told me about the auction in the first place. Also, like Pierce I could always count on Bailey to be honest with me, but unlike Pierce, he'd actually be nice about it.

Finally, when I was about to hang up, because I only do voicemail for a work call, I heard Bailey's groggy voice answer.

"Who the fu...Parker?"

Fuck, "Shit. Were you asleep? I'm sorry I didn't even think about how early it was on a Saturday. I'll call Pierce." Pierce woke up at 4am without fail. It didn't matter what time he went to bed the night before or what day of the week it was. He was always up at 4am, because he was fucking insane.

"Wait!" Bailey practically yelled before I had a chance to hit the end call button, "I'm awake now, anyway. And if you're calling at the asscrack of dawn, something's up. So..."

what's wrong? Do I need to fly out and get you? Because I will."

There was clear worry in his voice... which was nice. We hadn't been super close, which was mainly Collin's fault, but the friendship was genuine. It was sort of heartwarming to know I hadn't lost everyone in the wake of my toxic relationship.

"Sorry, I'm fine, seriously. I'll bother Pierce. Sorry."

"Don't you dare hang up on me now! You're kind of freaking me out here. Just spill it."

Right. I was supposed to be working on that apologizing thing. "So I think I mentioned the sexy guy who runs the winery?"

Bailey snorted. "Yeah, a time or two. Or fifty."

I felt my cheeks heating, and I was glad Teo wasn't in the room to see me turning into a tomato, again. "Oh, whatever. I wanted to be clear just how hot he was."

"Believe me, you were. I could probably paint an accurate portrait of the guy solely based on your thorough description."

I decided to ignore his comment. "Well, so last night I may have drank one too many glasses of wine and...the sexy manager and I, we fucked." I said the words so fast and so low, they became one word. The stunned silence on the other end made it clear he knew what I said though.

"You did *what*? I don't think I heard you right."

"Oh, shut up. You heard me."

"Yeah I'm gonna need more than that. Like... all the details."

I was well aware I'd been in Teo's bathroom for a crazy long time, and I didn't want to waste all his water, so I shut it off and went to tactic two, turning on the fan switch. I talked low and quickly and prayed that Teo didn't come back into his room or go to check on me. I filled Bailey in on everything that happened over the last 12 hours or so since we last spoke, only eliminating the threatening texts from Collin, and my

little breakdown. Bailey didn't need to know about that. He seemed to have gotten multiple numbers and by the overwhelming amount of unread messages and missed calls I had this morning when I turned my phone on, he had no intention of stopping any time soon. I knew I was probably being stupid and I was going to regret this, but I'd been managing with the ostrich routine this far, and I was going to keep doing it until I was back in New York. Once I was back there then I'd talk to Pierce's cop friend, and likely my parents, and resolve this. But until then, ostrich.

"Damn! Not gonna lie, I was so fucking worried about you yesterday, but now I'm seriously jealous. I'm so happy for you, especially if this guy is as amazing and hot as you make him out to be."

"Yeah, but, did you hear the last part? When he called me baby boy and that it would be hard to keep things light? You heard that, right?"

I could almost hear Bailey's eye roll. "Yeah, I heard it. You repeated it like... four times. I mean, it's early in the morning, but that doesn't mean I'm unable to comprehend simple sentences. I don't see the issue though. He's an adult and well aware of the agreement. He can handle himself, and if he catches feelings, that's on him. He knows the risk."

"So you think it's ok I'm doing this? I don't want to hurt him."

Bailey was quiet for a long time, which was so unlike him, it made me nervous.

"Real talk, okay? You know I love you to pieces, but I honestly don't think it's Mateo you're worried about getting hurt. I think it's yourself."

I blinked twice as his words hit me right in the gut. My instinct was to deny it. And he was partly wrong, I did care if I hurt Mateo. He was the best thing that had happened to me in a long time. He was sweet, responsible, caring, and killer in bed. Why would I want to mess with a man like that? But I also couldn't deny I was terrified. I hadn't even considered the idea of catching any feelings besides lust until Teo said those

words. And now, yeah, I couldn't stop thinking about it. Could I get through with this with my heart intact?

“For a second I forgot how blunt you are.”

Bailey laughed, not offended. “Nah, you didn't. You called me for a reason—and I don't mean the part where talking about your sex life with your brother might be a tad awkward.”

That made me snort out loud. Fuck, I hope Teo didn't hear that. “Truer words. What should I do, Bails? I can't stay locked in his bathroom forever. He's gonna get suspicious eventually.”

“Yeah, it's probably too late for that.”

Damn it. He was most likely right. Again. “So, tell me what to do.”

“You know I can't do that, man.”

I sighed. Loudly and dramatically. “Fine. Then what would you do if you were me?”

“I'd let the sexy man fuck my brains out for the next few days, drink all of the wine, and have faith that it will all work out.”

“That sounds pretty nice.”

Bailey laughed. “Yeah it does. So, what are *you* going to do?”

Just then there was a knock on the bathroom door and I nearly jumped out of my skin. “Parker, are you ok in there?”

Shit. “Uh, yeah. Sorry. I'll be out in a second.”

“Ok...” Teo sounded like he didn't quite believe me. Which, honestly, made sense. I wouldn't believe me either. “As long as you're ok.”

“Yeah, I'm fine!” My voice squeaked, because of course it did. I was destined to be mortified in front of this man. Thankfully, Teo didn't say anything about that, and after a second, I heard his footsteps as he walked away.

“Oh my god! Was that him? You’re right, his voice is everything. Like seriously... with a voice like that I wouldn’t have kept it in my pants either.” And he hadn’t even heard him call me a good boy. Instant boner.

“I know, right? I gotta go though.”

“Are you gonna stay, then?” Bailey asked, his excitement obvious.

I sighed again. I had a feeling I was going to regret this, but I already knew I’d regret it more if I denied it completely. “Yeah, I’m going to do this. I’ll talk to you later. Thanks, man.”

I heard the beginning of a squeal before I disconnected the call, causing me to smile. Once the call was over, I did my business in record time, quickly brushing my teeth with a spare toothbrush I found under his sink and washing my face. I had slept in my contacts, again, so my eyes were dry and itchy. A quick glance through the medicine cabinet proved there was no solution, so I’d just have to deal till I got back to my room to change. Hopefully, I remembered to pack my case and solution. It was always 50/50 with me.

Like Teo, I hadn’t bothered putting my underwear back on, and just slipped on the borrowed sweatpants. They were a little loose, but the drawstring did the trick. My hair was a lost cause, so I only bothered with a quick comb through with my fingers before finally leaving the bathroom and facing my fate.

# CHAPTER THIRTEEN

# MATEO



“**E**arth to Teo. Hello? Are you even listening, man?” I blinked heavily, coming back to reality as Liam waved his hand in front of my face.

“*Mierda*. Sorry Li, I went into my own little world there for a second. What were you saying?”

Liam narrowed his eyes in concern. “Are you ok? You’ve been off all day.”

Yeah because I was thinking of the man with the tight little ass and big doe eyes who was currently off doing a walking tour of the grounds with Jake, and likely getting sloshed since Jake was heavy handed with the samples on a good day. And with someone like Parker who was so naturally charming without trying, yeah, I’d be lucky if he didn’t just give him the bottle and call it a day.

I shrugged, trying to sound casual. “Yeah, I’m fine. I just didn’t sleep well last night. What were we talking about?”

Liam grinned knowingly, his eyebrows waggling. “I bet you didn’t get a lot of sleep last night.” There was a lot of insinuation to his tone that I wasn’t a fan of. “You know how I have trouble sleeping sometimes? Well, last night was one of those times, and imagine my surprise when I saw another man leave the car with you. It was that cute, frazzled guest, wasn’t it? The one Jake’s giving a tour to?”

My mouth was gaping open, but I couldn’t bring myself to care. Liam and I were supposed to be having our weekly meeting where we catch each other up on everything that was

happening on our of the business and go over all the major decisions that we make together. However, the whole meeting had been a bust because I couldn't get Parker Miles out of my fucking mind. But now, I wasn't worried in the slightest about what crop was producing sour grapes because all I could think about was how Liam somehow figured out who I was with last night.

I had a moment of panic where I thought he'd judge me, or even call Marshall about my inappropriate behavior. Then I remembered that he met Jake when he was his guest with his ex-husband, who was still his husband at the time, and my worries evaporated. Still, I wasn't aware that Liam had even seen Parker, how had he picked him out?

"I'm going to take your silence and the shocked expression as admission," he replied, a cocky grin on his face. Liam was nearing fifty, but you'd never know it by looking at him. His skin was tanned from hours outdoors, but he swore by sunblock and some specially made moisturizer that I had to admit it worked, since he looked closer to my age than almost half a century. His nearly black hair was graying at the temples, but the baseball cap he wore constantly covered that, and his green eyes still sparkled with mischief like he was a kid. Only some laugh lines near his eyes gave any indication of his true age. And right now, he looked even younger.

Feeling like a twelve-year-old, I pouted and threw a balled-up napkin at him. Liam swatted it away effortlessly, laughing. "What are you, some super spy? How do you even know that?"

Liam's eyes lit up. "Because Melanie loves you like her own son, but she's a big gossip, and shared, as she called it, 'the spark' she saw between you two with my two gossips who in turn shared it with me." He shrugged and took a sip from his coffee, "And besides, I saw the two of you leaving your house this morning together in the daylight and put two and two together."

*Mierda.* I hadn't even realized that. Probably because my mind was still on that blowjob Parker had given me right by the front door before we walked out.



The morning had started off fairly PG. When Parker took an obscene amount of time in the bathroom I was worried. He was either sick or panicking. I wavered on whether I should check on him for a while. We weren't in 'invade his space and demand answers' territory. Besides I had a pretty good guess what had him panicked to begin with; my dumbass confession while we were lying in bed. I had just suggested and agreed to a casual, weekend fling, and mere seconds later I was straddling the man and implying I wanted more. Fuck, what was wrong with me? I was just glad the window in the bathroom was too small for him to fit through, otherwise I'd be worried he snuck out the back while I paced and fretted in the front.

Finally, I gave into my urges and checked on him. I couldn't hear what he was saying, but it was clear he was having a conversation with someone, and he seemed unsettled. I was sure that when he finally left the safety of my bathroom, he'd come up with some excuse and flee.

That didn't happen, though. He came out wearing nothing but my sweats. Even with the drawstring pulled tight to fit, hung down low on his hips. All his smooth pale skin was on display for me, showing off his thin physique. He didn't look like he worked out much but his belly was still pretty much flat, and that ass. *¡Dios mío!* I didn't think I had words in either of the two languages I spoke fluently to describe what that ass did to me. Parker had smiled shyly at me and then came to sit down on one of the bar stools while I gathered enough brain cells together to start breakfast.

I was feeling a little nostalgic, and wanted to show off; so I made chilaquiles. Unsurprisingly, Parker had never had them before, but he was game for anything, and when we finally sat down to eat, it thrilled me to see how much he enjoyed it. Not only was it one of the recipes my *abuela* taught me before she passed, but taking care of my lovers, even temporary ones, brought me a peace that was hard to describe.

We kept things casual and away from sex while we ate. He told me about the business he started up earlier this year, and a little bit about his new client. It was here that Parker truly

shined. He always seemed a little hesitant and unsure of himself, but when it came to his job, all of that disappeared. I had a feeling he could talk about it for hours if time allowed.

I told him more about Paradise, and the grounds, and briefly brushed over my childhood in Texas. He seemed to sense it was a sore subject, so we focused more on the present. I still wasn't sure where we stood, though. Once he helped me clean the dishes and we both got dressed, him back in the clothes he wore the night before, there was this awkward moment where it felt like everything stood on a precipice.

He hadn't mentioned anything about the conversation he had in the bathroom, or his feelings about our agreement for the rest of the weekend. I had no idea what was going on in his mind and where to go from there. That was until he got to his knees in front me, need and desire running through those crazy blue eyes, and asked to suck my cock. His feelings became real clear after that.

Fingers snapped in front of my face. Liam was laughing at me, thankfully not annoyed that I wasn't able to focus on work at all.

“Shit, I'm sorry. I'm all over the place. Do you mind if we put this off till Monday?” It went against everything I typically believed in to ask that. Work always came first. Always. I certainly didn't put dick, mine or anyone else's, above my job and this place. And yet—

“Don't look so guilty. Remember what I was like when I first met Jake? I had fucked up bottling and like a thousand damn bottles just exploded? Needing to postpone a meeting doesn't even come close on the scale of fuck ups to that.” I laughed feeling a lot better after that. It wasn't the first time something like that happened, of course, and probably wouldn't be the last. But it was definitely the largest explosion of wine I'd ever seen. It took days to get that all cleaned up.

That whole situation with Jake was a shit show and it lasted a while too, since he was still married to his asshole ex. It was amazing everything worked out the way it did, but now the three of them were happier than ever.

“Yeah, that’s different though. Parker and I—this is just fun. He’s going back to New York on Monday and I’ll never see him. I can’t be catching feelings.”

Liam scoffed. “And Jake was leaving with his husband. You at least know this guy isn’t married. He did that auction thing, right?”

I sighed, scrubbing my face with my hands. “Yeah. He does have some ex drama though.” There was definitely more going on than Parker was willing to share, and it was making me itchy. It was none of my business, I knew this logically. It didn’t stop me from wanting to know every detail so I could fix it for him. I pushed that out of my mind, and continued talking to Liam, “He made it clear he couldn’t do anything more than sex. And I thought I was fine with that. I mean I just met him yesterday. But—now I can’t get him out of my fucking mind. It’s affecting my work. That’s never happened before.”

“I get it man. All I can say is, from experience, if you’re this much up in your head about someone it’s worth pursuing. This is how I felt like for both my partners. It would have been so easy to give up on either of them, but you know I’m a stubborn fucker. And I’m glad I am. My life would’ve been so different if I let them go.”

I really didn’t have a response for that, so I said nothing. Parker had somehow burrowed so deeply into my head in such a short time, it was alarming. But I knew I’d have a hard time staying away.

“I just don’t know what to do. We ate breakfast together, and he gushed about my *abuela*’s chilaquiles, and the way his face lit up when he spoke about his business or told stories about his brother. It unlocked a side of me that I had buried since I was eighteen. It’s fucking terrifying.”

Liam was quiet while he digested my words. “At the end of the day, it’s up to you and Parker what you do. But if you continue the way you two agreed, have a fun weekend, and then Parker does leave and you never see him again, how do you think you’d feel?”

The air left my lungs and it felt like I was punched in the gut. The feeling made no sense for a practical stranger, and yet, “I think it would break my heart.”

Liam squeezed my arm, his expression sympathetic. “So then you have to decide, would it be worth it to spend the time you can with the guy, knowing you’re risking your heart, or play it safe and put distance now. That’s not a decision anyone besides you can make.”

With one last understanding glance, Liam pushed away from the table and walked out, leaving me alone with my conflicting thoughts and emotions.

And because I swore the universe had it out for me, the dining area was suddenly filled with a rich warm laughter that struck me right in the heart. I turned to face the entrance, only to see Parker entering the room with Jake. He had changed into a pair of dark jeans and a pale pink tank top that accentuated his arms. I swallowed hard, my gaze never leaving those arms.

And then Parker saw me. The smile that lit up his face, the smile meant for me and instantly erased all the doubt and worry I was having. I was totally sure that Parker Miles would break my heart before the weekend was over. And I was just as sure that it would be worth it just to have this small moment in his life.

# CHAPTER FOURTEEN

# MATEO



I walked up to Parker and Jake as they entered the main room. Parker seemed more relaxed, lighter than he had earlier. Though that might be mostly because of the regular sized wine glass that was half full in his hand, rather than the smaller sample ones he should have had.

“Hey,” I said casually as I approached them, my hands in my pockets. I so badly wanted to wrap my arms around him and kiss him hello. But that wasn’t what we were doing. I kept my distance and my hands to myself.

“Hi! This place is amazing. It’s so beautiful and the crops were actually pretty impressive. I thought I’d be bored during that part of the tour, but I wasn’t. And the rest of the grounds—I could probably just walk around them for days. Jake was telling me about all the changes you made over the last few years, it’s really impressive. You definitely downplayed all you do around here.”

I glared at Jake, who shrugged, not intimidated. Not that much intimidated Jake these days. He’d really found himself on the vineyard. The man was huge. He towered over anyone who met him, causing most strangers to be intimidated just by his sheer size. But once you spent a minute with the man you realized he was the sweetest, most loving and caring cinnamon roll of a human being. It was a shame that many people never got to know the real Jake just because of a gut reaction. Parker didn’t seem to have those reservations, though, and it thrilled me. He seemed to fit right in here.

Parker swayed a bit, a big goofy grin on his face. “How many of those glasses have you had *cariño*?” I asked, amused.

Parker shrugged. “I don’t know, a few?”

I arched an eyebrow at Jake. He grinned sheepishly. “Only a few, boss. He’s a VIP after all.” He wiggled his eyebrows playfully making it clear he knew what happened between us.

I rolled my eyes. There was no point going there. “What did you see darlin’? Did Jake take you to the creek?”

“Nope,” Jake responded instead, “I thought maybe you’d want to take him, if you weren’t too busy? I saw there were a few picnic baskets set up that weren’t grabbed from the lunch excursions. Y’all can make a thing of it. If you got time, anyway.”

Fucking meddler. But still... I already told Liam I was taking the day. I wasn’t in charge of the weddings, but I would have to stop by later to make sure the coordinator had everything they needed, but I had hours until then. All I had to do was put in one order and answer a few emails.

I turned towards Parker who seemed cautiously hopeful. “What do you say? I got about ten minutes or so of work, and then I’d love to take you to the creek if you want?”

He grinned, his eyes crinkling at the corner. “I think I’d really like that. I can wait here, if that’s ok?”

I glanced around the dining room. It was in between meals so it was quiet. Melanie was in the office. There was a couple eating at the table furthest from us, and one waitress that was also working the wine bar. No one was paying attention to us. Tipping Parker’s chin up slightly, I kissed him right on the lips.

“That’s more than ok. Why don’t you wait for me at the bar, and get a refill? I’ll be done in a few.”

He nodded, looking a little dazed. The kiss wasn’t anything special, but I had a feeling he wasn’t expecting any public display of affections, no matter how small.

I didn't respond, just lightly brushed my thumb across his jaw line. Parker gasped inaudibly. I took a step back before I took him right there. I gave a quick nod to Jake, who was grinning like an idiot, and slipped into my office so I could hurry up and get back to Parker.



“I can't get over how green everything is here. And open. It's kind of amazing.”

Parker and I were walking side by side on the dirt path that led to the creek on the back of the property. We weren't touching, but we were walking close enough that we occasionally brushed arms and fingertips. I wanted more, but I was holding the basket with the other hand, and I liked having a hand free since the path wasn't the smoothest, and falling flat on my face wasn't a good look.

“Must be a big shock for a city boy like you, huh?” I teased.

He shot me some serious side eye. “Oh shush.” Then he shrugged. “I do like it though. I used to go camping all the time in high school and college and I miss it sometimes. Being here now really is reminding me how much I enjoyed being away from everything.”

He suddenly sounded so sad that I couldn't take it anymore and squeezed his hand. Parker stiffened for a second before relaxing. “What made you stop?”

Parker shrugged and focused down on the uneven path. “Collin, my ex. He hated camping. Or anything outdoors, really. It became more of an aggravation than anything else, so I just sort of stopped.”

I wasn't sure what to say. Everything Parker let slip about this asshole made me hate the guy a little more. “Well, anytime you wanna get away, you know where to find me.”

Shit. Shit. I didn't mean to say that out loud. *Casual, Teo. Don't freak the guy out by talking about the future and trips to*



*visit.*

Thankfully, Parker didn't seem freaked out. He has a wistful glint to his eyes, but he gave me a crooked smile. "Maybe I'll take you up on that."

Damn, I wanted that more than I'd like to admit.

We were nearing the creek, so I skillfully changed subjects, jerking my head to show the rays of light that were peeking through the trees as the covering began to thin.

"There it is. Paradise Winery's best kept secret." The bubbling creek finally came into view.

"Wow," Parker whistled. "No wonder you guys use this as a romantic picnic spot. It's picturesque as fuck."

I snorted, completely taken off guard by his words. While Parker was definitely all Yankee, as my friends back in Texas would've said, his accent wasn't as strong as some of those guys you see in TV and movies. In that moment, though, he sounded every bit the New Yorker I knew he was.

"That's what we should put on the website. Come to *Paradise Winery*. It's picturesque as fuck."

Parker grinned. "Trust me, I could make that work."

The way he spoke with such passion and confidence about his job, I had no doubt he could. I led Parker down to the edge of the creek, right in between two flourishing beds of flowers, and put the basket down. "Are you hungry, darlin'? Or do you want to get the tour first?"

Parker gave me a goofy grin. "Tour, please. Oooh, can we go in the water? It's hot as balls out here."

"We didn't bring towels or suits," I reminded him gently, but a plan was already forming in my mind. "But— it's quiet this time of the afternoon. There will be no tours coming through, and this is still on private property, so we don't have to worry about outsiders either. We can't skinny dip," I added quickly as I saw his eyes widen even more than usual, "We can strip to our underwear though," I raised an eyebrow. "Provided you're wearing them."

Parker's cheeks flushed that sweet red as his tongue peeked out between his teeth. "I-I'm wearing them."

A thrill ran through me as I stepped into Parker's space. I did a quick mental rundown making sure we'd be ok. I might be lust drunk and not thinking clearly, but the integrity and stability of *Paradise* still came first. I ran through every possibility in my head, but I couldn't think of anything that would make this go wrong; as long as we kept our underwear on.

The man watched me with hooded eyes as I came within only inches of him, my hands finding his hips. I touched his lips, my tongue teasing at the seam, but not completely entering.

"Hmm, I think I need to check, just to be sure."

Parker's nose crinkled adorably at my cheesiness, but we were close enough that I could feel all of him, and it certainly didn't turn him off.

"That's a good idea," he replied softly, his voice so quiet I could barely hear him over the babbling of the creek, "I am forgetful sometimes, it's good to make sure."

Grinning, I buried my nose into his neck even as my thumbs slid into the sides of his pants. "You're perfect, *cariño*, that's what you are."

Parker snorted, his doubt clear.

"Don't worry, I'll prove it to you." I sucked lightly on his neck, not hard enough to make a mark and then down his collar bone. He tilted his head back, giving me more room. Parker lightly held onto my hip, mostly for balance than anything else. I made no move to remove his hand as I dipped my thumbs further into the band of his pants and pulled them down.

Sure enough, Parker was wearing black boxer briefs that clung to his surprisingly muscular thighs and tight ass beautifully. His bulge was obvious, but he didn't appear to be hard yet. I stepped back and took my time checking him out, making it clear how much I appreciated the man before me.

“Look at you baby boy. So damn sexy.”

Parker rewarded me with one of those lopsided grins. “I think it’s your turn.”

I cocked an eyebrow, but there was no way to hide my amusement. “Oh, is it now?”

“Yes,” he nodded seriously. “You wouldn’t want to get those pants wet. I bet that would be very uncomfortable.”

He was flirting, but he also wasn’t wrong. Wet jeans were the worst. “Wanna help me take them off, darlin’? They’re a little tight, I might need assistance.”

Our flirting and teasing was cheesy, but Parker seemed to be eating it up. If he continued to look at me like that, I’d pull out every corny pick up line and banter I’d ever heard of. Hell, I’d Google new ones. Whatever it took to keep him grinning.

Parker’s gaze was heated as he reached for the button, his breath hot on my neck. The moment felt significant for some reason as we slowly undressed each other down to our underwear. By the time we’d both removed our shirts and were standing there almost naked, I became aware of just how hot it was. Time to go in. Taking Parker’s hand, I kissed him lightly on the lips before gesturing to the water.

“C’mon, darlin’, let’s go swimming.”

His smile was contagious as he hopped up and down on his bare feet, clearly excited. I felt like a kid again when I dragged him into the cool water.

“Oh my God!” he screeched, once we were both waist deep. “Why is it so cold? It’s way too hot out for it to be this cool.”

I smiled at my city boy as he slowly got used to the water. “Creeks and brooks are usually colder because of the movement and they’re fed from the mountain snow melt. Plus this area is pretty covered.”

Parker paused, his eyes took in my tattooed torso hungrily, before his expression morphed from worshipful to

mischievous. Before I could register what that would mean, a huge spray of water was splashed into my face.

Parker laughed. By the time I wiped enough water out of my eyes to see, he was running away, splashing water behind him as he shuffled through the creek.

“Oh, I’m so gonna get you.”

He grinned over his shoulder, as he shot another spray of water at me. I covered my face and launched, grabbing for him before he could slip away.

“Come here, you little—”

Parker managed to dodge my first attempt to grab him, and I nearly slipped and fell face first into the cold stream. But I surprised him enough the second time that my arms wrapped around his waist.

“Ahhh!” He half laughed-half screamed, as I lifted him partially out of the water, twisted myself in a way that meant I’d probably be hurting later in the day, and tossed him into the stream.

He came up spluttering, but wasted no time tackling me. We played around like that in the water for a while, making me feel much younger than my 35 years. But at some point that kind of play time ended and another began, as somehow Parker ended up with his back pushed against a large flat stone that was half in the creek and half out, while I crowded him, our bodies pressed against each other.

“It’s not fair how hot you are,” Parker murmured into my lips. His hands were lightly running up and down my torso, tracing the outlines of my tattoos.

I grinned against his collarbone as I left a trail of kisses down it. He might like my tattoos, but I was fucking obsessed with his virgin skin. I don’t think I’d ever hooked up with a guy with no tattoos and no piercings. It was a novelty, and I couldn’t get enough.

“It goes both ways, darlin’. I’m fucking obsessed with you.”

Parker shivered. At first I was worried I took it too far, but he rubbed himself against me as he pecked light kisses against my lips. And then much to my surprise, he slid his hands down my soaking wet underwear and wrapped his fingers around my shaft.

“Baby boy,” I warned, quickly scanning our surroundings. There was no one around and we were hidden from the main path. Even if someone came down here, we’d have enough time to stop what we were doing before we were spotted.

It was a risk, one I typically wouldn’t take. But Parker made me want to risk it all.

Parker hadn’t moved. He had a tight grip on my cock, but didn’t move as he seemed to be waiting for my permission. His eyes were hooded as they met mine.

“Go ahead, darlin’. Just keep it quick, anyone can come down here at any minute.”

That seemed to get him going. He bit his lip and jumped into action, his hand going to work. “That’s it *cariño*, you can go harder than that. I like it rough.” I pressed my palm against his own still covered bulge. I could feel it twitching under my touch. I ground my palm into it, up and down, giving him some friction.

“Even covered like this, I can feel how hard you are. What is it that’s getting you that way, baby boy? Is it you jerking me off? Taking care of me while you stay neglected and hard and aching?”

Parker moaned and began pumping me double time. It felt so fucking good, and I was struggling to continue to string coherent sentences together. “Or is it the fact that you could get caught?” His dick twitched again.

“Oh yeah, you like that baby boy, huh? Do you like people watching, or just the idea?”

He knocked his head back, eyes closed, yet he didn’t stop his task. “The idea of it. T-that maybe we could get caught.”

I grinned and cupped the side of his face with my free hand. “I like that too, darlin’. Can you imagine if someone

came down the path now? Maybe one of the guests. I would see them, but I wouldn't let you know. I'd just let you keep doin' your thing until they walked right up to us and could see just how filthy we are."

Parker groaned again, and began thrusting his hips into my palm. It was clearly not going to be enough for him, but I didn't stop him either. I'm not sure I could if I tried.

"Or maybe you wouldn't even stop. Maybe they'd stand right there and watch as you took care of me. I bet it would turn you on so much. Right baby boy?" Parker nodded rapidly, clearly lost in the fantasy. "Would it make you so horny that you'd come like this? Untouched and in your pants?"

"T-teo, please." He was desperate, and so was I. I had pushed down my underwear so I was exposed now, but I had tilted myself in a way that no one besides Parker and I could see, just in case. I was close, though. Sometimes guys I hooked up with struggled with my piercings, making it uncomfortable. But not Parker. It felt so fucking perfect, and it wouldn't be long.

"Please what, *cariño*?"

"Please let me come."

My words got caught in my throat. We only briefly mentioned it, and that was through dirty talk, so I was taking a risk. But it felt so right, I had to take the chance.

"Is that something you'd like, baby boy? For me to control when you can orgasm this weekend?"

He nodded rapidly, looking like a bobble head. "Yes. Yes. Please. Teo. I need more."

I nipped at his jaw. "You have a choice, darlin'. I can make you come now, with my hand, or you can wait till tonight, and come on my cock. Which one do you want?"

It wasn't until after I gave him the option that I remembered what happened last time I gave him choices. Luckily, Parker didn't react like that this time. He didn't even hesitate. "Your cock! I want your cock, Teo!"

The words took me over the edge, and then I was shooting my load all over his hand. Fuck, I felt like a horny teenager again.

“Such a good boy for me, darlin’. I promise I’ll take care of you tonight.”

Parker smiled, a little dazed, like he was the one who came. Once I was spent, he lifted his hand to his mouth, and without breaking eye contact, began licking up my release.

I hissed. “*Mierda*. You’re gonna get me hard again.”

His eyes lit up from the mild praise. He ate up praise like it was his last meal, and I was all too happy to be the one to shower him with it.

Once his hand was clean, he glanced around. Satisfied no one was there, he ducked down into a half squat and began licking my soft dick clean.

I found myself fisting his hair, my head tilted back. He was being extremely gentle, probably so it didn’t stimulate my oversensitive cock, but still. Just the action itself was turning me on.

When he was satisfied it was clean, Parker stood up and wiped his face with the back of his hand. He was still hard, but didn’t even attempt to touch himself.

“Thank you, darlin’. You’re so good to me. That felt fucking fantastic.”

Parker rewarded me with one of those lopsided smiles and his shining blue eyes. “Thank you, Da-Teo.”

*Mierda*. Was he about to call me Daddy? I tucked myself back into my wet underwear, even though it felt uncomfortable, and stepped closer so I was completely crowding the man.

“You can call me Daddy, *cariño*, if that’s what you’re comfortable with.”

“I-is that what you’re usually called?”

I shrugged. “I’m not that particular on what I’m called. It’s more actions that matter than titles. But I have been called Daddy before, yes. And also Papi. But if you’d rather call me Teo, that’s completely fine. No pressure.”

Part of me hoped he’d stick with Teo. I’m not sure I could hear him call me Papi or Daddy with that New York accent and not completely tip over the ledge from lust to like. More than like, really. The ‘like’ ship sailed yesterday. The other part of me was desperate to hear those words from his lips. I just knew it would be ten times more meaningful than it ever had been in the past, and I wouldn’t feel whole until the moment he called me that. It would also make it ten times harder when he left.

I waited patiently as Parker had some internal debate with himself. I did my best to keep my emotions in check so he wouldn’t be influenced by me.

And then finally, he smiled. “If you saw my porn search history, you wouldn’t be questioning what I wanted to call you. I might be awkward as fuck, and gave up on ever getting what I wanted, but the desire has always been there.” Parker paused, causing me to hesitate. Should I say something, or did he have more to say? His met my eyes and finally started speaking again. “Well, I don’t know about you, Papi, but I’m starving. And desperate to get back so you can fuck me. So what do you say about getting to that picnic now?”

Then Parker shot me a flirty smirk before slipping out of my grasp and heading back to dry land, leaving me alone in the water, and floundering as the world as I knew it rearranged itself.



# CHAPTER FIFTEEN

## PARKER



“This really is delicious,” I told Teo for the fifth time, around a bite of fried chicken. “You really make everything here on site?”

We were sitting on the bank on a thick blanket, eating the most delicious southern picnic I’d ever had. Not that I had a ton of experience with southern picnics, but still. Most delicious. We had ditched our soaking wet underwear, tucking them under the blanket in case anyone came by, and were just wearing our pants, nothing underneath. I had thrown my t-shirt back on, feeling a little self-conscious, and also wanting to cover my love bites. Teo, though, was still in all his shirtless glory, not at all embarrassed or uncomfortable.

He laughed, his tone rich and husky. “Not me personally. But yeah, we have a chef that makes everything we serve at the vineyard, including for these picnics. Her fried chicken is a personal favorite though.”

“Yeah I can see why.” I eyed his still naked torso pointedly, “Though how you still look like that’s a mystery.”

Teo shot me a flirty grin. “Lots and lots of time in the gym.”

Yeah, no thank you. I never understood people like that. “I’m surprised it’s not just from mind-blowing sex all the time.” Even as I said the words, I wished I wouldn’t have, because I really didn’t want the answer. Obviously I had no right to be jealous, but depending on his answer, I might be.

But he just smiled softly. “Ha. Nope. I told you I don’t ever do this, and I wasn’t kidding. I tried to get to Asheville about once a month but that’s it.” His expression turned serious. “You’re special, Parker. Even if this is just for the weekend, this is by far the most meaningful sexual experience, or hell, closest thing to a relationship I’ve had in years.”

I tried not to think too much about the “if” in that sentence. It was just for the weekend. It had to be. I couldn’t get ahead of myself and let my feelings get the best of me. I was still having a hard time believing him every time he talked about how special this weekend was to him. Teo was perfect. How he wasn’t locked down was unfathomable. Maybe the Daddy thing made it a little harder to find the right partner, but there were kinky people in Virginia, weren’t there?”

“I’m sorry.” I wasn’t sure what else to say.

Teo cocked an eyebrow. “Nothing to be sorry for. Mostly my choice. My focus was on the vineyard and building my life. Developing attachments outside of that just seemed like asking for trouble and drama. And for a long time, that was all I needed.”

Something about the way he phrased it had me pausing. “And now?”

Teo shrugged. “And now? Well, you’ve changed me, baby boy. I don’t think I could settle for meaningless sex anymore.”

Fuck. What the hell was I supposed to say to that? Part of me was fucking joyful hearing that. It was hard to imagine that I was special enough to change someone’s entire outlook on their love life, but it felt amazing to hear. All those years with Collin, and I’d never felt as special as I had in the last twenty four hours with Mateo.

I was also feeling a little bitter, if I was being honest. I didn’t want Teo to be alone for the rest of his life, but my brain wouldn’t even let me imagine anyone but me in the role of his partner.

My cheeks were heated with embarrassment, and I had no idea what to say, so I busied myself with the homemade potato

salad I had left on my plate. It was nearly as good as the fried chicken, and that was saying something.

My phone started to ring. I was still lost in thought and imagining a world where I was actually good enough for Teo and we could work longer than this weekend to be nervous about who was calling. That was until I saw it was Pierce. He knew what was going on, so there was no way he'd be calling if it wasn't an emergency.

I shot Teo an apologetic look as I answered the call, full of dread. I was imagining the worst, like something happened to our parents, or he got in a car accident or...

"Hello?"

"Parker, is it safe to assume you didn't destroy the fuck out of your apartment before you left?"

I blinked, trying to make sense of Pierce's words. He was pissed, and sounded a little out of breath, which I thought was impossible for him. No one I knew was in better shape than him. Yet, it seemed that way now.

"Um—" Nothing intelligible was coming out because I couldn't grasp what he was saying.

"Parker," Pierce snapped, all of that patience he usually had with me gone. "Your apartment. What did it look like when you left?"

"Uh—normal?" I glanced at Teo. He was watching me with concerned eyes, not even pretending not to be listening. Suddenly my brother's words began to become clearer. "Wait, are you in my apartment?"

"Yes," he replied, sounding exasperated like I was apparently supposed to know this, "And it's fucking destroyed, P. I would've said you were robbed, but since it was fucking empty to begin with, I'm gonna go with just trashed."

I dropped my plate to the blanket and scrambled to my feet. I needed to think, to understand what the hell was happening.

“Why are you in my apartment?” Ok, that wasn’t the most important thing, but it was what my mind latched on.”

Pierce made an annoyed sound in the back of his throat. “Really P? That’s what we’re focusing on?”

“Pierce, please,” I begged desperately. Usually he was the one I could count on not to get frustrated when I didn’t necessarily process everything the way most people did. But I guess it was understandable if he was upset.

“Ugh. Sorry. Yeah, Mom asked if I could pick up the air mattress from you because Aunt Gina was visiting tonight. Of course she didn’t know you were still sleeping on it, but I figured that I’d just get you a fucking bed rushed delivered or some shit. But when I walked in, I came into this shit show. P—this is bad.”

It was hard to imagine how bad it could be. The apartment was barren, and the only thing of importance, my computer, was with me.

“I called my buddy who’s a cop. You’re gonna have to file a report, and probably press charges.”

“Charges?” None of this made sense.

It was getting hard to breathe. How was this happening? Who would have broken into my apartment? Was it just a thief who got pissed when there was nothing of value? I was nobody. There was no reason for anyone to break in, let alone destroy stuff.

Suddenly someone was standing directly in front of me, and warm steady hands were on my shoulders.

“Parker, look at me darlin’.” The soothing voice with the slight sudden drawl grasped my attention immediately, and I was staring at a very worried looking Teo.

“That’s it *cariño*. Can you breathe for me? Nice deep breaths? Good boy.”

“Parker?” My brother growled into my ear, “Who is that?”

“Um, Teo. He’s the manager. We’re um—we’re doing stuff.” Doing stuff? Really? What was I twelve?

“You know what, I’m not even going to try and tackle that right now. I need you to focus. Can you do that?”

“Yes?” It came out as a question. But since I wasn’t sure, that was the best I could do anyway.

“P, I’ll talk to my buddy when he gets here and handle this, but he’s gonna need to know if you want to press charges, and I think you should.”

“Charges against who? I don’t have cameras.”

“You don’t need cameras. He fucking left a note.”

Nothing was getting clearer. Why would a thief leave a note?

“Who left a note?”

“Fucking Collin. This was Collin!”

Collin? No, that didn’t make sense. There was no way. And besides, that was so unlike him. Stooping to anything that resembled manual labor, including destruction of property was beneath him. “But I changed my locks.”

“Yeah, well, he found his way in.”

The phone slipped out of my hand as I collapsed onto the grass below me. I don’t get it. Why would he do that? Why wasn’t he leaving me alone? He broke up with me. He cheated on me. He was the one who spent years putting me down, and gaslighting me into believing I was the shittiest boyfriend and person. But it was supposed to be over now. Why wasn’t it over?

There was warmth against my skin again. Teo’s hands. Somehow I was sure I’d recognize them anywhere. “Darlin’ can I speak to whoever is on the phone?”

I nodded absently. I didn’t know why Teo would want to speak to Pierce, but someone probably should, and I wasn’t sure that could be me.

“My brother,” I informed him quietly.

Teo smiled and kissed the top of my head. “Good boy, thank you.” I watched absently as he picked the phone up from

where it fell face down on the ground. I could hear Pierce screaming into the line and flinched. Memories were crashing down around me, making it hard to stay present.

“Hello? This is Teo. Yes, your brother and I are spending time together this weekend. I understand that this is none of my damn business, but you’re upsetting Parker to the point where he nearly had a panic attack. I may not have a right to get involved in personal business, but I also won’t just stand around and do nothing while your brother can hardly breathe.”

Fuck. What was happening? Teo and Pierce could not be fighting right now. That was the last thing I needed. I forced myself to stand back up and walk the few feet to where Teo was having the calmest verbal sparring match I’d ever heard. He wasn’t yelling, he didn’t even sound mad. But he wasn’t backing down either, and Pierce wasn’t the easiest person to stand up to, even on the phone.

I managed to get close enough to touch Teo’s shoulder. His head snapped towards me, concern in his gaze. I didn’t say anything, but just gestured towards the phone. I didn’t take it when it was offered to me but instead put it on speaker.

“Pierce?” I hated how weak my voice sounded. “It’s ok. Just talk. Teo can hear what’s going on.” I didn’t tell Pierce how badly I wanted to just walk away and let the two of them handle it. Because that was crazy. Teo was a virtual stranger. He should just leave now and let me deal with my crazy on my own. Instead, he found my hand and held it tight.

I squeezed hard, using it as my lifeline. Pierce grumbled, clearly unhappy with me not sending Teo away, but whatever. I needed something right now, and however unfair it might be, that was Teo.

“Fine, whatever. We will talk about this later.” I groaned, dreading that talk. “My friend will be here in a few minutes. What are we doing, P?”

“Is it really that bad?” I asked again, finding it hard to believe. “And you’re sure it’s Collin?”

Teo's eyes flicked up. I couldn't remember if I ever used my ex's name when I briefly talked about him, but judging by the recognition, he must've known who we were talking about.

"Bro, the walls, the carpet, the fucking air mattress, all destroyed. Every dish is broken. Any food you had in the fridge has been dumped around the place and smeared on the walls. I could keep going on, but—" But he was afraid it was too much. And he was probably right. "It was definitely fucking Collin. I'm not reading the note out loud, I'm sure you'll see it soon, but if I find this fucker—"

I stopped him before he threatened Collin over the phone. Teo's eyes were blazing, and I was sure there would be questions later, but luckily he didn't ask now. He just held my hand tighter, and I relished that connection.

"You think charges will work? Isn't it hard to prove that kind of thing, even with the note?"

There's a knocking in the background before he could answer. "Hang on a second, that's probably Quinn."

I turned towards Teo while I waited for my brother to get back on the phone. I must've looked as close to breaking as I felt, because all the anger in his expression melted away in an instant. "Oh, come here baby boy. I got you." He spread his arm, welcoming me in. Maybe I really was pathetic like Collin always said. I probably was too dependent, and I did rely on other people too much. All of those things certainly felt true right now. And even so, even with my self loathing bubbling to the surface telling me to handle my own shit, I jumped right into that welcoming embrace and buried my head into the hard muscle of Teo's pec.

"Shh, it's okay *cariño*. We'll figure it out."

A throat cleared on the other end. Shit. I nearly forgot about Pierce.

"Sorry," I muttered into Teo's chest, not really caring if Pierce and his cop buddy could hear me.

"Parker?" an unfamiliar voice answered, "I'm Detective Quinn Michaels. I'm friends with your brother, but I'm here in



a professional capacity. I know you're on vacation, but do you mind answering a few questions?"

"Sure," I answered, my throat paper dry.

The questions started off easy; when did I leave? Was I sure the doors were locked? Was there anything valuable that could have been taken? That kind of thing. Then he started to ask about Collin, and the questions got harder. I had no problem rattling off his address, his sister's name and where she lived. Though I wasn't sure of that address. I also gave his place of employment and his boss's name and any other identifying information I could think of. I was tired of giving him the benefit of the doubt. Some threatening texts and calls were one thing, but destroying where I lived? I couldn't just ignore it anymore.

They asked about renter's insurance, which thank fuck I had. That was one of those bills I set up on automatic payments and forgot about, but I was glad I did. It seemed like I was going to need it. Did it cover structural damage? Was that on me or the landlord? Fuck, I just didn't know.

Then Quinn asked the question I had been hoping to avoid, especially in front of my brother and Teo.

"Pierce informed me Collin had been harassing you through messages a few weeks ago. Has it happened since then? Has he tried to contact you in any way?"

Damnit. I could practically see Pierce shooting me daggers through the phone. He was gonna kill me when I got back. "Um, yeah. They started again."

As predicted, my brother wasn't happy. "What they fuck do you mean, P? When? Why didn't you say anything? What did that fucker say? I don't understand how you just let this happen? How can you just let him keep doing this to you. First for the five fucking years you were together and now, when you're finally away from that bastard, you're still letting him walk all over you—"

"Enough." I nearly jumped at the force of Teo's words, and I did flinch.

“Excuse me?” My brother’s voice was deadly calm. Great, this was the last thing I needed.

“I said enough. I understand that you’re upset, and it’s clear you care about Parker a great deal, but he doesn’t need you piling on him right now. And he definitely doesn’t deserve to be victim blamed.”

“Who the fuck do you think you are to—”

“Pierce!” I snapped at the same time Quinn spoke up.

“This is not the time for this, Miles.”

“Fucking A.” I could hear the frustration seeping through Pierce’s tone. Guilt surged through me. He was right. It was all my fault. I thought it would just go away if I ignored it, and now, this had happened.

“Parker, stay with us, darlin’. You’re ok. You’re safe. Whatever’s happening, we’ll handle it, ok?”

“We? You have nothing to do with—”

“Miles, enough. Let it fucking go. Can we deal with the problem at hand please?” Quinn said harshly. My brother mumbled something, but he didn’t just knock the guy out, which was surprising on its own. Who was this cop to him? No one talked to Pierce like that and got away unscathed, usually.

“Fuck. Sorry, P” he muttered, sounding genuinely guilty.

“It’s fine.” It really wasn’t. But I also understood it was coming from a place of love and he was legitimately scared for me.

Teo didn’t say anything, but he met my eyes, and it was giving me strength to continue. Quinn started asking thousands of questions again, and asked me to send him screenshots of all the new messages and share the voicemails.

Both Pierce and Teo were seething again by the time I was done, but neither of them said anything. My brother also didn’t snap at Teo again either, so I considered it a win.

“Thank you, Parker. I know this is incredibly difficult for you. I do suggest filing a restraining order as soon as you can. We’ll start the process of filing charges against him in the meantime. I know you’ve been ignoring him, and if Collin does message you again, I’ll ask you to continue to do so, but send me the messages right away.”

“Okay,” I responded, completely wrung out.

“I know this is hard, Parker. You’re doing extremely well, I promise. And I swear I’ll do what I can to have Collin legally charged. He may even face time.”

“As long as it stops, I don’t really care.”

Quinn was silent for a moment before responding, “I’ll do everything I can.”

“Thanks,” I mumbled.

“So what next? Does Parker need to come home?” Pierce asked. I held my breath, not wanting to hear the answer. I already dreaded the idea of going back to New York tomorrow night as it was, and now, the idea terrified me. I wasn’t ready for this little bit of paradise to end.

“No. I thought you said you were coming home tomorrow night?”

“Yes.” Unfortunately.

“That’s fine. In fact it’s probably better to be out of the state until we can find and arrest Collin.”

“Was there anything in your apartment that would trace you back here?” Mateo asked quietly. He hadn’t said much after that initial mini showdown with Pierce, but there was an edge to his voice that got me nervous. Was he worried I was going to bring a psychopath to his home? Not that I blamed him.

“I-I don’t think so. But, I’m not sure. Maybe I should just leave now? I don’t want to bring this to your home and business.”

“No!” Teo responded, just shy of too loud. “Sorry. But no, that’s not why I was asking. I was just going to ask if

Detective Michaels thought I needed to call the cops, just in case.”

It was crazy how relieved I felt that Teo wasn't trying to get rid of me. “I don't think he would know I'm here. Basically everything I had was either on my computer or phone and both are with me.”

“Still,” Quinn responded, “It's not a bad idea. Send me the address to the vineyard, and I'll reach out to local authorities and ask them to keep an eye out.”

“There's quite a few of them that frequent our winery with their families, I'm sure they'll be willing to spare a few extra minutes to check that everything is safe.” God I hated that I was causing all this trouble. Teo seemed genuine about me wanting to stay, but I didn't know... I was way more trouble than a weekend fling should be.

Everyone talked for a few more minutes, finalizing all the plans. I had checked out minutes ago, and it was about to be obvious if they didn't get off the phone soon. Finally, Pierce spoke to me again. “I'll let you go, P. Try to enjoy the rest of your trip and not stress out too much, okay?”

All the anger and annoyance at me was gone. I was sure we'd have words eventually, but he was back to being the concerned protective brother, and I was grateful.

“I'll try. Thanks Pierce. I'm sorry you walked into that.”

“Honestly, I'm glad it wasn't you. No one should have to see this done to their home.”

I swallowed hard. Pierce and Quinn took pictures but I asked them not to send them to me, not yet anyway. I wasn't ready.

“If anything else happens, let us know right away,” Quinn chimed in.

“I will. Thank you for your help.”

A minute later and finally the call was disconnected. I closed my eyes. I could hear Mateo moving around, and objects rustling, but I was too tired to open my damn eyes and

see. Was he leaving me here? I wouldn't blame him. I'm sure he was regretting every kind word he'd said to me and was trying to figure out a way to let me down easily. That was fine. That was better even. Cut the cord before I got too attached. Well, even more attached. How was it possible it had only been a day since I met this man? I felt like it had been a lifetime already? This wasn't normal, was it? But still, it would hurt a little less if he walked away now.

“Can you open your eyes for me, baby boy?” His words broke through my downward spiral and I was obeying before I even realized what I was doing.

Teo's dark brown eyes, filled with emotion, met mine. “Good boy. You're doing so well. We have to head back. Do you think you're okay to walk?”

I nodded, feeling empty. But I wasn't crippled. I could walk.

I was glad I didn't say the words out loud. Teo didn't deserve that. I didn't say anything at all, actually. The whole trek back, I just silently walked by Teo's side, holding his free hand and staring straight out ahead. I felt numb, and it was blissful.

# CHAPTER SIXTEEN

# MATEO



It took everything in me to keep my rage in check as I guided Parker down the path and back to the main property. My anger was pointless, and would only add more stress to the situation. I pulled out my phone and shot a quick text to both Melanie and Liam asking them to cover for me today. They'd have questions; I'd only called out twice in the 17 years I'd been here, but I also knew they'd handle everything without batting an eye. I just couldn't imagine leaving Parker alone right now.

He didn't say a word through the entire hike. It was a stark contrast from the lively animated man who flirted shamelessly with me earlier today. I wouldn't even recognize him as being the same person if I wasn't there to see the change.

Parker stared straight ahead, barely even blinking. I would be sure he wasn't even aware that I was here except that he clung to my hand with a desperation that I had rarely seen in anyone before.

I didn't bother heading to the winery, but straight to the gravel parking lot for the employees. For the second day in a row I was thanking the stars that I brought my car with me. I wanted to get Parker to my home and away from all the nosy guests and employees, but I didn't want him to have to walk any further than necessary. I had a feeling he didn't even realize he was walking at all, but all my protective caretaking instincts were shouting at me to get him to my home as fast as possible.

He didn't even question it as I guided him to the passenger door of my Jeep and helped him in. It wasn't until I started the car and drove off that he said anything.

"I'm sorry." He was speaking very quietly, but I heard them clear enough. My gut clenched, and I gripped the steering wheel tighter to keep from reaching for my boy. Because at the moment it was impossible for me to think of him as anything but my boy.

"Why are you sorry darlin'?" I struggled to keep my voice even, no annoyance or judgment in my tone.

He shrugged. "For all of this. I swear I had no idea he'd do *this*." Parker waved his hands, probably trying to encompass everything his bastard ex had done recently, or maybe ever. "I knew I couldn't ignore it forever, I just thought I could push it aside until the weekend was over. This was supposed to be about me, about us, and for once I didn't want Collin ruining something for me. I thought just a couple days wouldn't hurt anything, and then when I got back to New York, I'd figure it out. I swear I wasn't trying to bring this to your doorstep. I never imagined he'd do something like this."

Thank fuck we pulled in front of my house. I threw the car in park, unbuckled my seatbelt and turned towards Parker. I thumbed his cheek, and lightly wiped the one tear that was trailing down. "You have nothing to apologize for, baby boy. Nothing. I promise we can talk as much as you need, but can I get you inside first?"

He nodded his agreement, and I jumped into action. As quickly as I could, I got out of the car and helped Parker out. He was still so lost in his head he didn't even make an attempt to open his own door, which I secretly kind of loved, I just wished the circumstances were different.

Once he was out, I gave him a light kiss trying to stress that I wasn't angry or upset with him. That I wasn't blaming him for this. Parker reached for my hand and I couldn't stop the grin for how happy that made me. It scared me how much I wanted to be the one he reached for.



I quickly unlocked my door and ushered Parker right towards my bedroom. He stood in the middle of the room and looked at me confused. “You brought me back to your place? Why?”

I quickly stamped down my nerves. Did he not want to be here? “I thought you would be more comfortable here, but I can bring you back to the main house if you’d rather. I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have assumed.”

Parker shook his head back and forth so quickly I was afraid he would hurt his neck. Despite everything, he looked kind of adorable standing there with his ruffled hair and pink tank top. “I-I don’t want to go back to my room. I’d like to be here, as long as you don’t mind. It’s just—I know I took so much of your time up today, and you have to work.”

I stepped closer, but still didn’t enter his space. “I already texted Melanie and Liam. I have the rest of the day off. It’s just you and me, baby boy, unless you tell me you’d rather be alone.”

Parker tilted his head to the side, clearly struggling to understand. “But—why? Why would you do that? This was supposed to be a fun, sex-filled weekend, and I completely ruined it, and now you’re calling out of your job and taking care of me and—”

I cut off his rambling with a kiss. This wasn’t one of the light pecks from earlier, either. I gripped the back of Parker’s unruly hair with my fist holding him in place, and let him know this was exactly where I wanted him.

I controlled the kiss completely, from the way his head was tilted, to the force of it, and Parker let me. He gripped my shoulders, his nails biting into the skin, but I didn’t mind. When I finally pulled away, he was breathless, and his eyes were glazed with lust.

“You ruined nothing, *cariño*. I know you might not want to hear this, but all I want to do is spend time with you. If it’s having a picnic, great, mind-blowing sex—fantastic. And if it’s just cuddling in bed while you nap and regroup, that still sounds perfect. And, I know this might be hard for you, but try

to not say sorry. It's obviously ingrained in you to apologize. That's not something that can be fixed in two days, but please darlin', I want you to try. Every time you go to say 'I'm sorry' take a second and think, what am I saying sorry for, and is it really something that I did wrong? And if it's not, then try not to say it."

"And if I'm not sure?" Ugh this man. I kissed his nose.

"Then ask. I won't get mad at you or make fun of you. I swear. But darlin; it's killing me to hear you apologizin' for that bastard. Nothing that fuck twat did was your fault. That's why your brother pissed me off. I knew he meant well, and that he was just trying to deal with everything there, but to put the blame on you, was just fucking shitty. You couldn't control what his actions were. And from the little bit I know about this guy, I'm not sure if you reporting him would have stopped anything anyway.

Parker rested his head against my chest. "Yeah. Pierce didn't mean it. I think he's just tired of cleaning up my messes. Not that I blame him."

My heart was breaking, but I knew I'd get nowhere if I kept on about his brother, and if anything I'd push him away.

"Right now, I want you to stop worrying about that and let me take care of you. The cops are handling the business in New York. All you need to think about is how much I want you to be here, in my home and letting me care for you. Okay?"

"Are you sure?" His voice was so soft, so insecure it nearly broke me.

"Yes, baby boy, I'm sure. All I need you to do is tell me if you prefer baths or showers."

Parker blinked, clearly not expecting the change. "Um, showers."

"Thank you." I knelt down in front of him and quickly started to take off his shoes. My boy seemed so startled by the progression of events, he just let me. I kissed his ankle underneath his pants. I put his shoes to the side and then began

unbuttoning his pants. I slowly pulled them down. His cock was completely soft, showing just how much this situation was getting to him. I didn't think Parker had been totally soft since the moment I laid eyes on him.

"That's it baby boy. You're so good for me." I kissed both his thighs, carefully ignoring his dick. It wasn't the time.

Once his pants were removed, I stood and removed his shirt at the same time, kissing his treasure trail above his belly button, and then his sternum, as I did.

I didn't linger after he was naked. I just stepped back with one last kiss and began removing my clothes. I did it quickly before tossing both of our stuff onto my dresser. Parker hadn't moved, but he was watching me with hungry eyes. I grinned.

"C'mon, let's get you clean."

I led him into the bathroom and turned the water on, running my hand underneath the stream until it heated up.

Once we were both underneath the hot water, I grabbed a bottle of body wash and poured a generous amount right in my palms. Looking up, Parker's head was tilted up, his eyes closed as he let the water run down his face. His body was still rigid with tension, and I was hoping the shower would relax him.

His eyes flew open as I started to wash him. But I didn't stop. "That's it darlin', just relax."

Parker was quiet as I scrubbed him thoroughly. I didn't miss an inch of his beautiful skin. I took extra care around his cock and balls, but I did my best to keep it nonsexual. Once I finished, I kissed his shoulder.

"Turn around, please, baby boy."

Parker turned around without a word. I added more body wash before I started on his back. Things changed as my hand slid in between his ass cheeks.

"Do you think it's as bad as Pierce said? I mean the apartment was practically empty, how bad could it be, right?"

I paused, trying to work out what was happening. My fingers were literally in between his cheeks. Maybe I should stop? Parker answered the question for me by pushing his ass back slightly, letting me know he wanted me to continue. Okay then. I quickly switched to conditioner and gently pushed the tip of my coated finger in while I considered his question.

“I’m not sure darlin’. I don’t know your brother well enough. Is he prone to exaggerating or overreacting?” I wanted the pictures so I could see it myself, but I hadn’t asked. I had a feeling Pierce would have just told me to go fuck myself. I understood, especially after everything with Collin. I’d be hesitant if another guy was trying to force himself in and control things if this was someone I cared about, too.

Parker groaned dramatically and banged his head against the tiles. Even as he did, he pushed his ass back more, and I pushed my finger in deeper. “No, he’s not. Ugh. I can’t believe this shit. What if the landlord makes me pay for the damages? I wonder how much damage there is?”

I squeezed his ass cheek and then slid a second finger in. The dramatic sighs switched to ones of pleasure. “Later on, after you have some time to relax, and the cops have time to do their thing, we’ll give the detective a call and try to get more information. How does that sound?”

I curled my fingers, giving him a reminder of the pleasure he should be focused on now. Some of the tension finally left his body. “That’s it darlin’. Nice and easy. Try not to worry about anything but this moment and my fingers in your ass.”

I began to slowly pump my fingers back and forth. That wasn’t my initial plan, but Parker needed it. “Oh fuck. Papi, I need more.”

I sucked in a breath. He called me Papi again. I wasn’t sure if he even realized he said it, but still. My cock had stayed mostly soft, but hearing that word had it hardening a bit.

“Do you want another finger, baby boy?”

His ass shook involuntarily. “Yes. I need to feel full.”

*Mierda.* Plans shifted in my head as I slid out just to add a little more conditioner, before sliding two fingers in, and then eventually third.

“Ohhhh my fuck. Teo—”

I began to move my fingers, fucking him with them deep and slow, completely owning him. “That’s it, baby boy. Do you feel me deep inside of you? Am I taking care of you the way you need?”

Parker slapped one of his hands against the tile. “I feel you, Papi. I feel so full. So owned. I wish it was your cock.”

Fuck, that was a relief. If he was flirting and talking dirty to me, that meant he was finally letting go.

Unfortunately, the water was starting to get cold, and I didn’t want to fuck Parker in the shower. I didn’t want to fuck him at all. What he needed was a slow and deep love making, not a rough fuck against the shower wall. Don’t get me wrong, I was always here for that, but that was for another time.

I pulled my fingers out, despite Parker’s protests. “I know darlin’ but the water’s getting cold. Let’s finish washing up and I promise I’ll fill you again when we get out.”

He looked at me over his shoulder. “With your cock.”

Laughing, I pinched his ass, “Yes, baby boy, with my cock.”

He nodded once, satisfied. Then much to my surprise he turned around, his hole still clenching at the emptiness, and poured some body wash into his hand. I watched, completely surprised when his soap covered hands began massaging my pees.

He grinned saucily. “You’re not the only one who wants to take care of their partner. Besides, I’ll take any chance to get my hands on this body. Fucking A.”

I grinned, feeling pretty good about myself. “By all means, baby boy.”

Parker was just as thorough washing me as I was him. The only difference was he didn’t penetrate as he washed my ass at

all. I wasn't sure if it was because he didn't like it or he was afraid I wouldn't. I thought about telling him there were no limits but the water was getting cold and I wanted to get us out soon.

Soon he was done and I shut off the water. Before I knew it we were wrapped in the thick fluffy towels I'd splurged on, and Parker was pushed against the bathroom sink as we made out like teenagers.

I pulled off. "Bedroom, baby boy."

"Uh, it's so far away."

I nipped at his lip. "That's also where the condoms and lube are."

"Ugh fine. Bedroom it is."

The smile on my face was huge as I took Parker's hand and practically dragged him into my room.

Parker headed straight for my bed, before he could lay down, I quickly grabbed a couple pillows, putting one by his head and another where his hips would be. I planned on taking my time and taking my boy apart inch by inch and I wanted him to be comfortable.

Once I was satisfied, I gently nudged him to crawl on the mattress and get comfortable. I had to stop and take a moment to admire him, so taken aback by the man sprawled out in front of me. The only marks on his creamy smooth skin were the little love bites and bruises I left on him. The possessiveness I felt when seeing that was unreal.

Parker swallowed, watching me intensely. The moment was heavy, and normally I'd be trying to ease that, but this time I wanted all of that heaviness. I wanted all of the emotion right there on the surface, not giving one tiny fuck how much more that might make it hurt later. This wasn't about me. This was about Parker. He needed to know I didn't think of him as a chore or as a burden. I had a feeling a lot of people in his life made him feel like that, whether it was intentional or not, and he needed to understand how un-fucking-true that was.

I slowly crawled onto the bed, taking my time. Every movement was deliberate. I straddled his hips, running my hands up his still damp body.

“The things you do to me, Parker. You make me feel things I didn’t know I was still able to feel.” His eyes widened and I kissed him quickly before he could respond.

“I’m going to take my time with you, darlin’. I’m going to make sure you feel each and every inch of me. You’re going to feel so fucking owned. So wanted. You’ll never doubt yourself again.”

Parker’s eyes welled with tears and his breath seemed to catch in his throat. I was taking things too far, and I couldn’t be damned to care right now. Especially when those pouty lips parted and the most beautiful words I ever heard escaped them. “Yes, Papi. Please. I want to feel owned by you.”

Fuck.

My fingers curled in his wet hair as I attacked his mouth, losing all sense of control. Parker seemed to feel the same as me because his fingers dug into my shoulders and he wrapped one leg around my hip, bringing me closer.

“Fuck me, Papi, please,” Parker whispered onto my lips when I finally pulled away.

Thankfully the lube and condoms were still out from the night before. I quickly snatched the lube off the counter. “I’m already stretched,” he reminded pointedly.

I grinned. “I know, baby boy. I’m just gonna coat you up. I want my boy to be nice and sloppy when I take him.”

Parker groaned, his head flopping back. “I feel like that should be gross, but I want it so fucking much.”

I glanced down at his dick. *Now* he was hard. “Hold out your hand for me, please.” Parker did as I asked.

I poured a generous amount of lube into his, probably too much. “I want you to touch yourself. Show me how you normally get yourself off. But,” I added before he could move,

“you can’t come yet. Not until I do. We’re gonna go at the same time, darlin’.”

His eyes darkened and just the smallest tilt of his head indicated his agreement. “Go ahead and touch yourself darlin’.”

I’d never seen someone move so fast in my fucking life. I smiled as my boy took on his task with fervor. I spread his bent legs out more, climbing in between them. He was tilted up, giving me perfect access to his hole. After coating two fingers with lube, I slid them in easily.

Parker was right, he didn’t need to be stretched much, so once he was nice and sloppy I pulled my fingers out. He was watching my every move as he slowly jerked himself off. I doubt he was ever that gentle at home, but I figured he was trying to last like I asked him to. I grabbed the condom and ripped off the wrapper before slowly rolling it on.

I was always slow and careful with condoms so I didn’t tear them on my piercings, but now I was just playing with Parker a bit. He growled at me. It was adorable.

“Teooooo,” he whined, stretching out the last syllable.

I held my shaft in my hand but instead of doing what he wanted, I bent over him, dragging it along his skin. Leaning down, I brushed my lips against his. “Let me take care of you, baby boy. Let me make love to you the way you deserve.”

I nipped his lip and pulled back. We were both past the point of teasing by now. I knelt up, slid my hands so they were under his firm ass cheeks, tilting him up just a little more, and then slid in slowly.

Neither of us said a word until I’d pushed all of the way in. The fit was tight as he squeezed the life out of me.

I waited a moment, allowing him to adjust as I watched him continue to pump his own erection. Not once did he stop; not once did he look away. I knew he was ready for me to start when his free hand cupped my ass cheek and pushed trying unsuccessfully to move me.

I smiled. “Patience, baby boy.”



Clearly he didn't like that, but he didn't complain. I began to reward him with long slow strokes, making sure he felt every single inch of me, like I had said.

"Darlin' you feel so good. You're so fucking tight. Just a perfect fit for me in every way."

I held onto him tightly and never changed my cadence as I continued to shower him with praise. Parker was giddy with it. His hand seemed to have a will of its own, and he was pumping much faster now, his grip tight and rough. He was panting, and quietly cursing, trying desperately to get more traction, but I was holding him in a way that he couldn't move. All he could do was accept what I was giving him.

"Papi!" he practically cried after what seemed like ages of long and slow pumps. I knew he'd lose it if I didn't change it up. I tilted him some more and picked up the pace. He screamed in pleasure.

"That's it, baby boy. Do you feel me inside of you, filling you up? Does it feel good?"

"So fucking good! Papi, I'm close."

Fuck. "Slow down a bit darlin'."

He fixed me with his most unimpressed glare, but still Parker slowed down. Once I was sure he wouldn't spill immediately, I tightened my grip and began to speed up.

It wasn't long before I was just as ready as Parker was. "Alright darlin', come for me, baby. Come on my cock."

The words lit a fire in him and it was only a handful of pumps later that he screamed out his orgasm. His ass squeezed my dick so fucking tight that I was a goner. I tossed my head back as he milked me for all I was worth.

And then it was done. We were both left panting and covered in cum. I met Parker's eyes and I could see something shifted in him. I smiled and lightly kissed his lips.

"Thank you," he whispered, almost reverently.

"I should be the one thanking you, darlin'."

The moment was too intense, so I had to look away. I quickly pulled off the condom and tied it up, running to the bathroom before I said something I'd regret. I took a second for myself as I wet a washcloth. I needed to get it together. Parker needed me. He was likely to be overly emotional after everything, and I couldn't make things more complicated for him by letting my true feelings slip. I threw some cold water on my face and took a deep breath before going back to Parker.

He hadn't moved an inch. My boy smiled sleepily up at me as he saw me, and suddenly all was right in the world. I made quick work of cleaning him up, because I wanted to hold him. Soon, Parker was right where he belonged, in my arms, and I felt like I could breathe.

I had no idea what was going on with me, but I ignored it and snuggled as close as I could until we both drifted off peacefully.

# CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

## PARKER



I'd never really liked packing much on the best of days, but now, it felt like pure dread. Every item of clothing I placed in my suitcase felt like another nail through my heart because it would take me away from Teo.

I had to go back. That was obvious. The weekend was over, and everything was chaos in New York. Just this morning I had gotten a call from the cops saying they couldn't find Collin. He apparently hadn't shown up for work in days, and the guy he left me for said he was ghosted about a week ago. It was clear I'd have to put my big boy pants on and go deal with the real world up north. But every cell in my body rebelled against it.

After the most amazing and probably most cathartic night of my life, I spent all of yesterday having a relaxing and fun day on the vineyard. I didn't even spend most of it with Teo. But it was so refreshing. Paradise was really living up to its name for me. For the first time in ages I could breathe, and I felt more at home in the two days here than 30+ years in the city.

I had no choice, though. This was always supposed to be a fun weekend getaway, and now it was over and it was time for both of us to get back to our responsibilities. I just wish leaving wasn't so hard.

There was a soft knock on the door to my room. It was funny because this was the longest stretch of time I'd spent in here since arriving. I'd spent the last two nights at Teo's, and most of my other time either around the vineyard or with him.

I dropped my t-shirt into the suitcase and walked over to open the door, not really surprised to see Teo standing there.

“Hey,” he said softly, looking a little unsure. It was weird. I realized I didn’t know him that well, but I had never seen him doubting himself before. “Is it okay if I come in?”

“Oh, uh sure.” Fuck why was it so awkward between us? It felt like when Collin left all over again, just with a whole lot less yelling and things being broken.

He gave me a half grin before walking in, his hands shoved in the pockets of those skin tight black pants I had become obsessed with.

“I didn’t realize you wore glasses,” he told me, gesturing to my face.

I pushed them up self consciously. “Yeah, I usually wear contacts. But I didn’t remember to take them out at all this weekend so my eyes needed a break.”

Teo narrowed his eyes and shook his head. “That can be dangerous *cariño*. Please be careful.”

My stomach was swarming with butterflies. I didn’t know why I was so nervous. I waved my hand dismissively. “Yeah. Anyway. What’s up?”

He seemed to remember that he was the one to knock on the door. “Oh right. Listen, I know I don’t have any right to ask you this, and it breaks our agreement but—” he paused, taking a deep breath, which didn’t help my nerves any. A thousand scenarios flip through my head at a rapid fire pace, and if he didn’t finish his sentence soon, I’d be likely to combust with anxiety.

He looked me in the eye and grabbed my hand. I breathed a little easier. “Stay for a few more days. Or a week. I know you have to get back to New York eventually, and I’d never stop you, but I’m not ready for our time to be over yet, even if it’s only for a couple more days. I’ll take anything to have you here for a little bit longer.”

My brain quieted and the answer was obvious. For once, I didn’t over analyze, or panic at the idea of having to make a

decision. There were so many reasons why I should say no. My life was in shambles. Collin was MIA. I clearly couldn't be trusted to make good decisions when it came to men and was probably better off alone. Not to mention I was falling way too quickly for someone I just met. Especially after my last dumpster fire relationship.

And yet.

“Yes.” There was no other answer besides yes.

Teo blinked, like he wasn't expecting that. Then a slow smile spread across his face. “Yeah?”

I wrapped my hands around the back of his neck and kissed him before either of us could say anything else. It was the first time I'd initiated or tried to control a kiss with Teo, but he didn't resist or try to fight me for dominance. I'm sure it was rare and not easy for him to let someone else lead, even just for a kiss, but we both needed this, and I fucking loved the way he opened up for me.

My nails dug into his skin, but he didn't push me away. Instead his fingers curled into my hair, his favorite place to hold me, I think, and refused to let go.

“You're really gonna stay a little longer, darlin'?” he asked against my lips, his breath hot and his eyes heavily lidded.

“Yeah. I mean I gotta talk to Quinn, and probably fight with Pierce. But unless the cops tell me I need to get back immediately, I'll stay. For a few more days,” I emphasized, mainly for myself. If I didn't set boundaries for myself, I'd be shipping my small amount of belongings down to Virginia and making this my permanent address. But even I realized how insane that was. So, boundaries. “Also, I'll have to work a few hours a day. My business is way too new for me to take more than a few days off at a time. But, as long as you have Wi-Fi, I can work from anywhere.”

All the emotion on Teo's face stopped me in my tracks. Never in my life had anyone looked at me like that. No one had ever been that happy to have my company, romantic or

not. It was powerful, and wonderful, and terrifying, all at the same time.

I opened my mouth to say something, anything, to try to ease the intensity of the moment. But before I could, Teo was on me. His mouth ravishing mine, his body pressed into me, eliminating all space between us. I couldn't think, and without consciously moving a step, I suddenly found myself pushed against the bed.

Teo put light pressure on my shoulder, and I got the picture, willingly dropping back onto the bed.

“Baby boy, letting you go is going to be the hardest thing I've ever done.”

I hadn't even registered that bomb when he climbed on top of me, once again covering my body. There were clothes littering my bed, and I was pretty sure I was lying on a shoe. None of that mattered. All that mattered were the light kisses Teo was pressing against my neck, his scruff scratching my skin and turning me on all at once.

Teo pushed my suitcase out of the way and it tumbled to the ground. I didn't give any fucks. We were wild, all savage kisses and fumbling hands as we got each other naked. “I-I don't have any condoms!” At least my brain was functioning enough to remember that little detail.

“That's fine.” I wasn't sure where Teo was going with that until he was suddenly straddling my face and my dick was in his mouth.

No more words were needed, and I quickly followed suit as Teo swallowed me down in one thrust. He smelled like soap and citrus, like he just showered, and sort of tasted like it too, but it didn't fucking matter. The angle was a little awkward, but I grabbed the base of his dick and swallowed around his piercings. The first time I did this, I was sure the metallic taste would ruin it for me, but I was wrong. Sucking his cock was everything.

Usually, Teo kept up an almost continuous stream of dirty talk, but his mouth was too full to do that, and I didn't care. I

was too lost in the feeling and concentrating on the beauty before me, determined to give him as much pleasure as he was giving me.

Teo never let up, sucking me with the same amount of passion he had when fucking. He only paused long enough to grab some pre-cum and saliva before sliding a finger inside me. Damn that felt amazing. My fingers grazed his hole, but I couldn't get myself to take that final step. I was just relieved he didn't freak out with how close I was to it.

It didn't take long for that to not matter though. I pulled off Teo long enough to speak. "I'm close," I whispered.

"Good," he mumbled around my cock. Or at least I thought that's what he said. "So am I." We were both using that as the signal to let up if we wanted to, but neither of us did. Teo increased his suction, and I followed suit. We somehow found the same rhythm, moving at the exact same time.

It took me a moment to even realize that my own orgasm was wracking through me because I was so fucking focused on Teo as his seed filled my mouth. But we somehow managed to orgasm at the same time like some homemade porn, and I laid there in amazement as Teo continued to suck me dry. That's it, there was no question, he was some fucking sex god in disguise come here to drive me wild and ruin all other men for me. It was the only explanation that made any sense.

Soon we were both cleaned up and happily cuddled on the bed. My clothes were tossed all over the place and my suitcase was flipped upside down. But that was fine. Because I wasn't fucking leaving. Not for a few days anyway.

After about twenty minutes of lazy cuddling, I turned towards Teo. "So," I said with my best flirty voice, "I never did get to use that hot tub."

He raised an eyebrow. "Is that so?"

"Yup." I popped the P. And then Teo was on his feet and I was in the air, getting thrown over his shoulder so fast the world spun. He lightly tapped my ass.



“Let’s fix that right now.” I laughed, feeling lighter than I had in years.

# CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

# MATEO



My toe tapped rapidly against the wooden flooring of the tasting room, anxious for my morning shift to be done so I could see Parker. He was leaving first thing tomorrow morning. For real, for real. He already pushed his leaving date back once, but Pierce basically gave him the ultimatum that he needed to get back to New York or he'd drive down here and drag him back. Since I was pretty sure Parker wasn't ready for Pierce and I to meet, he agreed to go home. Besides, Quinn, the detective, suggested he come soon so all the final paperwork and charges could be filed properly.

I understood it. I really did. I couldn't keep Parker here permanently. And we agreed last night that we would still talk when he went back to the city. No real promises, but neither of us were ready to completely say goodbye. So for now it would be Zoom calls and texts. It wasn't enough, but it would have to be.

I still had one day with my boy, though. One day and one night, and I planned to make the most of it. If I ever got out of this tasting room.

Parker was currently in my office getting some work done. He'd tried to work in his room the first couple days, but it wasn't working. He kept wandering down here to see me, and I spent half my time texting him. So, I suggested my office since he'd be closer to where I typically was. Plus he'd have an actual desk and place to spread out. I rarely used it during business hours anyway. I could also peek in on him during the day and get my fix.

It was insane how addicted to Parker I'd become in just a week. One week and he'd somehow managed to shatter every wall, every box, and any barriers I'd built up over the years were decimated within days. I went from being a successful, totally functional adult, to a horny, obsessed, teenager with my first crush. I should have been running away far and fast, but it was impossible to run from Parker Miles.

The hours until I could spend time with the man dragged by. But finally, the afternoon tasting and tours were over, and Melanie was handling the evening ones. I just had to hope that Parker was finished with his own work, and we could get started on the special day I had planned.

We hadn't left the vineyard at all this week, but I wanted Parker to see the rest of the town too. We weren't the only thing around, and I had a feeling he would love the quaint, small town feel of this area. I was absolutely not showing him around as an incentive for him to come and visit again soon. Not at all.

I popped my head into my office, grinning at my man as he was lost in his project. I could probably have stood here and watched him work all day. I had an L shaped desk, and he had taken over the space against the wall. His laptop sat in the middle, with multiple binders, notebooks, sticky notes and pens littering the rest of the space. He had earbuds in and was bopping unrhythmically to whatever was playing through the speakers. I had learned over the week that it was typically 90's hip hop or heavy metal while working. The way his shoulders kept swaying side to side led me to believe today was a hip hop type of day.

He was sitting with his legs crossed up on the chair, like he usually sat when he was lost in his work. His hair stuck up in all different directions since he'd likely been running his hands through it non stop. He still hadn't noticed I was watching him and I took advantage of that.

The feeling hit me so strongly and so suddenly, it knocked the breath out of me. I loved him. Somehow in one short week I'd managed to do the thing I had avoided for my whole 35 years of life. I fell in love. Fuck.

Something must've alerted Parker to my presence because he turned around suddenly, pulling out one of his earbuds. The smile on his face once he realized it was me was everything. I schooled my features as quickly as I could, because he could *not* know my true feelings, but I wasn't sure if my poker face was up to par. Parker's tongue poked out between his teeth and tilted his head to the side. Shit. He was so damn adorable.

"Hey," he greeted me. "Are you done already?"

"Darlin' it's been about six hours."

"Shit. Really?"

"Yup. Do you need some more time? I don't want to take you away from your work."

Parker shook his head, running his fingers through his hair. "Nah. Maybe like fifteen minutes—twenty tops. Just to finish up. Is that okay?"

"Of course it's okay. I need some time to get everything together anyway."

I walked into the room and tilted Parker's chin up, so that I was looking into those bright blues. I could tell he was questioning whether it was really alright for him to keep working. Like I had a right to interfere with the way the man made his living. Like I had a right to complain at all, as if I wasn't the world's worst work-a-holic, at least until very very recently.

I didn't say a word, just stared into his eyes until I felt him relax under my touch, and then I kissed him. "Good boy. I'll leave you to it. I'll get everything set up and come to grab you, okay?"

"Okay," Parker replied, sounding a little dazed.

Grinning, I stood and backed out of the office, my mind already on the rest of the day's plans and the conversation I'd had with Parker last night. It was late, well past midnight, and we were both drifting off, wrapped in each other's arms.

*"Hey, Teo?" Parker asked suddenly.*

*"Yeah?" My fingers traced down his side idly as I waited.*

*“Have you ever fisted someone?”*

*I blinked, completely not expecting the turn of conversation. I must’ve taken too long to answer, because suddenly Parker was rambling, “Sorry, it’s none of my business. Forget I asked. I—”*

*I turned to face him, squinting to see his face in the darkness. “Take a breath, baby boy. It’s okay. I’m not upset. I just wasn’t expecting the question.”*

*I didn’t need to see his face to know he was blushing. “Yeah, um, sorry. I was thinking, and sometimes my train of thought goes completely haywire, and then I blurt out the last thing I was thinking. You don’t have to answer that.”*

*I stroked his face. “I don’t mind. And to answer your question, yes I have, once.”*

*Parker sucked in a breath. “And what did you think? Did you like it? Would you do it again?”*

*Where was he going with this? I was trying not to let my imagination go wild. Just because he was asking questions didn’t mean he wanted a fist up his ass.*

*“I liked it. It’s more about what my partner likes, though. That’s the part I really like. I think that’s my biggest Daddy trait, taking care of my boy. Making sure he’s happy and satisfied turns me on and makes me happy.” I kissed his forehead, “And yes, he liked it as well. I wouldn’t be against doing it again, with the right person and with the right prep.”*

*“Would I um, would I be the right person?”*

*Um, yes. 100%. I couldn’t let myself get carried away though. “I would love nothing more, but I won’t rush it and hurt you, and you’re—” Leaving in a day, but I couldn’t get myself to say it.*

*“Tomorrow? I want to still feel you when I’m driving home. I want something to remind me that this was all real, that you were real.”*

*Fuuuuuck. “Darlin’ I don’t think that’s going to be enough time. I don’t want to hurt you.” I trailed off, at his*

*disappointed look, “But, I think I have an idea. It won’t be my fist, not this time, but it might help?”*

*Some of the disappointment eased. “Yeah ok, whatever you want.”*

As soon as I made sure Melanie was good, I slipped out of the winery and into my car to head back to my place. I had left the house early this morning before Parker woke up and had gone to a 24 hour Walmart to pick up some things.

As soon as I was in my house, I went right to the bathroom and pulled out the bag I’d stashed under the sink. An enema kit, more condoms, because we were running low, and a big ass bottle of lube. I was definitely getting looks from the early morning clerk at the store, but whatever. I then went to my toy bag and pulled out what I wanted. One was a smaller plug that should be able to fit my boy easily. I planned to have him have it inside him through our date. And then the second one would be for later. It was a large dildo that had ridges that hopefully would emulate my piercings, at least a little. And it vibrated.

I was just finishing up scrubbing the larger plug when my phone started to ring. Pulling it out, I saw it was Melanie. She would never call me during the day unless it was an emergency.

“Mel?” I answered, bringing the phone to my shoulder so I could finish washing my toy.

“Teo, you need to get back here, now.”

My first thought went to Parker. Did something happen to him? Did he sneak out and leave when I wasn’t watching? I swallowed down my fear.

“What’s going on? Are you all okay? Parker?”

“We’re fine. But there’s this guy here, he’s saying he’s Parker’s fiancé and...”

I didn’t wait for her to finish. It didn’t take a genius to figure out who that was, and there was no way I was going to let this fucker get to Parker again.

“I’m coming. Don’t let him leave, and don’t let Parker see him.”

“Teo—he knows he’s here already.”

I dropped the butt plug into the sink and ran back out my front door. “I’ll be there in a few minutes! Try to keep him away from that fucker. And call the fucking police.” I hung up before she could respond.

I didn’t bother locking the door. I just slammed it shut and raced back into my Jeep. Thank God this area of the property was isolated, because I fucking flew. I barely saw the road in front of me, a fog of rage clouding everything. How could that fucking asshole show up here? How did he even know where Parker was? Melanie didn’t have to even tell me the guy’s name, I just knew.

Honestly, I’d been expecting him all week, or at least some kind of contact from him, but as the days went on with nothing, I’d started to get comfortable, and lost in the moments with Parker. Everything had become about making the most out of our short time together, and Collin had all but left my mind. Most of the time, anyway. There were times when Parker looked so unsure of himself, or apologized over and over again for just being himself, that the jackass came back to the forefront of my mind. Those were the times I imagined all of the ways I could murder him. I wasn’t a violent person. I’d never been one to get into fights. But for that fucker, I was willing to throw down.

I didn’t bother parking in the back lot, and just pulled right up to the front porch. A few guests who were hanging outside gave me funny looks but I could give two fucks. They could complain to the manager. Oh right, that was me.

I heard two male voices screaming as soon as I came inside. It took a moment for me to realize that one of them was Parker. I’d never heard him yelling like that before, and he was pissed. I hurried through the tasting room following the sound of shouting. Liam came out of nowhere, rushing towards me.

“What’s going on? Who is that guy? Jake is tryna get him out of here, but it’s like he lost it.” Liam asked, all business. I



shook my head since I wasn't really sure what was going on.

“Can you get the guests out of here? I'll try to handle this.”

“Melanie called the cops, they should be here soon. We tried to get everyone out of there, but you know people, they're nosy.”

It was the best we could do until the cops showed up. “Thanks.” I squeezed Liam's shoulder and ran towards Parker just in time to see him haul back and slap the bastard.

# CHAPTER NINETEEN

## PARKER



“Parker,” someone called, loud enough for me to hear even with my earbuds in. I turned to see a very cold looking Melanie watching me. I swallowed hard, an uneasy feeling in my gut. Melanie had been so warm and kind to me all week, so seeing her watching me with barely disguised disdain set off all the red flags.

I forced a smile and pulled out one of my ear buds. “Yeah?”

“There’s a man here looking for you. He says he’s your fiancé.”

My first thought was pure confusion. Fiancé? I never had a fiancé, it must be some sort of mistake...Oh. Oh no. Oh fuck no.

I could feel all the color drain out of my face as the walls began to close on me. It couldn’t be Collin, right? There’s no way he would be so crazy to show up here after everything. How did he even find me? And yet—

I finally forced myself to look up and into Melanie’s accusatory gaze. That’s when it hit me. She thought I’d been lying to Mateo all week!

Suddenly, that was the only thing that mattered, that she knew it wasn’t the case. Whether it was Collin, or a mistake, I didn’t care. This woman who was like a mother to Teo could not possibly think I’ve been playing him this whole fucking time.

I jumped to my feet with such force it tipped the chair over. Of course as it fell, it hit the desk and took my wireless mouse and keyboard with it. I flinched but didn't bother to pick them up. They weren't important.

"I'm not. Engaged I mean. I swear I'm not engaged, or in a relationship or anything. I'd never do that to Teo. Oh fuck. I um—" My mind was racing in a thousand different directions as I tried to figure out what to do. Melanie still looked doubtful, but her expression softened a bit. Maybe because I was hyperventilating.

My conversation with the detective finally pushed through my spiraling thoughts. If he tried to contact me or showed up I was to contact the authorities immediately. But what if this was some big mistake and it wasn't Collin?

I gulped for air, trying to get enough oxygen to think properly. "The guy, is he about my height with blonde hair perfectly swept to the side and ridiculously preppy clothes?"

Her eyes narrowed again. "Yes."

Ok. Ok. Fuck, I wish Teo was here. No. I could handle this. I was a grown ass adult and perfectly capable of dealing with my own shit. "C-can you call the cops please? Teo notified the local authorities of what was going on, so they should come quickly enough. Tell them Collin O'Neil showed up looking for Parker Miles and if they have any questions contact Detective Quinn with the NYPD." I doubted that was enough information, I didn't even know what precinct Quinn worked out of, and I was pretty sure Quinn was his first name, not last, but I was drawing a blank on any other information. It would have to be enough.

I wasn't sure if Teo had told her anything about what was going on, but all the anger and coldness evaporated instantly. "Honey, what's going on? Are you in danger?"

I didn't think I was in physical danger, but I'd also never expected Collin to fucking stalk me or destroy my home either, so what did I know.

“Hello? I’m still waiting!” Collin screamed out from wherever Melanie left him. His voice was filled with annoyance and that self centered cockiness it always had. He never liked to be kept waiting. He wasn’t anything special, but always expected everyone to bend over backwards to accommodate him. For too long that was me. I did everything to keep the peace, to keep his temper in check. I completely lost myself and most of my support group in the process. But no more. Collin was done controlling my life.

There was a loud knocking right outside the door. “I don’t appreciate being kept waiting. I’ll be sure to leave a message with the owner regarding the poor customer service.”

Fuck, he was such a skeeve. What did I ever see in the guy? Melanie continued to ignore Collin, watching me carefully.

I knew I had to get Collin out of the main area of the winery. He was going to make a scene, he always did. The last thing I wanted was to cause trouble for Teo by letting my home drama seep into the business and life he had built.

“Just please call the cops. And Teo. I’ll get him out of here before he causes any more trouble.”

Melanie tried to stop me, but I dodged her and slipped out of Teo’s office.

I had been dreading the moment I’d have to come face to face with Collin again. I knew it would happen eventually. After all the shit he pulled it was inevitable. But I was a little terrified of how I would handle it. Collin had a way of turning me into a shell of myself with just a look. One shake of his head, with his lips pursed in disappointment as he sighed at me like a small child, and I was shrinking into myself. Apologizing, and twisting myself into knots to become a person that he wouldn’t be ashamed of. I’d be lying to myself if I didn’t admit that I was more than a little afraid I’d revert right back into that man at first contact.

Collin noticed me almost immediately, and wasted no time hitting me with one of his *looks*. I paused a beat and waited. Nothing. No guilt. No shame. No unbearable need to

apologize and make things right. All I felt was annoyance, a strong dislike verging on hatred, and maybe just a little bit of pettiness. This week was hands down the best week of my life, and here this fucker was trying to ruin it.

“Parker, there you are.” Collin had one hand on the hip of his designer dress pants, the other held his phone. Even acting as a crazy stalker, his phone was still the most important thing to him. How the hell did I fall for this guy? “Are you done with your little stunt and ready to come home now? I went through a lot of trouble to find you.”

My eyes widened to the size of saucers at the audacity of this man. How dare he? How fucking dare he.

I didn't get truly angry often. I could take a lot of shit before it bothered me, but like everyone else I had a breaking point. There was a point where my brain felt overstimulated to the point of pure chaos, and if I didn't let it out immediately, I'd explode. I went from calm, laid back, and relaxed, to a Karen who got mashed potatoes when they'd ordered french fries in zero-point-five seconds.

“You know what, Collin? Fuck you and fuck your crazy, psychopathic, stalking, cheating ass! How dare you walk in here and try to act like I'm the one in the wrong when you've lost your damn mind. You're not Joe in *You*, Collin, but you sure as fuck are acting like him. When the calls and texts first started I was gonna ignore them. And I probably would've kept ignoring them. But now, your insane ass is going to jail!” I was panting and beet red by the end of my speech. I also somehow closed all the distance between us, so now I was standing just inches from the man who wouldn't stop tormenting me.

I guess he was attractive in the traditional sense, with spray tanned skin, Botox around his eyes to prevent wrinkles and a fake smile, but after meeting Teo it was hard to see what I ever loved about him.

I froze, the realization hitting me all at once. I was vaguely aware of everyone around me. Collin was spluttering, making excuses and trying to save face from my rant. There was

movement behind me, and Melanie's voice as she ushered guests away from us. I had come out here to prevent Collin from making a scene, and I was the one who ended up making one. The guilt would come, but I was too fucking stunned for that to star as my primary emotion.

Collin was screaming now, the loving boyfriend charade over, I guess. I blocked it out. Teo. That was the only thought I seemed capable of thinking about. Holy fuck, did I love Teo? A reel of my five year relationship with Collin played through my head. I quickly tried to shuffle through it and see if at any point I felt the way I do now about a man I'd known for a week. I honestly wasn't sure.

One thing I was sure of, was that Collin had never made me feel the way Teo did. Even in the beginning when he was all lovey dovey, and I was head over heels, I was always very aware of every move I made. I always knew that Collin would only shower me with praise and affection when I fit into the mold of his perfect boyfriend. I instinctively knew from the beginning that I had to hide the moments when my brain was chaotic and I lost focus. I always knew that every half finished project and overflowing basket of clothes would be another look of disappointment and a tick off the perfect boyfriend column.

But with Teo, even in this short time, I never felt the need to hide from him. He was never embarrassed of me or made me feel like a problem child, even though I'd been a hot mess this whole fucking time. Maybe it was the 'daddy' side of him, or maybe he was just a decent person, but I felt good about myself with Teo. I didn't feel like a fucking burden. And he had managed one thing that no one else or any medication ever had, he quieted my mind. Of course it was when he fucked me brainless, but I'd take it.

Somebody else showed up—Jake. He was trying to drag Collin away, but he was feral, fighting him every inch. I probably should try to help. But, I needed to know, did I love Teo? Was that even possible in such a short time? Was I setting myself up for another failed and toxic relationship because I had no chill? Did Teo feel the same? He seemed to

like having me close, but was it just physical attraction? Did it even matter since I was going back to the city tomorrow anyway?

Something wet hit my cheek. I blinked, checking back in to reality, and absently touched my cheek. Ugh, gross. Did he fucking spit at me? That alone showed how unhinged Collin had become in the last few weeks. Old Collin didn't do bodily fluids. Even cum was wrapped neatly in a condom and disposed of immediately. Spitting was beneath him. But whatever caused him to lose his sense of reality since our split must've been significant.

I wiped the spit off and looked him directly in the eyes. Jake had managed to get a hold on him, his arms wrenched painfully behind his back. "The cops are on the way, Collin. I'm done. I'm done with you. I'm done living in the past. I'm done with the phone calls, and texts. I'm done with you fucking destroying my apartment and making my life a living hell. I hope you fucking rot."

Something changed in Collin's expression. He went from wild to cold and calculated in a split second. He stopped fighting Jake as a small smile spread across his face. "You're sleeping with someone else, aren't you? That's why you're behaving like this? You think you don't need me anymore because you found someone else willing to stick their dick in you. Well, let me enlighten you, Parker, that only holds its value for a little while before you lose your appeal, and even that tight little hole won't be enough to keep him around. You're too much trouble, Parker. You always have been. Even your family only deals with you out of a sense of obligation. I'm the only one who will tolerate your behavior long term. I'm the only one who will stick around. So, I'm giving you one more chance. Come back with me now. Give up on the little tantrum and come back to where you belong. It'll be a clean slate. I'll forgive you for everything you did during this *rebellion*, and you can actually have a chance to have a partner that would put up with you so you're not alone for the rest of your pathetic existence."



Maybe there was a time that would've worked. I knew I was a lot, and he was right, before him I never was able to keep boyfriends. Maybe there was a time where the pros of the possibility of not always being alone outweighed the cons of spending my life with Collin. But now? Now I knew just how much psychotic, gaslighting bullshit he had spewed at me over the years, and I was a fool to believe it. I realized now my worth wasn't in what another human being thought of me. I didn't have to damp myself down for a chance at a relationship. Things might work out with Teo. Or they may not. Maybe he was the love of my life, or maybe it would be just another lesson learned. It hit me with a clarity I never had before that it was ok. That I would be ok no matter what happened with Teo. I wasn't scared to be alone anymore.

Collin was sneering. He probably mistook my silence as consideration of his ridiculous speech. Well, he was about to learn a hard lesson. Everything just shot to the surface and it had to be released. I pulled my hand back and slapped Collin across the face; five years of bullshit all let out in that one slap.

# CHAPTER TWENTY

# MATEO



I rushed towards Parker before he could hit that smarmy fucker again. Don't get me wrong, I'd love nothing more than to watch my man take out all five years of stress and wrongdoing on the creep's face, but I also didn't want him to catch an assault charge.

I stepped directly in front of him before he could take another swing. For a second, there was no recognition, and I was a little afraid I'd be the next one to take a hit, but he hesitated, and I took my opportunity.

“Parker, it's me, *cariño*. It's Teo. You can relax now.”

Parker's tension eased as he seemed to realize who it was. He dropped his hand. “Teo?”

“Yup, it's me darlin'.”

His cheeks flushed with embarrassment. “Oh God, I almost hit you.”

I grinned and stepped closer, inviting him to reach out to me. “But you didn't.”

“Are you serious?” The slime said from behind me, his voice full of disdain. “*This* is who you replaced me with?”

I ignored Collin utterly, my focus completely on Parker. His eyes had snapped behind me, but I cupped his cheek, bringing his attention back to me.

“Eyes on me, darlin'. Don't give that asshole another second of your attention. Any word on the cops?” I asked

anyone who was willing to answer, but I didn't dare look away from those big blue eyes swirling with emotion.

"They just pulled up," someone said. It wasn't a voice I recognized, so possibly a guest, but it didn't matter.

The mention of the cops seemed to light a fire in Collin, and his attempts to get out of Jake's hold started again, but I still didn't turn around, even though I was an exposed target. I wanted him to know I thought so little of him, I would keep my back to him. But more importantly, Parker needed to know he was my only priority.

"I planned to get him out of here so he didn't cause a scene. Instead I caused a bigger one." Parker sounded sheepish, and that wasn't gonna fly.

I cupped his other cheek, so I was holding his face firmly in my palms, and kissed him, showing him without words how little fucks I gave about him causing a scene.

The doors to the tasting room burst open as the police came in. I heard Melanie and Liam explaining the situation. Even as I finally pulled away, I still didn't turn around. I barely dared to blink. I knew the cops would need to talk to us, especially Parker, but until that fucker was in cuffs and out of the building, I refused to move. Besides, I was afraid if I looked at Collin, I wouldn't be able to control myself.

"Get your hands off me! I did nothing wrong!"

Parker was no longer staring into my eyes, watching the scene unfold behind me, but he made no move to get out of my hold.

From what I could gather, the police paid Collin's protests no mind, and before I knew it a uniformed officer was clearing her throat to get our attention. Reluctantly I stepped back, allowing Parker to handle things. I would be here for him in every way he allowed, but this was a chapter of his life that he needed to close for himself. Collin had done a number on him, and I believed there was still a small part of Parker who believed he was useless and incapable. If we had any chance for a relationship between us to work, then he needed to know

that despite my caretaking tendencies, I'd never thought that about him. From the second I saw him on the front porch of the winery, I knew how fucking strong he was, and this would be my first test to prove that. I'd be his support, his comfort, whatever he needed to get through this, but I wouldn't take over.



“That was exhausting. I better never have another stalker. So many damn questions. I was starting to doubt everything myself.” Parker collapsed onto my bed looking spent.

I snorted, kicking off my shoes and climbing up next to him. He had just spent the last couple hours recanting everything that had happened since Parker broke up with Collin. He wasn't kidding, they asked him so many questions, twisting things and rephrasing them so many times, like he was the fucking criminal.

It only stopped when the officer in charge received a phone call from the NYPD basically telling them to back the fuck off. Pierce seemed a little overbearing at times, but I was glad for it when he shared the drive he had created with every text, call record, and pictures of the apartment, as well as the police reports and records to give to the officers here.

I was exhausted, and I wasn't even the one being interrogated. Though keeping my mouth shut and not giving the cops a piece of my mind was almost as much work. I had called out Parker's brother when he tried to blame him, and then I spent hours watching the authorities do the same damn thing.

Finally though, they left, letting us know they were making arrangements to get Collin back to New York. Not that I cared. As long as they didn't try to charge Parker for hitting Collin, I couldn't really care less. Luckily, it was open palmed, and plenty of people saw the asshole spit on him first, so we were assured he was in the clear.

Parker felt terrible about the disturbance and causing me issues, which I assured him a thousand times he didn't, but I knew he still felt guilty. It probably didn't help that as soon as the police left, I dropped everything in Liam and Melanie's lap to handle while I took care of my boy. But I needed this as much as he did, and Paradise was in good hands. Our reputation was solid, and most of the guests who witnessed today's events were regulars, so I wasn't worried. All I was worried about was making sure Parker was okay.

"Lay on your stomach, baby boy. You're so tense, let me take care of you please."

Parker obeyed, but looked over his shoulder with a smirk. "Are you gonna take care of me with your dick?"

I smacked his jean clad ass cheek lightly. "I'm not opposed to that, but I was thinking a massage."

"Oh." Parker folded his arms and rested his head on them, closing his eyes. "That sounds good too."

I kissed his shoulder. "Take your shirt off for me before you get comfortable, please."

Parker didn't respond, but just shimmied out of his shirt, tossing it in a lump next to him. I reached over his bare back to grab a bottle of lotion from my dresser drawer.

"I was so proud of you today, darlin'. The way you handled that jackass, and the police. I know it had to be a lot but you never let it get to you." I pumped some of the lotion into my hands before straddling Parker. I kissed the back of his neck and then in between his shoulder blades before finally starting the massage.

The tension in his shoulders was palpable. "That's it baby boy, just relax for me. It's time for you to let me take over for a while. You kicked ass all day, now it's time to let go."

Parker let out a choked sound, not quite a sob but not really a moan either. I dug into his shoulders and continued to shower him with praise.

"I wish I got to see the whole thing, but you looked so sexy standing up to him, and to the police. I had to keep

adjusting myself.”

That was true, too. As worried as I was, something about Parker just handling shit turned me on.

Parker opened one eye. “You looked hot too. The way you kept snarling at the officer every time they asked a question you didn’t like.”

Once all the knots were out of his shoulders, I began to move down his back. I apparently hit a sore spot, because the moan he let out was obscene. I was insanely glad that I wasn’t a professional masseuse, because if he kept doing that, he’d be feeling my dick poke into his back very soon.

“I hated that they were acting like this was somehow your fault. When they asked how long we’d been in a relationship? Even if you had cheated, that doesn’t justify fucking stalking and destruction of property.”

“Ugh, don’t remind me about my apartment. I’m already dreading going home tomorrow and leaving you, I don’t want to think about the mess that’s waiting for me.”

I happened to know that there was no mess. Pierce, their mom, and a friend named Bailey had gone earlier in the week once they got the okay from the cops and cleaned up all evidence of Collin. From what I understood from my conversation with Pierce today, their mom also did some furniture shopping.

I didn’t want to spoil the surprise, so I just hummed noncommittally and worked my thumbs into his spine. “As much as I’d rather you not leave at all, I’m kind of glad Pierce is coming down here to take the ride with you.”

No one, Parker included, felt comfortable with him driving all that way by himself just one day after the confrontation. I’d offered to drive him up, but Pierce put his foot down and Parker gave in to his brother. I wasn’t looking forward to meeting him tomorrow, despite the reluctant truce we’d formed today. I understood his reservations when it came to me, but I just hoped he didn’t plant too many seeds into Parker’s mind when he was back home. I already knew letting

him go would not only be difficult, it would break my fucking heart.

I had worked my way down to his lower spine, just realizing he was still wearing his pants. I slipped my hands underneath him, blindly reaching for the buttons. “Let’s get these off you, darlin’.”

Parker agreed sleepily. “Yes, let’s.”

He helped by lifting his hips up and I slid both his pants and underwear off, not in the mood for any games. His sexy bubble butt was right there in my face, like a meal waiting to be devoured. I pumped some more lotion into my hands and then began kneading his butt cheeks.

For a while, we’re both quiet. I poured everything into the massage, working to relax every muscle on my boy. Parker was pliant and finally relaxed. His eyes were closed, though I could tell he was still awake. Right when I made my way down to his thighs, he began to speak.

“This is real, right? It’s really over?”

I stopped what I was doing. “Yeah, darlin’ it’s really over. Collin should go to jail for a really long time.”

Parker sighed deeply. He didn’t speak again, so I cautiously went back to what I was doing. Right when I was sure he’d actually gone to sleep, he spoke. “Am I crazy for feeling the way I do about you this soon? It’s nuts right? I should be hiding in a monastery somewhere, not ready to risk it all.”

I snorted. “A monastery?” I asked, equal parts amused, confused, and thrilled by the ‘ready to risk it all’ portion of his sentence. I stopped massaging and came to flop down next to him so that we were eye to eye. He opened one to look at me, one of those half smiles peeking out from under his arm.

“Yeah. That’s where monks live, right?”

I squeeze his ass cheek. “Why on earth would you want to become a monk?”



“To keep me away from temptation.” He waved a lazy hand in my direction. “Cause you’re pure temptation, Teo Cruz. And I’m not sure I can resist.”

I shuffled closer and gently moved his arm out of the way so that our noses were touching. “You need to do what’s right for you. But just know, darlin’, I’m already past the point of no return. So, go back to New York, get your life and feelings settled, but you’ll know where to find me when you’re ready.”

Parker’s Adam’s apple bounced up and down as he swallowed, his eyes intense as they were glued to mine. My heart pounded in my chest and I was fucking second guessing my admission. Was it too soon? *Of course it was too damn soon, Teo.* At least I didn’t say the L word yet. Maybe I could still salvage it.

But before I could backtrack, Parker reached out, smoothing my hair. “I need to feel you, Teo. I need a physical reminder of you when I leave tomorrow.”

My mind immediately went to the two plugs still sitting on my bathroom sink. But it just didn’t feel right anymore. We both needed something different now. I’d keep those locked away for another time, hopefully.

I wracked my brain trying to think how to make sure he ‘felt’ me tomorrow. Sure, I could just fuck him senseless, and I absolutely would, but I wanted something more than that. Then it came to me. I smacked one of his ass cheeks, then waited, with an eyebrow raised to see his reaction.

We had talked about light spankings earlier this week, and Parker consented, but still, consenting in theory wasn’t the same as when it was actually happening. His eyes widened in surprise for just a moment before he seemed to relax. Without words, Parker shimmied his legs up so that his knees were now under him and his ass was in the air. He wiggled it in invitation.

“Please Papi, make sure I remember you when I leave.”

*Mierda.* I pushed myself back up to my knees and squeezed his ass cheeks. “Remember, red stops everything,

baby boy.” And then I lifted my hand and made contact with one of his round cheeks. Parker made a little sound of pleasure as I repeated the action on the other side. Then I took a moment to enjoy the pink spot that was rising to the surface.

“Look at you, baby boy. Serving this ass up for me on a platter.” Two more smacks. “Is this what you need?”

Parker groaned. “Yes, Papi. I need it so bad. I always wondered what it would feel like. It looked so good in porn.”

I bit my cheek to keep from laughing, since he was being completely serious. I continued the spanking, alternating for a while as the smacks got progressively harder once I had a better gauge of Parker’s tolerance.

“Is it everything you fantasized about?” I paused and began kneading his pinked cheeks, my thumbs pushing right into the color. Parker pushed back into my hands, rocking back and forth, begging for more.

“It’s better.”

My dick was straining painfully against my pants, making me wonder why I always wore them so tight. I reluctantly took my hands off Parker just long enough to release the button and give my cock some breathing room. It was so tempting to stop the spanking and fuck him right now, but I could tell that he needed more. I pumped myself a handful of times, just using the residual lotion on my hand. And then I went back to reddening my boy’s ass.

Changing up the pattern, I started my pseudo-dirty talk back up since my boy seemed to enjoy it so much. “I’ll only use my hand today, but one day, if you want, we can try something else.”

Parker twisted his head, attempting to look at me. I stopped and began massaging his cheeks, waiting to hear what he had to say. “Do you have...other stuff?”

I grinned, and spanked again. This time lower, right at the seat spot. His sounds were so fucking hot I did it again. “Oh yes, darlin’. I have a lot of toys.” Most of which were buried in the back of my closet and hadn’t been touched in years.

Some were still in their wrappers. But that part wasn't important. "I have a few different paddles, a flogger, a crop, probably a couple other things."

My boy seemed to really like that, and I saw his hand slip underneath him. I let it go for a minute. "I also have other toys, butt plugs, dildos, even a cock ring and a cage." I spanked a few more times.

"Oh fuck. Papi I'm so hard. I-I need to come."

"It looks like you got a head start on that." I replied dryly, smacking his left cheek twice in a row.

Parker's arm, which had been moving at a steady pace for about a minute now, stopped suddenly. "Oh. Oops."

I laughed, and came to kneel directly behind my boy. I grabbed my dick and dragged it over his pinkened skin. I allowed all the metal jewelry to scrape gently across the parts I'd spanked, adding a new sensation. "That's ok baby boy. It turns me on to see how horny you get from this."

"So much, Papi. Can I-can I touch myself please?"

Instead of answering, I flipped him over, amazing myself at how smoothly I managed it. Parker landed on his back with a grunt. I climbed right on top of him and claimed his mouth in a savage kiss. When I backed off, we were both panting and desperate.

"Let me." And then I swallowed down half of Parker's dick in my mouth.

My boy let out a surprised yelp and arched back, unintentionally pushing himself further down my throat. I gagged and quickly grabbed the base to keep him from going too deep. Parker's eyes snapped open when he realized what he'd done, but I wasn't going to let him feel bad. I cupped his balls with my free hand and sucked a little harder, making it clear how much I was enjoying myself.

Parker babbled nonsense as he continued to writhe underneath me. He was such an expressive lover, once he got over his self-consciousness, and I fucking loved it. I had barely touched myself and I was this close to shooting.

Finally, Parker stiffened, “Teo. Papi. I’m close. Like really, really close.”

I lifted my gaze so that he could clearly see my intentions. It was all he needed as assurance to let go, and soon his orgasm was filling my mouth. Fuck, every time I’d done this over the past week it was as good as the last. I swallowed him down, until his hips finally stopped moving, and he relaxed.

I gently pulled my mouth off but lapped up his release with my tongue before pulling back completely.

“You taste so good, baby boy. I’m going to be counting down the days until I can taste you again.”

Parker smiled sleepily, and reached out, his fingers lazily petting the side of my head. “You’re still gonna fuck me, right? Even though I came?”

“Do you want me to?” It was a rhetorical question. I could see how much he wanted it. And he’d get no complaints from me.

Parker nodded rapidly and reached blindly over to my nightstand, I guess trying to find lube and condoms. I stilled his hand before he knocked everything over, and then opened the drawer to grab the supplies. “I got you baby boy. You know how much I love looking into your eyes as I take you, but tonight I need to be a little rougher. Is that okay?”

“Fuuuck. Yes, that’s okay.” I grinned as my boy flipped back onto his stomach, once again presenting his ass for me. “Use me, Papi. Take what you need.”

I squeezed my dick so I didn’t squirt early, something I hadn’t done since I was a fucking teenager, for chrissakes.

“Spread those cheeks for me, darlin’.”

Cursing under his breath, Parker reached behind him and spread himself, leaving me a clear view of his hole. I grabbed the lube and poured directly into the opening.

I wasted no time slipping one finger inside. I’d taken Parker nearly every day this week, so he didn’t need much

stretching. Besides, I knew he liked it a little rough. I quickly added a second finger, scissoring them back and forth roughly.

“I’m good, Papi. I’m good.” If this was any other moment I’d probably slow down, take my time and stretch and tease him until he was a pile of goo underneath me. The truth was that I was as desperate as he was, and I didn’t have the patience to wait. I pulled my hand out and opened the condom in record speed. One day I hoped for us to both be tested and to be able to do this with nothing between us, but we hadn’t had that talk yet and I wasn’t sure if we ever would now.

Once the condom was rolled on, I pushed Parker’s hands out of the way, replaced them with my own, and slid inside.

As soon as I was all the way in, I rearranged my grip to his hips, pulled about halfway out and slammed back in.

Typically I kept up a stream of dirty talk and praise as we fucked, but right now no words were coming. The only sounds were my grunts and Parker’s cries of pleasure as I kept up a relentless pace. I think we both somehow knew that this time was different. That despite our promises to continue talking to each other and see what happens, this might be the last time we’re ever together like this.

I was right on the edge. I knee walked up a few steps and folded over Parker, our bodies touching and my angle changing. I was pegging his prostate relentlessly, and his cries were so loud I vaguely wondered if Liam and his partners could hear them from his house.

I reached under Parker’s body, shocked to see him rock hard again. I planted my free hand by his head to keep my balance and jerked him off to the rhythm I was keeping.

“Fuck, baby boy. Do you see how hard you are already? You just came and you’re already this desperate for more.”

I took the grunting sound as agreement. “I’m so close, *cariño*. Do you think you can come with me? Are you so needy for my cock that you’re ready to shoot again?”

“Y-yes. Papi, please.”

“You know I can’t resist giving you everything you want, darlin’.” I began pumping harder; both his dick and my hips, forcing both of us to hold on just a little longer.

Finally it was clear neither of us could take another moment. “Come for me, baby boy. Give me one last orgasm.”

Parker cried out as my hand and the sheets filled with his seed. I followed quickly after, filling the condom.

For a bit, we were both focused on the clean up. I removed the condom and wet a wash cloth before coming back to bed and cleaning up my boy. We were both relaxed, sated and happy. But by the time I climbed into the bed, brought Parker close, and covered us both with the blankets, something had changed.

Parker clung to me like he always did after sex, and I fucking welcomed it. But there was this awkwardness, this tension, I’d never felt with him. Because we both knew he’d be going home tomorrow, and despite any reassurances, things would never be the same.

# CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

## PARKER



“So, I don’t get it,” Bailey said in between bites of fries and burger that sat in front of him. “You had the best week of your life despite the asshole showing up, and porn worthy sex—even if you won’t give me any details, right?”

Flushing, I sipped on my beer to buy myself more time. “Uh, right.”

“And since you’ve been back you’ve spoken, at least through text, every day. Facetimed a few times a week. And judging by your non-answer and evasion when I asked, some hot video call sex, right?”

Why did I keep telling Bailey all my problems? Right, because he was the only one who stuck around besides my brother, who doesn’t count, and we’d actually become good friends in the three weeks since I’d been back from Virginia. Even if he was so fucking straightforward.

“Yeah. Um, all of that, yes.” I’d never had phone sex, or Zoom sex, whatever, before Teo, and I thought it would be awkward as fuck. But somehow Teo had a way to make everything just seem so right and natural, I ended up enjoying it a lot more than expected.

Bailey grinned, waving a french fry in the air. He was actually leaving for his own auction date soon, and I was probably more nervous than he was. He deserved something good, so I hoped it worked out for him.

“I’m not really seeing the problem here, Parker. You’re sulking like the world is ending, but everything seems to be



finally going right. That dickwad is in jail, your apartment is fixed up, and you've got this sexy, Southern, tatted up daddy desperate to get his hands on you. Why are you panicking?"

I buried my head in my hands as my cheeks heated up. The restaurant was loud, and we were towards the back, but Bailey wasn't exactly quiet by nature. I peeked one eye out of my hands expecting everyone to be watching us, but of course no one gave a fuck. This was New York. I could probably get naked and stand on the table and no one would notice or care.

Bailey was watching me, patiently waiting for an answer that I didn't have. It was a good fucking question. Why was I panicking? I thought for sure that things would have fizzled out between Teo and I by now. The morning I left was stilted and awkward, and even though I was seconds away from word vomiting all my feelings, I managed to hold them in. A few times I thought Teo was going to say, well I don't know what, but something. He never did, though. He just reluctantly greeted Pierce when he pulled up in his Uber he took from the airport, helped me get the luggage in the car, and kissed me innocently. "Keep in touch, darlin'," he had said to me before walking back inside. I stood there for pathetically long, watching the glass doors and hoping he'd come back out and mend my already breaking heart, until Pierce basically dragged me into the car. I thought that was it. That despite all our promises and plans, I'd never hear from him again.

But only an hour later my phone buzzed with a text.

Papi: I'm so sorry for the way I left things, baby boy. I thought it would be easier for both of us if I kept our goodbye short and sweet. But after getting an earful from Mel and Liam I realized how badly I fucked up. I hope you can forgive me.

It was followed up with a heart emoji.

And from that moment on it was like nothing changed between us, except the whole 11 hour drive thing. But Bailey was right. We spoke every single day, and it wasn't always about sex, either. We'd talk about each other's days, about our families and friends. We shared memes and gifs and even

watched a whole movie together through Zoom. The only thing missing was being able to touch him.

And yet, I was a wreck. “I’m waiting for the other shoe to drop.”

Luckily Bailey didn’t immediately dismiss my concerns. “That’s valid, especially everything the douche canoe put you through.” Every time Bailey mentioned Collin he found a different insult to call him. “But I’mma ask you the same question I asked you when you were hiding in Teo’s bathroom panic calling me.” I rolled my eyes. Really, he had to bring that up? “Do you think he’s worth the possible heartbreak? There’s never going to be complete assurance that things are going to work out. In any relationship. So you just have to be sure it’s worth the risk.”

Ugh, hitting me with logic, again. “Okay, yeah. I mean it’s hard to imagine letting him go. And, um, I’m pretty sure I’m in love with him.” I rushed the words out, terrified that if I didn’t get them out immediately, I’d never be able to say them. Fuck, how would I ever admit it to Teo, if we got that far, if I could barely even say it to Bailey?

He grinned, his smile lighting up his whole face. “Yeah, well, that was pretty obvious. I wasn’t sure you’d admit it.”

“It’s terrifying. It’s too soon, right? After all the Collin stuff? I know my parents and Pierce think it’s too soon and they’re probably right.”

Bailey never got to answer, though, as my phone started ringing. It was Pierce. I started to reject the call, but Bailey stopped me. “I’d answer that if I was you.”

Huh? Squinting suspiciously at him, I hit answer. What the fuck was going on?

“Pierce, is everything okay? I’m at lunch with Bailey.”

“Hello, darlin’.”

I blinked, my eyes darting to Bailey who was grinning like an idiot, and then back at my phone. I checked the name. It definitely said Pierce but there was no fucking way that was my brother.

“Parker, are you there darlin’?” The voice that sounded suspiciously like Teo’s asked again. But why the hell would Teo be calling me on Pierce’s phone. How?

“Teo?” I asked hesitantly, a little afraid that this was somehow a ridiculous prank.

His husky laugh hit me right in the core like it always did. “Yes, *cariño*. It’s me.”

“I-I don’t know what’s happening? Why are you calling me on Pierce’s phone?” I tried to run through all the scenarios, but nothing was making sense. How would he get Pierce’s phone? Were they together? Why? They didn’t exactly like each other.

“Look behind you,” Bailey interceded. I had been so distracted I had forgotten he was even there. I turned slowly, afraid of what I’d see, even though I knew deep down none of these three men would purposely hurt me. The phone slipped out of my hand as my eyes fell on Teo standing about fifteen feet away, a phone to his ear and a huge smile on his face.

I found myself rooted to the spot, my mouth hanging open in shock. Teo was here? In New York? We had talked in vague terms about seeing each other again, but it was always me coming back to Paradise. It was so much easier for me to get away then the other way around. I always figured if Teo was ever able to visit me, it would be after months of planning and rearranging schedules so he could get away.

I still hadn’t moved. Something nudged my back and I turned to see a giggling Bailey pushing me towards Teo. “Well, go on. Go see your sexy man.”

“You knew about this?”

“Course I did. Teo reached out to me and Pierce last week on Facebook.”

He what? I had so many feelings whirling through me, and so many questions, but the one that was in the forefront was so dumb I had to push it aside.

Before I even moved a step, there was a presence in front of me and I knew without looking it was Teo. He brushed a

lock of my wild hair out of my face. “Hi darlin’. I hope this was okay. Pierce and Bailey assured me it would be, but now I don’t know. You seem overwhelmed. Maybe I should’ve called first?”

My gaze snapped to my man and I could see the apprehension in those dark eyes. I opened my mouth to reassure him I was thrilled. Overwhelmed, but the good kind of overwhelmed. The kind I always felt around Teo. Instead, I said, “How did you get Pierce’s phone?”

It still broke the tension as Teo broke out laughing, and wrapped his arms around me. He jerked his head to the side where I just noticed my brother sitting at a table with— was that Quinn? Not my problem right now. It was still hard to believe he got them all in on this. “Come here, baby boy. I want to kiss you.”

Now that was something I could get on board with. I willingly opened for him as we kissed right there in the middle of the restaurant. For a moment I forgot anyone else was around. It was just Teo and I.

When we finally pulled apart, my eyes were wet and I realized that I was crying. Teo looked worried so I quickly reassured him with a peck to his lips. “These are good tears, I swear. I’m just. Fuck, I missed you so much. I was just sitting here panicking, waiting for the other shoe to drop because things have been so perfect and there was no way they could stay like that, and you were right here.” A thought occurred to me. “You didn’t hear my conversation, did you? Oh God. Did Pierce? How long were you standing there? Shit, this is a good thing, right? You’re not breaking up with me, are you?”

I could tell Teo was trying really hard to follow my train of thought, but I couldn’t even follow it half the time, so I couldn’t blame him for being lost.

“Let’s start at your last question and work our way up because I don’t want to worry you. No, I’m not here to break up with you. I was driving Melanie and Liam fucking crazy, so they worked together to clear my schedule and get the vineyard completely covered so I could come and visit. I just

needed to see you in person. To touch you.” To emphasize he cupped my cheek and kissed me softly before continuing.

“Fuck, that feels so good. You taste as good as I remember, Parker.” I mean, it had been less than a month, but the moment was too special to point that out. “I also didn’t hear your conversation with Bailey. We were going to wait a little longer but you seemed so tense, I couldn’t take it anymore. I don’t know if Pierce heard it, but even if he did, it’s okay to worry, darlin’. I was worried too.”

I relaxed and smiled. Everything was okay now. Teo was here. Even if it was only for a few days. I’d have to ask him how long he was staying.

“You were?”

“Course I was. Still am a bit. I’ve never done the long distance thing before. And honestly Parker, you mean a lot to me. Like a whole fucking lot. And I’m often torn between packing up and moving to New York just so I don’t have to spend another minute away from you, or running as far and fast as I can. But I can’t run from you, Parker Miles, I love you too fucking much.”

“You can’t leave Paradise! That place is your life. And besides it felt more like home to me than the city ever has. I don’t want to be away from you either, but let me move down there. If you want me to, that is?” It occurred to me there was another part of his sentence that was much more important. Fuck, I was all over the place. Maybe my brother and parents were right, and I should talk to my doctor about getting back on my meds? Later. “Oh. I love you too.”

Mateo didn’t get mad or frustrated at my ridiculous train of thought or how it seemed like the L word was a second thought, which it definitely wasn’t. He didn’t criticize me for running my mouth without thinking or talking too much.

All he did was tip my chin up and kiss me. “I love you, darlin’,” he repeated, his voice a little husky.

“I love you too.” See, that was the way to do it.

Teo grinned. his eyes sparkling with happiness. “We’ll figure out all the rest. We have plenty of time. Let’s just enjoy each other, yeah? This is my first time in New York, I want the full locals tour.”

I rolled my eyes but I couldn’t stop cheesing. Teo was here. He’d somehow made some big ass plan with my brother and Bailey without me finding out. He’d rearranged everything at the vineyard to make time to come here and see me. He’d told me he loved me. How was this my life?

“I’d really like that. To give you the tour, I mean. I have so many questions, but they can wait.”

Teo took my hand. “Then lead the way, baby boy. Show me your world.”

# EPILOGUE

# PARKER



## *One Year Later*

I looked around my once again empty apartment, my hands on my hips. This time though, it was a good kind of empty. It meant I had finally gone through the last of my crap and I was ready to turn in my keys and leave this place for good. It was bittersweet. This was the first and only apartment I ever had on my own in the city. It had been my home for a long time. There were a lot of memories there. Some of them good, some of them tainted by Collin, but all of them important.

I started my business right here in my living room. Hell, I made the decision to start my own business here in this living room. I had made a name for myself over the last year, and the majority of that happened right here. I also jerked off an obscene amount of times here to dirty fantasies of Teo when he was back in Virginia.

It was time to move on, though, and as scary as that was, I was ready.

“Everything look good, darlin’?” I turned to see Teo walking out of the bedroom where he had been doing a final sweep. He had been here for the last week helping me get all the final odds and ends done before the big move.

I smiled and accepted the kiss on my cheek. Even after a year together, he was always quick with casual affection. Teo never shied away from light kisses, hand holding, or even cuddling on the couch. Part of it was because we were both touch starved from the weeks spent apart by the time we



finally saw each other, but it wasn't only that. It was just the way he was. I hoped it didn't change much once we saw each other every day.

“Yeah. I was just thinking about all the times I shot my load in here thinking about you.”

“Ugh, TMI, P, TMI. Thank fuck you sprung for the professional carpet cleaners.” I shot my brother the finger over Teo's shoulder. Of course he was here. Pierce had been here a lot in the last couple of months since I made the announcement that I was moving to Virginia to live at the vineyard. I understood it. We'd always lived near each other, and had been extremely close since he moved in with us as teenagers. This was going to be the first time we had been more than a subway ride away from each other for longer than a week or two in well, ever. And with his on again off again thing with Quinn being off for the last few months, I knew he was feeling a little untethered.

I was going to miss the hell out of him and my parents, but I needed to do this. And not just because I couldn't go another day living states away from Teo. I think I needed the space to really become myself. Still, it was going to be an adjustment.

My parents were honestly thrilled. They loved Teo, and I they had been saying I should get out of the city for a while now. Sure they'd miss me, but now they had a built-in vacation spot to visit a few times a year, and they always had the best wine to bring to their get-togethers with their retired friends.

I stepped away from Teo and walked to where Pierce was standing at the corner of the room. His hands were shoved in his pockets and his face was carefully blank. I wasn't having it. I wrapped my arms around him, forcing my brother to hug me. He didn't return it for a painfully long time, but I didn't let go. I didn't care how awkward it was, I refused to leave without a proper goodbye. Finally, he relented. His arms squeezed me tightly.

“Fuck, c'mere P.”

“I’ll miss you,” I told him, as my much stronger brother smothered me in his arms.

“I’ll miss you too. If you ever need me, for anything at all, call me. It doesn’t matter what time it is or what I’m doing, I’ll answer. And I’ll get my ass down there as fast as I can.”

I smiled even as tears began to spill. “Thank you, Pierce. I’m so grateful for everything you’ve done for me. I love you, and that offer goes both ways. I’ll always be here for you, whether it’s for you to vent or if you need me to beat up a dumb ass detective that won’t get his head out of his ass.”

Pierce snorted and squeezed me even tighter. “Fuck, P. I love you too. No offense but I definitely don’t need you to beat up Quinn. He’d kick your ass, and then I’d be in jail for murdering a police officer.”

I should be offended, but he was right. I shrugged, “Still. You know I’m here.”

Teo cleared his throat. “I know you’ll miss him, but can you not squeeze the life out of my man please?” he asked Pierce, his tone amused.

Pierce shot him a dirty look but he released me. And much to my shock, he turned to Teo and hugged him too.

“You’re good for him,” he said quietly, but I still heard him. “I’m glad P ignored my advice to leave your ass in Virginia.” We both laughed. This was common knowledge by this point, and whatever issues the two of them had were more or less resolved by the first time Teo surprise visited me. “But,” Pierce continued, “If I find out you hurt him in any way, and not that kinky daddy shit youse are into...” yeah I didn’t want to think about how Pierce knew that, “I will kill you.”

Teo backed up and looked Pierce in the eye. “If I hurt him, I’ll let you.”

I scoffed and turned my back on their posturing. Battling over who was more overprotective of me was their way of bonding. Honestly, it could be worse.



Finally, it was time to leave. A moving truck had come yesterday to take most of my furniture. It was probably ridiculous but my family and Bailey had picked it all out for me just last year. I had been so overwhelmed and touched by the gesture I cried for hours when I got home from the vineyard after that first trip. It felt wrong getting rid of it already, and since Teo had mostly hand-me-downs that were left from the owner when it was his cottage, I decided to ship my shit down to my new home. It was outrageously expensive, and I was wasting a ton of money, but I couldn't part with it.

All that being said, I only had a few boxes that were loaded in Teo's Jeep for the drive down to Paradise. They were all already packed. Pierce had left a few minutes ago. I had said my goodbyes to my parents yesterday and to Bailey the day before. Really, none of this would've happened if it wasn't for him. If he didn't tell me about the charity auction, I'd never have gone down to Paradise to begin with. He was gonna come down with his new man, who he also met through the Sweetheart auction, for New Years. They had a bit of a rocky start but were doing great now, and I was excited to see them. But there was nothing left for me to do in New York but drop my key off and leave.

I turned towards Teo who was waiting for me with a bit of apprehension. Did he think I was about to bail?

"Ready?" he asked.

"Yup. Just gonna drop off the key and I'll be ready."

Teo grinned, his eyes lit with emotion. "I can't believe this is finally happening."

"I know, me either. It's a bit surreal. But it feels right."

Teo took my hand. "That's cause it is right, darlin'. I would've gladly left everything to be here with you, but I think you belong down at Paradise."

It was true I loved the place almost as much as I loved Teo. And the people there had become a second family to me.

“Well let’s go. I’m ready to start my new chapter in my life with you.”

THE END



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*\*listed in order\**

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Jacey is a true East Coast girl, born and raised in New Jersey. After a brief stint in North Carolina, Jacey is back in NJ with her husband, two young girls, and a black lab mix.

Jacey writes MM romance. Her first series, Caldeon Brothers, was a dystopian romance, but it just expanded from there. When she's not writing, Jacey can be found reading smut and steamy MM romances, watching Netflix, and trying to tame the chaos that is raising two little girls.

She loves all things PNR, Marvel, and fantasy. Jacey is always looking for new books and shows recs, so feel free to share. She is also working on becoming more active on social media. So please follow her for up-to-date information, conversation, games, and overall good times.



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