



NEVER SAY
NEVER

DARK & TWISTED TALES

MAYRA STATHAM

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BLURB

Pro baseball player Peter Northend swears to anyone who will listen that he will never settle down. Ever. Why would he? He has it all! Money. Power. Looks.

Never say never.

Peter goes down a proverbial rabbit hole on social media when he finds out there is a podcast dedicated to him. Unfortunately, it doesn't cast him in the light he'd assumed it would.

Wendy Quezada is a diehard Dirt Devils fan and has it out for the notorious pitcher Peter Northend. From his fights on and off the field to the conquests that seem to be walking in and out of the locker room, Wendy thinks he's the worst and isn't shy about sharing that on her Dirt Devils dedicated social media platforms.

Peter finds himself inexplicably pulled in by her dark eyes and stories. A lot of them are tall tales, but some hold truths that don't cast him in the best light. Instead of ignoring her, or suing her for defamation, he keeps watching her.

Addicted and obsessed, he even goes as far as befriending her under a different name.

The line between love and stalking is a thin one, and one night, he can't help himself. What happens when Wendy leaves a window open and Peter all but flies in? Will they head off to never-never world and make new stories together? Or will she tell him where he and his shadow can stick it?

PROLOGUE

PETER NORTHEND

“Goddamn it, Peter! Are you listening to me?” my agent and old friend, Carraway Monroe, asked, snapping me out of my thoughts.

“Xbox X series or PlayStation 5?” I asked, and just like I knew it would, a muscle under his left eye twitched as a vein at the right temple grew, almost throbbed.

“Peter,” he growled my name, and I had to fight myself from chuckling. Carey was so damn predictable. Everything got under his skin and ruffled his feathers. “If the owners of the team get wind of this—”

“Breathe, Carey. Jesus. You know what you need? You need to get laid. How about we go to—”

“Peter. This isn’t a joke. This girl can do damage,” he laid out sternly, and I blinked.

Carey and I had known one another for decades. Since we were about ten years old. In elementary school, we were the bad boys from the wrong side of town at a rich kids school. We’d stuck together for the long haul.

“Damage?” I repeated, and I knew my eyes glittered with humor. “You really think a little girl and her what, Dirt Devil’s fan page, can hurt me? *Me?*”

“Peter—” I rolled my eyes, but he kept talking. “Podcast,” he corrected.

“Everyone has a podcast nowadays.” And this little fan girl seemed to have it out for me from what Carey was saying. Not

that I had been paying that close of attention.

“That might be true, but—”

“Shit, my granny could start one. For all I know, she and her friends might have one about that book club they’re in.”

“Maybe so, Pete, but this girl has a huge following.”

“So do I.” I shrugged. “I have two million followers.”

“She has four,” he cut me off. “And that’s just on TikTok. Not her YouTube, Twitter, Insta—”

“I get it.”

“On those she has an average of five million, which regardless, she doubles your following.”

“Fine,” I groaned. I got what he was trying to tell me. This girl, whoever the hell she was, could really do some damage. She seemed to hate everything about me, and even though she was a die-hard baseball fan who followed the league, she seemed to specialize in everything about the Desert Dirt Devils.

My Desert Dirt Devils, also known as my team.

According to what I’d picked up from Carey, this girl was viral. And it was the stories she shared about me that seemed to get the most traction. But then again, who could blame her fans? I was Peter Northend! I basically had my spot in the Baseball Hall of Fame picked out, and I was still playing the game. I’d had an entire season of strikeouts a couple of years ago. I was a star, some might even say a living legend. During my career from college to pros, I had always been about giving the fans what they wanted. Pictures? Sure! My jersey? Why not? Especially when they were sexy-as-hell fan girls. But it seemed this little podcaster didn’t light me in the best light like she should have been. From what I got, she pretty much hated my guts and thought I should be cut, or worse, traded.

“Peter!” Carey clipped. I rolled my eyes, kicking a leg over my knee.

“What do you want me to do?”

“I need you to calm down.”

“Calm down?” I repeated with a grimace. Calming down was for older people. People who were settled in their lives. I was not the settling-down type. “What the hell is that supposed to—”

“You know what it means,” he cut me, off and I blinked.

Carey and I got along, were able to work and be friends the way we had been for a lot of reasons. One of them was he never cast judgment on how I lived my life, and vice versa. He never told me to cool it.

Until now.

“It means no more of your arm candy coming and going from the locker room in your jersey and—” he snapped me out of my thoughts.

“It wasn’t what everyone thought,” I started to explain. “I wasn’t banging her—”

“It doesn’t matter,” he interrupted for the second time in less than as many minutes. Shit. Carey was serious. “No more women. No more fights. You need to behave.”

“Behave? What, you think I’m just going to roll over and be a good boy because some—”

“See, that’s the thing, Peter. You’re not a boy, you’re a freaking man, a grown man. You’re thirty-five. It’s way past the time for you to grow the hell up. I shouldn’t have to tell you this shit. You should be easier than the three rookies I work for.”

“Care—”

“Yet you’re the oldest and biggest pain in my ass,” he clipped. I blinked some more. Carey could get his feathers in a tangle, but he was never like this.

“What crawled up your ass? I just mean this isn’t all about me. You’re pissed about something.”

“It doesn’t matter.” He wasn’t going to share.

I watched as he ran his fingers through the thick jet-black hair god had gifted him with. He needed a cut. The length showed off a lot more of the salt that was starting to grow in. “It’s time you grew up, Peter.”

“What if I talked to her? I go to wherever she does this podcast from and charm her up and—”

“Don’t.” He pointed at me, and like it did earlier, that vein at his forehead popped to life and literally throbbed again. “Do you remember Tony Quezada?”

“Tony—” I started to repeat and frowned. “Tony Quezada, one of the best pitchers the Dirt Devils ever had? That Tony?”

“That’s the one.”

“Yeah. What about him?” The man was a damn legend.

Fuck, I’d looked up to him my entire life. The man had known how to play the game and live life in a way that when his time was up, I was pretty sure he’d never had any regrets. Especially after he was added to the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York.

“This girl? She’s the one kid the fucker didn’t claim.”

“Wait.” I put a hand up and scoffed. “Did you really call Tony freaking Quezada a fucker?”

“Obviously, you missed the point!”

“Dude, he was Tony Quezada!”

“He was an okay player, but, Pete, the guy was not the freaking hero you think he was. He played dirty and lived dirtier.”

“No.” I shook my head. “Those were all rumors.” Carey stared at me for a long moment before sighing heavily.

“I hate to burst your bubble, but a lot of those rumors came from the truth. Ugly truths.” He rubbed the bridge of his nose, and his icy blue eyes locked with mine. “You know I love ya, man. You’re like a brother to me. We go way back. You helped me build my agency.”

“Yeah.” I shrugged. It always made sense to hire Carey as my agent. There wasn’t anyone else I trusted the way I trusted him.

“You know I always have your back...” A bad feeling started to settle in the pit of my gut.

“But?”

“But do not approach her,” he sternly ordered. I frowned. Since when did Carey order me around? “Do not call, do not text. Do not dm or sext—”

“Sext?”

“Don’t send a random dick pic,” he kept talking unfazed by my interruptions. Usually, he’d joke right back with me. *What the hell?*

“Jesus, you really think I would—” He shot me a look that instantly shut me up.

“I’m serious about this, Peter.”

“Okay, wait, so this Wendy chick, that what you said was her name?”

“That’s all you need to know.” That muscles twitched, and I sat back, extended my legs.

“Why?” An inkling of curiosity piqued my interest. Why was he so stuck on making sure I stayed away from her? Was she hot?

“Because I know you, Peter.” His expression didn’t change in the slightest. I crossed my arms even though I knew exactly how it made me seem. Like I was a kid about to pout and throw hell of a tantrum. But come on, I was Peter freaking Northend!

“What is that supposed to mean, Carey?”

“That means you get some asinine idea stuck in your head, and it explodes in your face.”

“That’s not—”

“Then I have to hire a slew of people to clean up your mess. Like I said, you’re too old for this. We’re both too old for this.” *Too old?*

“Age is but a number,” I quipped, hoping that would get him off my back, but honestly, I should have known better.

“That might be true, but it’s time to grow up.” Something about his tone had me sitting straighter. He was seriously scolding me. This was graver than I’d thought. “This is a make-or-beak season for you. You’re getting older. You know that. We both do. Retirement might be—”

“Bullshit,” I muttered. Retirement? Who did he think he was?

“You telling me that shoulder of yours isn’t aching every morning? That you haven’t doubled up on your ice baths and ___”

“Okay,” I cut him off. Anxiety started to prickle at the back of my neck. “I get what you’re saying.”

“I honestly hope you do. Like I said, you give me the most work, and I have three brand-new rookies who look like choir boys next to you. Shit, they look at your antics and get tired!”

“Boring,” I mumbled under my breath.

“Depending on this season, it might be time to start thinking about—”

“Don’t even say it,” I clipped, knowing it wouldn’t stop Carey.

“Hanging up your cleats,” he finished off the sentence.

I turned, giving him my back, and stared out the huge window in my home office. My own jaw clenched tightly as I stared out toward the clear desert land that faced my backyard. I hadn’t started out as the starting pitcher for the Desert Dirt Devils, but I’d made a good career here. A lot of people loved the beach and busier cities, and when I was on the road after a win, I would tend to agree. But there was something special about the desert landscape.

Peaceful almost.

I'd started to crave it. The peace and solitude. Maybe that was why I'd upped my crazy meter? It was a way to control life not becoming boring even though a sliver of me was starting to crave it.

And it freaked me out.

I'd never been the kind of man who liked to stay still. I loved the game and being outdoors when the sun was out and partying when the daylight ended. Drinking, women, dancing, poker, hell, even drugs. Anything to feel carefree and wild.

"Peter," Carey called out, his voice a little gentler, more like I was used to hearing from him. "I'm not telling you this to screw with you."

"Then why are you on my case?" I argued, my eyes pinned on the saguaros along the fence line.

"You took a runway of lingerie models to stand behind you when you went to talk to the press." He sighed, and I winced.

Thankfully, he couldn't see my reaction with my back turned to him. Even I had to admit, now sober, that might not have been a great idea. Neither had been making out with each one while the cameras had been rolling and then handing each a hundred-dollar bill and smacking them on the ass as they walked away.

"I know." I sighed, not bothering to look at him. I might have been a little too drunk when I'd planned that out. Drinking had started early for me when I'd been pulled out of the game by the fifth inning. Pissed and frustrated, I'd left the dugout and started drinking in the locker room before calling a buddy to get the girls over.

"I want you to have the option to play until it's time for you to say that's it."

"What if I never want to stop playing?" I asked out loud, the words slipping past my lips.

"Never say never," Carey annoyingly said. I rolled my eyes. "You might meet someone and want to settle down one day." I chuckled at his remark and shook my head.

Sometimes it felt like Carey had never been paying attention to who I was. Settling down with stars of forever in your eyes was for chumps. I turned my head, my green eyes met his blue ones, and I smiled.

“Never.”

CHAPTER 1

PETER

Never say never. Carey's annoying deep voice had been playing on repeat for a month. A goddamn month! If he knew, he would laugh in my face and shrug it off with a smug know-it-all grin.

I really hated him sometimes.

Never say never.

Fuck. My hands stretched out and relaxed before the tips of my fingers started to tap on the top of the desk in my home office. It had been four long weeks since he'd been over here, trying to warn me about Wendy Quezada and her little podcast. He'd been gone for about an hour before temptation got the better of me and I looked her up on TikTok.

When her face popped up on my screen and I started to listen to her recap of the games played the day before, I'd fucking gone rock hard.

Not because of the game or her knowledge of it.

Because of her.

The way her eyes sparkled like amber when she went on a rant or when she recapped a game. You could not only hear her love for the game, you could feel it. See it.

And when she started to tell the stories about me? Fuck! My body had never reacted to anyone that way, and I had never even stood in front of her.

Well, that she knew of.

The lines of my obsession had grown murky. I had learned to blur the lines of reason and common sense a long time ago to make whatever I wanted sound reasonable, but never so much as I had with Wendy.

My Wendy girl was special.

I started up my laptop and opened the app I'd been trying to fight everything inside of me from looking at. The same app that was on my phone and the reason I'd left it charging on the second story of my place. With a few clicks and glide of my mouse, relief hit my veins like a hit off a joint.

Her apartment appeared on my screen.

The moment my eyes landed on her, I felt like I could breathe.

Never say never, Carey's voice repeated again on a goddamn loop as I watched her sitting on her couch. Her legs exposed in the short-shorts she wore in the privacy of her own home. Golden tan skin that my hands ache to fucking touch.

Physically hurt.

To say I'd spiraled this last month would have been a goddamn understatement.

I ran my tongue over my teeth as I glanced away. But I only tore my gaze away because I could still hear her. She was singing along to something playing in her ear pods. It only made me more curious about her. She lived alone but didn't play her music out loud.

"Shake, shake it off..." she sang, and I smiled.

Carey would shit a goddamn brick if he knew the lengths I'd gone to this last month when it came to my little fan.

And a fan she was. She might protest about me when she went off on an alleged story she might have heard, but I saw it. There was a fire in her eyes, a spark when she talked about me. One that never appeared when she spoke about the other players. Something that went a lot deeper than her alleged hatred for me and what she called my sense of entitlement. I

heard it in the way her breathing changed anytime she talked about me. The lilt to her voice when she said my name.

I probably sounded insane, but I knew in my gut it was there. It drew me in and pulled me further into this deep need to see her.

Hear her.

Talk to her.

My phone pinged just in time, and I turned back to the monitor and smiled. She was on her phone texting. She had no clue, no idea she was texting me.

Carey would definitely have a freaking coronary if he knew everything I'd done this last month.

To be fair, it'd started off innocently enough.

After his departure and warnings to leave her alone and not approach her, I'd found myself in my backyard. The sun had just started to set when I'd pulled up my TikTok app and searched for her. Dirt on the Devils. My lips twitched at the name of her page, but that smile had all but died on my lips when she appeared on the screen.

Wide-eyed and tiny. The woman was breathtakingly beautiful. She was the kind of beautiful that men struck up wars for, letting blood spill on their land all just to be close to her. That fucking mesmerizing. Her caramel stare made me hungry for something sweet. Something feminine and most likely only unique to her. Her delicate features made me ache to find a gentle side of myself I had no clue if it even existed.

The sight of her had struck me dumb and stupid.

I should have closed my phone at that very moment. I should have put it away and done exactly what Carey had suggested. Go on, live my life, but just a little quieter. A little less frat boy to avoid grabbing her attention.

But I didn't.

Fuck me, I wish I could say I'd gone in it with good intentions, but it didn't matter. Not when I was literally paving

my own road to hell, brick by damn brick. Good or bad, it didn't matter. I'd gone down a damn rabbit hole.

Watching video after video, and when I was done and the sky was filled with bright shining stars, I watched them all over again. Then I searched for her other social media accounts. I was ravenous for every bit of her I could find. Consuming every video and image of her I could get my greedy eyes on.

I was half insane by morning. I needed to know if this was just a silly thing on my end. There was no way I'd have such a visceral reaction to her in person. I found her address easily enough, and after a long practice, I drove to the area in town she lived in. Parked and sat across the street in my car wearing a black hoodie and matching joggers. I knew I was risking being recognized, but I hadn't been able to leave. Especially not after I watched her walk up the street with a bag of groceries. It was like something deep inside of me felt a crazy connection to her. My dick was begging me to take him out I was throbbing so damn badly.

I'd forced myself to stay in my car as she stopped to talk to a woman on the street. I watched, completely enamored at first sight as she smiled and laughed. I'd fisted my hands tightly as I sat there. Watching. Admiring. I'd done that so tightly my nails had cut the skin inside my palms.

But I hadn't moved. Not after she said goodbye and headed into her building. Not after she turned the light on in her apartment on the third floor, and not when she opened a goddamn window. The night was too dark and the light in her place was too bright as she stood there for a moment looking up at the sky for me to be able to see the details of her face, but my hand had reached into my joggers, and I'd stroked my cock to the sight of her across the street like a goddamn pervert.

One of her making.

A week of that shit.

Seven days of me driving up and parking, hoping and praying to a god I wasn't sure I believed in that she'd make an

appearance. I saw her outside two more times in those seven days. But it wasn't enough. I needed to talk to her. I needed to make a connection with her. I needed to change the way she saw me because I was pretty sure I was half in love with the woman who seemingly hated my guts.

But wasn't that the way it went? Cupid fucking hit his arrow and laughed at the chaos he set in place? I could have had any woman. I wasn't being conceited; I knew it. I was famous, had money, and was more than good-looking. I'd had my share of women and then some. But my heart? My stupid dark and twisted heart wanted the impossible.

It wanted Wendy Quezada.

When it came to my sweet little Tinkerbell, I couldn't just knock on her door and introduce myself. She'd more than likely slam the goddamn door in my face. As much as I didn't want to admit it, Carey was right. The stories Wendy told might sound crazy and outlandish, but no way did they cast me under a good light.

Some were very fake and exaggerated, while others, even though they were rumored stories, were only a glimpse as to how bad my behavior had actually been. Stories if the owners of the team caught wind about, would most definitely get me a meeting with them.

And not a comfortable one.

Listening to her talk about me had me taking a serious look at the kind of man I was. And I didn't like it. It even kept me up at night since I found her page and heard her voice.

When that first week was coming to a close, I had to travel to spring training. I'd needed a way to keep an eye on her because there was no other option. She didn't live on the best side of town. As a man who always went after what he wanted and found a way to get it, I created a way to keep an eye on my pretty little fairy.

One I wouldn't regret even if someone might think it was a little... unethical.

I'd come across all sorts of people on my way to the pros. Good and bad. I'd hired a hacker friend of mine from college to get me cameras inside her apartment. He got me one in her living area and outside her place. He even added one in her bedroom that faced right toward her bed so I could watch her sleep.

And I had.

Then, by the third day of spring training, I'd thought of something else. I needed a way to talk to her. A way for her to get to know me without really knowing it was me. Without overthinking, I had asked my buddy once again for help to create a fake account. Following, friending, and subscribing to every possible page she had. There was no way she would know it was me. I hid in the shadows.

My phone pinged again, and relief mixed with anticipation. I opened the app and slowly breathed out.

Wendy: Hey! How was your day?

Wendy: Mine's been ducking boring!

I turned my attention to the screen in front of me and watched her head bob along with her singing some kind of pop song. The woman loved baseball but had terrible taste in music.

Me: Boring? You need to go out, come out with me, I started to type out, and like usual, I deleted the message. A heaviness weighed in the pit of my gut. I couldn't just ask her out. To her, I was someone else. She had no clue I was the very man she loved to tell stories about.

The man she loved to hate.

Me: Boring? What's going on? I pressed *Send* and watched her on screen. A smile covered her pretty face, and she started to type away, then she deleted whatever it was and started again.

What did she delete? Did she want to meet?

This shit had been going on for two weeks. Two weeks of talking to her on a daily basis after I approached her carefully

three weeks ago.

Carey had been right about the way I'd approached women in the past. I'd been a douchebag. Even though, now after Wendy, everyone else seemed to cease to exist for me.

I'd struck up a comment here and there on her videos. About the love of the game and some of the players in the past. I'd even stuck up for myself in one, bringing up good things about me, hoping she knew those.

She had but seemed unimpressed.

Then, by some miracle before I privately messaged her, I woke up to a message from her. A week of chatting; we'd exchanged numbers after I bought a new phone with a new number... just for her.

My very own tiny, sweet, dark-haired Tinkerbell had made me rethink so many different aspects of my life.

Wendy: No new stories on the man child. *Man child.* The term should have bugged me, but now it only made me smile. I called her Tinkerbell, and she called me man child. It was fine. Shit, it basically made us an official couple with nicknames.

Too bad she didn't know it.

Yet.

Me: Maybe you should go to a game? I suggested and waited. Hoping she'd bring up the next plan I had set in motion. One that was tempting enough to dangle in front of her that would bring her straight to me.

Wendy: Funny you suggested that. I was contacted by the Dirt Devils!

My lips quirked up. Yup, that had been all me. Like I said, I'd needed to be smart. I'd needed a plan. One that would have her brought right to me on a silver platter.

She needed to meet me.

In the flesh.

And after two weeks of talking like we had, I was done waiting. I knew I could be charming, and once I had her in front of me as myself, she would have no choice but to fall for me.

Me: Oh yeah? What did they want? *As if I didn't already know.*

Wendy: They offered me a pair of complimentary season tickets for all their home games.

Me: That sounds great! Now you won't have to pay to see them.

Now she could sit closer to the field and not have to worry about missing a damn detail. She would be close enough for me to see. To almost touch.

Wendy: True. They have an afternoon game tomorrow. Would you like to meet up?

Fuck. Something in my chest swelled. My sweetness had taken me off guard and had approached me first. *Again.*

There was no way I could agree.

Not only was there the fact I was playing, but she hated me.

Me: I wish I could, but I have to work. My jaw clenched, and that thing in my gut tightened.

Wendy: Oh! That's right. She responded with a cute little happy face. But she wasn't smiling on my screen. No. My girl looked sad. Almost disappointed. And I hated it.

Me: You'll be able to see Northend play, though. Heard he's starting.

I brought myself up in our conversations as much as possible, but talking to Wendy, it got dicey. I forget I'm pretending to be someone else and find myself spilling all sorts of shit. Shit I had never once voiced out loud or gave much thought to, much less shared with anyone.

But Wendy wasn't just anyone.

She was mine.

Wendy: LOL. When doesn't His Highness start? Her little message dripped with sarcasm. *His Highness*. She was fucking cute. Even when she was making fun of me.

Wendy: Would you like to talk? Tonight, I mean? Maybe we could FaceTime?

My little pixie was getting impatient.

She'd been pushing for more for the past three days. First, she'd brought up us talking. When I heard her voice on the other line, it'd been hard to keep my hand off my cock. My voice deepened with every stroke as we got to know one another. There were times when her own voice had changed and her breath hitched.

It'd made me wonder if she'd done the same thing. If she had been touching herself to the sound of my voice. Though it wasn't my voice. I'd had to deepen it to make sure she wouldn't recognize me. Just in case.

But my stupid ass hadn't been watching the cameras in that moment. Too enthralled with the idea of just talking to her.

Me: Talk or FaceTime?

Wendy: Does it matter?

Me: What if you see me and you hate what you see?

I couldn't believe how vulnerable I was making myself to her! I wasn't that guy. The shy one, unsure of his natural charisma. Yet with her? Everything was fucking different! *That's because you lost your goddamn mind!* a voice in the back of my head shouted, but I ignored it, on the edge of my seat as I watched the bubbles in the chat light up to life.

Mandy: I have a feeling that's impossible. And just like that, the bat between my legs perked up further.

Me: Why is that? I was fishing for compliments, and I knew it. But I wanted to make sure this was a two-way street. I needed her to confirm her own attraction to me even though she was clueless as to who I actually was.

Wendy: The last pic you sent was very nice.

Wendy was flirting with me. Last night, she asked if I thought we should exchange pictures. Tempted beyond belief and unable to tell her no, I'd agreed.

I'd sent her pictures of myself.

Faceless ones that were cropped and angled just right so she would never be able to put one and one together and find out she was taking to the man child she loathed.

Me: I could be severely deformed.

Wendy: I highly doubt that. I loved how quick and witty she was. I watched her stand up from her couch and stretch. She looked up toward one of the four hidden cameras in her living space, and I froze with phone in hand. Her head tilted, and she frowned. Her brows bunched, and as she started to walk forward, my heart rose from my chest to my throat with every step she took as she got closer to the one camera. I acted again without thinking.

Quickly, I lifted my burner phone and called her.

I watched her jump at the sound, refocusing her attention on the phone she'd left on the couch. She walked over and picked up. The smile on her face as she looked at my number pop up on her screen had my heart flipping inside out in my chest.

She looked genuinely happy.

And just like that, I knew I'd do anything, crazy or sane, to make that look on her face a daily one.

CHAPTER 2

WENDY QUEZADA

I smiled at the image on my phone and answered.

“I didn’t think you would actually be the one to call.” I winced at the brash words that slipped past my lips before I could stop them. The deep sound of his rough chuckles makes goose bumps flare to life on my skin. From head to toe, I shivered.

“I’m a little slow making the first move, huh?” Kirk Carraway mumbled deeply, almost like he was embarrassed or maybe shy.

“A little.” I chewed on my bottom lip, hoping he didn’t take it offensively.

“I just didn’t want to come off too strong and make you think I was some kind of creep,” he shared.

I settled back on my couch, extending my legs to its length as I rested my head on the arm rest. I didn’t usually meet people online. In my line of work, all sorts of people messaged me on all different social media platforms. From emails to TikTok, if there was a way to get a hold of me, people tended to send messages. Some were innocent while others not so much.

But there had been something different about Kirk. His comments stood out, and something about him made me reach out to him. Then, for a week, we talked. Got to know one another.

He’d been kind and sweet. Funny.

So much that I found myself intrigued by a faceless man who knew the game I had a very weird relationship with. He understood it in a way that even surprised me. He'd helped me see baseball in a different way, and along the way, I'd slowly started to fall for the shy guy with a great laugh.

"I don't think you're a creep. Wait..." I hesitated. "Do you think I was creepy? You know, asking for a pic and—"

"No." His chuckles sounded loud and scratchy, almost like he doesn't laugh often. "I like that you did. Got us talking and getting to know one another a little better." Was it just my hopeless romantic heart or had his voice dropped lower? Huskier?

"Oh. Okay. that's good."

"I just don't want you to think I have no game."

"No game, huh? Like Northend?" I teased with a giggle.

It was a cheap shot at Peter Northend, a pitcher I secretly crushed on but hated how immature he was. The man was thirty-five acting like an eighteen-year-old just getting a taste of freedom for the first time. He was a self-acclaimed bachelor for life. "Kirk?" I called out then repeated his name again, "Kirk?"

"Oh, yeah, that's me. Sorry, I got distracted. Was, uh—closing up my place for the night." he explained.

"Calling an early one?" I asked, glancing up at the clock on the wall. It was a quarter to nine.

"Something like that."

"Do you have to go into work early?" I asked. He cleared his throat.

"Yeah. I have to meet some of the train... I mean trainees. New hires." Kirk didn't really talk a lot about himself.

When we got talking, he usually liked to steer the conversation toward me and my day. Something I'd been weary about at the beginning, but somehow, Kirk had started to work his way under my skin, making me want things I had no business wanting. Not from someone I met online, at least.

“Oh, well, that’s exciting, meeting new people,” I tried to spin in a positive way.

“It can be.” He sighed. “So, you going to take the Dirt Devils up on the season tickets?” I smiled, relaxing on my couch.

“I’d be an idiot not to.” I giggled, “I’m actually kind of excited. I’ve never had seats like the ones they offered me.”

“I bet you get to meet some of the players.”

“I hope not.” I made a face.

I still couldn’t believe the fact I was making a living from the very sport I had grown up having such a tumultuous love-hate relationship with. My dad, or sperm donor like my mom liked to call him, had been a legend.

Literally one of the players who had been inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown. And as a curious, gawky, tomboyish teenager, baseball had been my only way to get to know him. It was a place where I somehow felt like I fit.

Until the press got wind of the legend’s illegitimate child sitting in the nosebleeds and made life a headache for my mom.

But that was a long time ago.

My dad died shortly after I meet him for the second time, and my mom moved across the country with whom she believed was her soulmate. He was an okay guy. He was good to my mom, and she seemed happy. That was all that really mattered to me. Older than Mom, he was retired, and they just traveled from continent to continent, cruise ship to cruise ship. In a way, as sad as it sounded, I didn’t mind her being gone. I’d put her through a lot, and I was happy she found someone who suited her.

“Wendy? Wendy, you there?”

“Yeah, sorry.” I shook my head. “I got a little… sidetracked,” I lied.

“Editing new content?” I smiled.

“No, nothing like that.”

“Hey, listen, with you going tomorrow, I was thinking...” he hesitated, and silence filled the line. Because I was me, I cracked a joke.

“Did it hurt?”

“Cute,” he muttered. “I was thinking you should give the guys a chance.”

“What?”

“A lot of them are not as bad as you think.”

“They’re not? Wait, how would—”

“I mean, I wouldn’t think they are,” he corrected, and I frowned. “I’m just saying keep an open mind.”

“I wasn’t going to be mean, Kirk.”

“I know you weren’t, babe.” *Babe*. My eyes widened at the term of endearment. The first one he used. I didn’t mind it, but as hot as that picture he’d sent was, I wasn’t stupid. One, he could totally be catfishing me, and two, we weren’t like that. I didn’t think. “I don’t think you have a mean bone in your body.” Now that had me forgetting about the babe comment and made me straight out laugh.

“Why are you laughing?”

“Have you not seen my videos about Northend?” I reminded. “I can most definitely be mean.”

“Yeah, I know that, too. But maybe, I don’t know...” he hesitated, and my smile died on my lips.

“Maybe what?”

“Maybe keep an open mind. Especially when it comes to him.”

“You’re just saying that because you’re a fan of his.” I still couldn’t get over the fact I’d sprung up this weird friendship with an actual Northend fan.

“Maybe.”

“Maybe? That’s all?”

“Okay, maybe I just think we’re all human, Wendy. People make mistakes. Athletes make them all the time.”

“I know. I was one of them,” I muttered. The words slipped past my lips without thought, and we both went silent.

“You’re not a mistake, Wendy,” he said sternly. My lips wobbled.

“I didn’t mean it that way.”

“You meant it some kind of way. Look... your dad—”

“Sperm donor,” I corrected.

“Right, he was messed up. He might have known what he was doing out on the field, but off it? Him not claiming you? That was his biggest mistake in life. He probably died regretting it.”

“He died during a threesome, Kirk,” I shared a truth that wasn’t widely known. I was suddenly exhausted.

“Babe—”

“I’m tired, and don’t worry, if I meet His Highness, I’ll be nice.”

“Promise?”

“Why is this so important to you?” It was weird for a guy to try and push you to meet another guy, wasn’t it?

“It’s not, it’s just—”

“What?” I cut him off wondering why Kirk was such an advocate for the second most notorious baseball player, second only to my father.

“He’s just a guy.” He sighed. “Sometimes when people look in from the outside, it’s all smoke and mirrors.”

“The guy had a runway of lingerie models just hanging out waiting for him in the locker room,” I pointed out.

“Wendy—”

“And then, during a press conference once, he came out drunk and stoned. Only to be slapped on the wrist with a fine,” I reminded him.

“Of twenty-five thousand dollars and a hundred hours of community service,” Kirk defended.

“Oh, please. We both know that’s pocket change for him, and the community hours were probably just signed off by some fan,” I argued.

“Or maybe he actually coached two seasons of little league when all he would have had to do was half a season?” I opened and shut my mouth.

“Is that true?” I asked, trying to remember when that whole thing had happened. “If that’s true, I would have found out about it.”

“Not if he wanted to keep it to himself.”

“You’re going to tell me the parents of those kids on that team wouldn’t have shared a picture or video of him being a do-gooder?”

“Maybe he asked them not to?”

“Maybe you’re full of it.” I laughed softly.

“Why’s that?”

“Because there’s no way Northend would do anything without somehow cashing in.”

“Maybe that’s not true.” Hmm, the concept of the famous pitcher doing anything for anyone else sounded ludicrous.

“I guess anything is possible,” I muttered, not completely believing it.

“He could also be privately sponsoring a couple baseball camps in shitty areas in surrounding towns.” I frowned.

“If he was, how would you know?” I asked, slightly suspicious. This wasn’t the first time Kirk had come to Northend’s defense or said things about him that unless he was the guy or knew the guy personally, he wouldn’t know.

“I don’t,” he immediately answered. “I’m just”—he coughed—“talking outta my ass. It’s late,” he murmured. I glanced up at the clock on the wall of my living room. I stood and stretched.

“You’re right.”

“Get a good night’s sleep for tomorrow.”

“You too. Don’t be mean to those new hires.”

“New hires?”

“The trainees?” I clarified, reminding him about what he allegedly had on his schedule.

“Right. God, I’m telling you I’m not myself tonight.” He chuckled, but I couldn’t shake off the feeling something wasn’t right. “Don’t forget to lock the door,” he noted, and I turned.

“My door is—” I started to say when my eyes widened. I was usually damn good about locking the door when I came in from running errands. I’d lived in shitty neighborhoods my entire life, and it had become second nature. “Do you have a camera in my house or something?” I teased as I went to lock the door. He coughed.

“No. Lucky guess. It’s just what I do at the end of the night. In my place.”

“You lock up?”

“Yup.”

“Well, how responsible of you.” I smiled. “Sweet dreams, Kirk.”

“Night. And remember, keep an open mind tomorrow.” With that, the call ended and I stared at my screen for a moment.

Keep an open mind. I shook my head. Kirk was a good guy. I wasn’t sure how I knew it, but I felt it in my bones. I felt it regardless of who he was. After this conversation, I had a feeling he wasn’t being completely open about how he knew Northend. But I couldn’t shake off the feeling about him being a good guy.

And maybe because of that, I’d go to that game trying to keep my judgment of Peter Northend and his past at bay.

CHAPTER 3

PETER

I was nervous.

And for some fucking reason, those damn nerves had me playing better than what most people would call my golden days. I could see her in the stands. Sitting that perfect ass of hers right behind the catcher's mound in the scout seats. When I'd sweet-talked one of our marketing girls into offering the podcaster season tickets, I'd made sure they would not only be the best in the house but she would be in a clear line of vision where I could see her.

With every pitch I threw, she was there. Her eyes wide as excitement started to glimmer and mount with every inning we went through. At first glance, I could feel the disapproval radiating from her. But by the third inning, I could see the hint of a smile on her lips as I struck out player after player.

A smile that fed this thing inside me. A thing I hadn't fed in a long time. The poor excuse of my heart started to beat for the first time.

By the end of the game, we had won but I'd lost sight of her. I hoped to God she took up the marketing team's offer for her to meet the players. I hurried to the locker room and stopped at the sight of Carey waiting for me.

"Great game," he muttered. His arms were crossed over his broad chest.

"You don't sound like you mean it." I smiled at him, hoping he hadn't seen her. But from the daggers he glared in my direction I knew that wasn't possible.

“Peter,” he warned. I nodded toward an empty room across the hall from the locker room. We stepped in, and I turned the light on and made sure to shut the door.

“Look, I can—”

“What did you do?” he growled. I could tell by the flushed skin on the back of his neck he was pissed.

“How do you know I did anything?”

“She’s here,” he stated. I was about to ask him who when he shot me a look. “Patty from marketing told me it was your idea. Now explain.” I winced. I hadn’t just been caught, I’d been caught red-handed.

“She should meet me.” I shrugged. I knew how it sounded—an entitled athlete who thought the world revolved around him. Just the way Carey saw me. Never mind I was in love with her and dying to be face to face with her.

“I told you to leave it alone. I told you to behave.”

“And I have been,” I lied easily. “You know that. You just texted me praising me about how well I am behaving I reminded him.

“Peter,” he growled. Carey’s face started to turn red, and a vein at his temple popped up. “How bad is it?” I was about to act like I had no idea what he was talking about when once again, he stared at me. “You tell me how bad this is, or I’ll quit you,” he threatened for the first time since I’d been signed as his agency’s first client.

“Quit me?” My eyes widened and my lips twitched. “What is this, a Jake Gyllenhaal cowboy movie?”

“Peter—”

“Though I know what you’re going to say, if it was anyone’s movie, it was Heaths, but—”

“Goddamn it, Peter!” he shouted, and I shut the hell up. I’d pushed the bear way too far this time. I hated being given the silent treatment, and Carey knew that. We stood in the small room staring at one another.

“How bad?” he repeated, finally breaking the uncomfortable moment.

“I might have been talking to her,” I confessed gently.

“How?” he asked without blinking. For the first time in a very long time, I couldn’t read him.

“Private messages. Texts?” I left out the cameras in and out of her apartment. I had a feeling if he knew, his head would explode.

“Texts?” He stared at me incredulously. “How did you manage that?” A noise sounded from outside. My eyes moved to the small window at the door, and I caught a glimpse of her.

“I should get out there.”

“How, Peter?” he pushed, but I was nervous about losing my window of opportunity to talk to her.

“I promise I got this under control,” I reassured him, hoping like hell I wasn’t lying.

“If you don’t, I won’t save you from anything. Not this time. I’ll be done.”

“We’re family,” I reminded him.

“And you always will be, but you won’t be my client.” His threat was crystal clear. My stomach twisted into a huge knot. One that I would have easily brushed away before just sat there.

Heavy and ugly.

“She doesn’t know it’s me she’s talking to.” I confessed a smidge of the pickle I’d put myself into.

“She doesn’t...” He blinked and then squinted at me. “You catfished her?”

“Catfished sounds so...”—I shrugged and made a grunting sound—“bad.”

“That’s because it is, Peter.”

“I’m gonna go and introduce myself. Charm her.”

“Stay. Away. From. Her.” He enunciated each word, but I just pressed my lips together.

I didn’t agree or argue.

I just stared at my best friend and brother from another mother.

“Shit.” He sighed before he ran his fingers through his hair. “You’re not going to stay away from her, are you?”

“Carey—”

“Just...” He put out a hand to stop me from saying anything else. “I don’t want to know. Ignorance is bliss, and it’s better than being a fucking accessory to whatever crime you’re—”

“I’m not.” I rolled my eyes, lying through my teeth. “Look, I have a plan.”

“Oh yeah?”

“She’s going to meet me and be completely charmed. She’ll forget all about Kirk.”

“Kirk?”

“*Star Trek* was playing in the background.” I shrugged. He stared at me. “Okay, fine! *Gilmore Girls* was on.” He was the only other person in the world who knew that show was my guilty pleasure.

“You are an idiot. You know that, right?”

“That’s hurtful.”

“It’s the truth. You could literally go after any girl, *any girl*. All you have to do is smile.”

“Awe, you think I’m that cute?”

“But you go after the one woman who seems to hate even the idea of you.” His words felt like a sock to the gut. My smile died on my lips, and I looked at the ground for a long moment.

He wasn’t telling me anything I wasn’t already aware of.

I knew firsthand how much she didn't like me. Yet, like some kind of spoiled child, it made me want her even more.

"She's different, Carey," I stated seriously, raising my gaze to meet his. "She's..."—I squeezed the bridge of my nose—"I can't even tell you how she's just..." I was at a loss for words. Carey's eyes widened. First with horror and then humor.

"You like her," he accused. "Holy fucking shit."

"Shut up." I rolled my eyes. "She's a nice—"

"You *like* like her." He chuckled, and I relaxed. I hated having Carey pissed at me. Even with all the shit I did to irk him, I hated the idea of him being angry at me. "This..."—he laughed and walked toward me—"is going to be fun."

"What?"

"You are falling for a woman who wants nothing to do with you."

"She hasn't met me yet."

"And it's going to be fun to watch you finally get what's coming to you." My brows narrowed.

"You sound like you want something bad to happen to me."

"Now that's bullshit, and we both know it. I'm your best friend, your only friend."

"That's not true—"

"It is. I'm the only one who is honestly and genuinely in your corner. All the other people around you use you for who you are." I opened my mouth and shut it because it was true. We both knew that. "Yeah, I see you're getting it. Eating crow is never fun."

"I'm not interested in her like that. I've told you before I am never going to fall in love. I am never going to have that forever thing people look for."

"Forever thing? You make relationships sound like a bad case of herpes," he teased. I rolled my eyes.

“First off, when have you ever heard of a good case of herpes? And honestly? It might as well be,” I muttered the same old arguments. But where it would leave me feeling better before, it didn’t this time.

It felt like I was lying. And then, because Carey was freaking Carey, he put a cherry of a shit sundae.

“Never say never.” His eyes glittered with humor as he shook his head. “Call me first if you need to post bail.”

“Bail?”

“Yeah, you’re going to need bail when you get arrested for whatever you have going on or whatever shit you’re planning blows up in your face.”

“You’re not going to tell me not to do it?” I asked, and I knew I hadn’t hidden the vulnerable tinge to my voice.

“Would it stop you?”

“No.”

“Then why would I waste my breath?” I opened and shut my mouth and shrugged. “I’m your first call, ‘kay?”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah,” I muttered and turned to leave. Just as my hand touched the knob, Carey called my name.

I looked over my shoulder. “Just be careful, okay?” He looked like he wanted to say a hundred and one other things, but to his credit he didn’t.

“I’ll be careful.”

“Try and be smart. I know it’s tough for you, but.... try? For me?”

“Damn. For you? Calling in big favors, huh?” I teased. “Trust me. I got this.” And as I walked out of the room, and my eyes locked with Wendy’s, I seriously hoped I did.

CHAPTER 4

WENDY

They say to never meet your heroes.

That if you did, more often than not, you would be disappointed. But Peter Northend wasn't a hero to me. In my eyes, he was what was wrong with professional sports nowadays.

But as my eyes locked with his as he stepped out of what looked like a room, my heart stuttered in my chest. For a moment, everything around us seemed to fade. Blur at the edges. It felt like he was the only thing that existed as his green eyes stared right into what felt like my soul. There was an unusual familiarity when it came to him.

I almost thought he hesitated, too.

As if his steps faltered and the boyish, charming grin he was known for vanished for a split second, leaving someone I hardly recognized staring back at me.

But as quickly as it appeared, it vanished. Replaced with his all-too-familiar cocky, slightly arrogant smile. A smile that had been off-putting in videos or pictures of him in the past. But in the flesh? *Holy crap!* I wasn't sure what the hell was wrong with my body. Heat traveled to the back of my neck and face.

And that's when I realized he wasn't just smiling at me. He was walking directly toward me.

"You must be Wendy," he said, extending his hand, putting it right between us. My eyes darted down to it and back up at him then glared at the hand like it was a snake.

“Excuse me?” I said without thinking.

“You’re Wendy, right? From Dirt on the Devils podcast?” I looked up all the way to find his eyes, I knew I was in danger from drowning in them. God, I knew they were pretty. Bright and wide with what looked like golden or bronze glitter swirling through them. But up close, they were even more than that.

“You listen to my pod—” I started to ask, but he cut me off.

“Religiously,” he shared with a smirk. His hand was still waiting between us for me to shake it. Without thinking, I took it, and when his hand enveloped mine, I knew immediately I’d messed up. A zing of awareness and something else, something I wasn’t sure I could name, ran through me.

“I’m Peter Northend, but you know that, don’t you.” He winced like he was honestly embarrassed by telling me what we obviously knew.

“Are you mad?” I blurted off again without thinking.

“About?”

“My podcast?”

“Not at all.” He chuckled. “Would you like an interview?” he offered easily. My eyes turned to saucers. They felt like they were going to pop out of my head.

“Just like that?” There was no hiding the suspicion in my voice.

Peter Northend didn’t give interviews.

Not willingly.

The only reason he did after-game press was because the team forced him to. It was literally written into his contract.

“Why not?”

“Umm, if you’ve listened...” Now it was my turn to be embarrassed. Heat hit my face and sweat started to form at my hairline. “If you’ve listened, you know I’m not your biggest fan.” His green eyes softened.

“I do,” he said in a softer voice. I wasn’t sure, but I almost felt like our bodies had swayed a little closer. I could swear I felt his body heat radiating against me while my hand was still in his. The pad of his thick thumb gently stroked my knuckles, almost putting me in a trance.

A trance? That alone had me pulling my hand out of his grip and taking a healthy step back. One that wasn’t laced with Peter Northend pheromones.

“Why would you want to be interviewed by me?”

“Why not?”

“Umm, for one, you don’t do interviews.”

“Exactly.” He smiled almost genuinely, like he made the most sense.

“That doesn’t make any—”

“Look, Wendy.” He reached for my hand again, and for some damn reason, I let him take it. I liked the way his huge, calloused hand felt against mine. “I don’t know how many more seasons I have left in me.”

“Are you saying...” I looked around us, surprised no one was paying any attention to us and there were a lot fewer people hanging around. “Retirement?” I whispered, but he just shrugged.

Not confirming nor denying a thing.

“I’m saying I’d like to do an exclusive interview.”

“With someone who can’t stand you.”

“Who else would be better?”

“Anyone. Literally anyone.” He chuckled. The sound made me almost dizzy.

“You’re cute.”

“Cute? You think I’m...” I frowned. “Is this interview some kind of proposition?” I asked. His lips twitched. “Because let’s be clear here, Mr. Northend—”

“Peter,” he corrected, and I rolled my eyes.

“I’m not interested.”

“You’re interested,” he whispered cockily. But before I could find my tongue, he pulled me a little closer and leaned in. His head dipped so low I felt his breath against the shell of my ear. “The walls have ears, Miss Quezada.” He pulled back, and I blinked. “I think we should go somewhere and talk where we would have a little more... privacy.”

“Privacy,” I repeated softly. He nodded. I licked my lips. “Like where?” I found myself asking instead of telling him to shove off.

“My place?” His place. My eyes fluttered shut, and I shook my head.

“I don’t think so,” I quickly responded. When I opened my eyes, he was looking right at me. I would never, not once, would have thought I’d be a ball player’s type, much less Peter Northend’s. But there was something about the way he was looking at me that had me wondering if I wasn’t being delusional thinking he might be interested in more than an interview.

“Okay, fair enough. A beautiful woman should always be safe. How about dinner? Have you eaten?”

“Eaten?”

“Dinner.”

“Look, Mr.—”

“Peter. You can call me Peter.”

“Peter, I don’t think—”

“Hey, man! Incredible game!” A reporter I recognized from a local news station walked by and patted him on the shoulder. “Any chance I can get an interview?”

“You know the rules,” Peter answered sternly.

“I know, but I had to try.” The guy whose name I was almost positive was Austin Storms said.

“But how about I give you the first question in the press room?” Northend suggested, and I saw the relief in the

reporter's eyes.

"See you there, thanks!" he called as he hurried to what I assumed was the press room.

"Come on."

"Come—what?"

"I gotta do press room, and then we can grab dinner."

"I don't—"

"We still on for dinner?" Ramires, the team's catcher, came out of the locker room and asked Northend.

"You know it."

"So, you already have plans?" I asked him after Ramires passed us.

"With the team. Figured you might like to get to know a couple of the other guys. Unless I assumed wrong? Which if I did, I'm seriously sorry."

"No." I shook my head. Embarrassment filled my veins, and I felt lame. "Meeting the team sounds good."

"Good." He smiled as I watched relief flashed through his eyes. "They're excited to meet you." He winked.

Excited to meet me? Before I could ask, his hand engulfed mine and I found myself following him as he led the way toward the press room. He opened the doors, and the sound of reporters calling his name and cameras shuttering overwhelmed the room. It was bigger than I'd thought it was when I watched it on TV.

I glanced over at him. Peter was unfazed. He simply walked me to a chair off to the side and smiled. "I'll be right back, and we will get some food, okay?"

"Sure."

"You won't leave?" he asked, and I blinked. He almost seemed worried I would just disappear from right under his nose.

“I’ll be here,” I found myself instinctively answering with a squeeze of the hand he was still holding.

“Okay. Alright. Good.” He stood to his full height, and I could have sworn he muttered *show time* under his breath. His gait dripped confidence as he made his way to the table where the team’s coach and manager were waiting. His green eyes met mine, and he winked at me, making butterflies in my belly fly when all I wanted to do was shoo them away.

I didn’t find baseball players interesting in any other way but for the love of the game. I didn’t date athletes. After having the shittiest person be your sperm donor, it was easy to find jocks off-putting.

But as I watched Peter Northend answer questions and dodge the ones he didn’t want to answer, I found myself being drawn in. It was no secret that the man was more than easy on the eyes.

Tall and lanky with a strength that was undeniable. Topped off with charisma and charm? He was literally like catnip to women. But personally? That kind of man had never called my attention.

Not until I met Peter in person and realized that maybe, just maybe, all the hype about him was actually real.

The game he’d just pitched, statistically, was better than when he took the team to the World Series. And the ability to not just start a game but pitch a no-hitter at his age?

Shit, it was unheard of.

And he wanted me to interview him when he wouldn’t let anyone else?

When did the world tilt on its axis?

CHAPTER 5

PETER

Throughout the press conference, no matter how hard I tried not to let my eyes dart toward where I had left Wendy, I failed.

I tried to focus.

Fuck, I tried.

I knew cameras were on me. I hated doing press. I knew a lot of people, Carey included, thought I thrived off the attention. And maybe I had the first couple of years in my career when I was drafted and put in as a starting pitcher from the get-go.

But it had been over a decade since I started hating the cameras and reporters all over me. No matter what I did, from no-hitters to taking the Devils to the World Series, it was never enough. Press had been a fucking joke. The way they twisted my words and no matter how well I played, talked shit.

So, I'd decided a long damn time ago that if they weren't going to respect me, I wasn't going to show. But then they slipped a clause into my contract that forced me to be there. Being who I was, I decided if I had to be there, I'd make a mockery of the whole thing. I was hell bent on it. Everyone thought it was part of my persona, and maybe it had been.

Young and dumb was never good when you were pissed.

I'd even been angry with Carey for not getting it. But even if he didn't get things, he always had my back.

I knew how much the reporters observed and scrutinized you when you sat up in front of them. And I knew that if my eyes kept darting toward Wendy, someone could catch on. It wasn't that I didn't want anyone to know about her; it was about protecting her. She had already been in the headlines due to who her dad was.

Yet my eyes kept bouncing to her because there was no other way to say it, I was scared, terrified she would vanish into thin air. Part of me had thought that being in front of her, seeing her in person, would somehow lessen the thing in me that pulled and drew me into her.

But fuck if it only did the opposite.

It amplified.

My body felt like it was an electric live wire. From the moment I stepped out and into the hallway, when our eyes locked, to every moment I stood in front of her, I tried to charm her. But my usual smiles and grins hadn't seemed to work. I knew she was affected by me. There was no way she could deny that, but catching herself leaning in a little too closely had me thinking she would do everything but admit she was attracted to me.

I'd played my cards too early, blabbering on about giving her an exclusive interview. I wanted to hit myself over the head when I did that, but fuck me, she was so damn pretty it was hard to keep my wits about me.

"Okay, guys, I think that's enough for today," Coach said. I looked at him. He nodded, giving me my cue I was done.

We all stood, waved, and got the hell down. But like the vultures they were, they yelled and shouted questions and shit to try and get a rise out of me. But they weren't going to get one from me. Not only had I thrown a no-hitter and we'd won, but Wendy was there.

Watching me.

I wanted, no, I *needed* to be better than I had been in the past. For her. For the possibility of something more. I grinned

at my shoes over my silly thoughts as I tried to make my way to where I'd left her.

Never say never, Carey's words played in my head as I lifted my head and extended my hand to take hers. When our eyes locked, a slight pulse of panic hit me. One that dissolved just as quickly when the serious way she'd been looking at me disappeared and was replaced with a smile. One she'd had on her face when she was talking to me, or Kirk, the night before.

Never say never was fucking right.

CHAPTER 6

WENDY

I woke up slowly.

But even in that half-awake, half-sleepy haze, my body wanted to protest. It wanted to go back to sleep and rest. I snuggled my face into a pillow that felt like a cloud beneath my head. An arm tightened around my waist.

And my eyes popped open.

Someone was in bed with me.

In a bed that wasn't mine.

“Shh, relax, Wendy,” a deep manly voice soothed against the top of my head, and my traitorous body melted.

I looked down at the fair hands holding my waist, and there was no controlling my pulse.

“Wendy, it's okay. It's just me,” the very big, very hard man holding me muttered. Kissing the top of my head before losing his hold on me. Before I knew it, he turned me around.

“Ohmygod!” I blurted as I looked into the bright, beautiful, mischievous green eyes of the one man on the face of the earth I would have never expected waking up next to. I tried to remember how the hell I found myself in what I was assuming was his bed, but no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't remember.

“Peter?” My heart thundered in my chest. His eyes softened.

“It's not whatever you're thinking.”

“What the hell am I doing in bed? With you?” I glanced down, and my eyes widened. “Wearing your jersey!” I screeched.

I tried to scramble out of bed, but he was way too fast and tightened his hold. Something came over me, and I fought him. Which turned out to be a mistake when we rolled and his body was over mine, between my legs.

“Relax! Jesus, wild cat!” I blinked and frowned. The nickname made no sense. *Wild cat*? But yet, as I thought about it, little flashes of the night before started to pop into my head. Moments that had me relaxing.

“Get off me,” I mumbled. There was no fight in my voice.

“Last night, you begged me to get on you,” he teased.

“Peter—” I shut my mouth because my face felt hot at the memory. I was in his bed. Begging him to touch me. “What... why...” I was at a loss for words.

“You’re a force of nature, you know that?” His hand brushed the stray strands of hair off my face as his gaze softened. “A damn hurricane of sass and sunshine and wit.” My body relaxed further. I’d never been called a force of nature. I kinda liked it.

“Peter, you’re not making any sense.”

“Yeah.” His head dipped down, and I was almost positive he was going to kiss me. And even though I’d probably never, ever admit it, I wanted him to. My eyes fluttered shut and my lips parted as my body softened and tingled with anticipation.

Anticipation that died into disappointment when his lips brushed the tip of my nose instead. Then he rolled us over, and I found myself straddling his middle. “Peter?”

“You and tequila are a riot, Wendy girl.” My brows bunched. I was uncomfortable with how much I wasn’t against the way his tone had turned all warm and mushy.

Nope. I didn’t like that at all.

“But you, tequila, and vodka?” I winced before my eyes shut.

Slowly, a little more about the night before came back to me. Moment after moment.

I'd gone with him to a team get-together. It had shocked me how innocent and wholesome the whole thing was. Some of the players who were married were even there with their families. The guys had been easy to talk to. And Peter? The easiest one of all. I'd found myself glued to his side. Not because I was forced to and I didn't feel like I could walk away, but because I didn't want to leave him.

Then some of the guys talked about going bar hopping, and Peter convinced me to join them when I admitted I'd never been on a bar hop. The Dirt Devils went from bar to bar, and at each one, I had one too many drinks.

But I'd held my liquor.

Dancing and laughing and—

“Did I play pool?” I asked, and he nodded. There was something in his gaze that felt a little too intimate.

Too sweet.

Too nice.

“Oh yeah,” he drawled. I hated how closely I was paying attention to him. The way his lips twitched like he was genuinely trying to hold back from smiling as to not embarrass me. “And darts,” he filled in. I blinked and despised the way my heart fluttered at the handsome smile he gifted me with. “You have one hell of an arm, babe.”

“If I drank that much, why doesn't my head hurt? I should be hungover.”

“Ah.” His head bobbed. “I made sure you hydrated through the night and gave you Tylenol before knocking out where I had to fight off your seduction tactics.”

“Seduction tact—” I couldn't even finish the thought. “Ohmygod,” I squeaked, lifting my hand to cover my mouth. His body shook beneath me before his hand rose and held my face with a tender touch.

“I see you remember now?”

“I stripped.” My voice went soft. *Oh god!* The memories were rushing back. One after another.

“Down to your panties.” Yup. I’d danced for him. In nothing but my panties! Who the hell was I?!

“And you covered me up with your jersey.” My hands touched the material. Each and every memory that came tumbling back was worse than the last. “You turned me down,” I blurted out for some godforsaken reason.

“I did.” Suddenly, he was unreadable. No longer was the cheeky grin of his staring at me.

“You kissed my nose and tucked me in.”

It’d been sweet.

So sweet I’d tried another tactic.

“I did.”

“Did I try to... oh god!” I groaned, dropping my forehead to his collarbone. His body shook with silent laughter. His hands stroked the line of my back.

I’d tried to get on him, much like I was right then and there. I might have even rubbed myself against him and tried to unbutton the jersey. I pulled back to look at him. His eyes were serious and almost a darker shade of green.

“I’m not pushing you away right now, Wendy.” I shivered at the deep tone of his voice.

“I, umm, I kinda just realized that. I, umm...” There was no point in denying the man got to me. I was wet, and we both knew it. I had no idea what the hell had come over me.

I hated the guy.

I hated everything he stood for.

That star athlete, full of himself, arrogant and entitled, who thought the world revolved around him. I’d never dated jocks for a reason. I’d never hooked up with them or a stranger.

I’d had three lovers in my life.

One in high school and two in college. It might have been a while since anything non-battery operated or silicone based had touched me.

“Wendy?”

“I, umm...” I swallowed hard. Goose bumps covered my skin. He probably thought I was lame. Suddenly shy after the night before. But the way he was looking at me said the opposite. His hand stroked the side of my face.

“You hungry?” he asked. I pressed my lips together. He was giving me an out.

“I could eat,” I answered, and he nodded. And just like that, I discovered Peter Northend has a gentlemanly side to him. “Let’s get up. You hop in the shower or take a bath if you want while I make us breakfast.”

“You can cook?” I asked, and his lips twitched.

“I can. Might not be the greatest, but I can manage breakfast. If it’s shit, I’ll take you out.”

“Is this like, umm, your usual?” I found myself asking. One of his dark brows rose. “I just mean... with, like, your one-night stands. Is this, like, your thing?”

“This wasn’t a one-night stand.”

“Because we didn’t, umm...” I made a face, and he chuckled. I felt my brows narrow. “Because we didn’t fuck?” His eyes flashed at my dirty words, but then, in a moment, whatever had been there disappeared and a gentle smile replaced it.

“Babe, when we have sex, it’s going to be more than a fuck. You’re going to be stone-cold sober because I want to get your body drunk off my touch.”

“*When*, not *if*?” I blurted the question before I could find any kind of common sense.

“When,” he confirmed. I watched him swallow. His Adam’s apple rose and dropped. “Most definitely when,” he rasped, and I ignored the way those goose bumps flared across my skin.

“Pretty confident.” I rolled my body off his, surprised and slightly disappointed he let me go so easily.

He rolled out of bed and moved right over to me. Unfazed by my attitude.

“I don’t know if you get what happened last night, but you showed me a side of you—”

“I was drunk.”

“You showed me a part of you, gave me a glimpse of you without the attitude and judgment—”

“Judgment?” I asked, cutting him off.

“Babe, those stories you tell on your podcast about me are completely judgmental.” *Babe*. I blinked. Something about his tone felt... familiar. I shook my head.

“They’re the truth.”

“From whose eyes?” I blinked. I opened then quickly shut my mouth. My brain was too fuzzy from the night before, and I had no idea how I had even found myself in the position I was in.

Peter Northend represented everything I was against, and yet, as I stared into his green eyes, I tried to ignore the way my body felt around him.

Tried and failed, I thought to myself.

“It’s too early for deep conversations.” I licked my lips. “I think I should change and head home.”

His arm extended, pulling me in by the hip. My hand rested on his bare abs. The ladder of muscles contracted beneath my palm. “Shower and meet me for breakfast. We can talk about that interview,” he reminded me.

That interview he’d offered now felt like he was dangling it between us to try and keep me around. I tried to bring it up on the way to the team’s thing early on in the evening, but he was great about changing the subject. He peppered me with questions about myself, and as the night progressed, I was having so much fun I all but forgot about it.

“Fine,” I mumbled. His shoulders seemed to sag with relief. Which only confused the hell out of me.

“Come on.” His hand found mine, and once again, I found myself doing something idiotic, like following him to the huge master bathroom connected to his room.

“This looks like a spa,” I blurted and loved the way his deep chuckles felt warm on my skin.

“It’s not that big.”

“Are you a spa guy?”

“Maybe.” He shrugged. “Playing as long as I have, I’ve been injured.”

“I know,” I reminded him. His shoulder and knee had been an issue three years earlier “That’s why yesterday’s game was crazy,” I complimented honestly. He looked at me for a moment and sighed.

“Yeah, well, my body’s been through stuff, and spas... help.” An image of him lying on a massage table with a towel resting low on his back popped into my head. My hands suddenly tingled with the desire to touch him.

To be the one who soothed out all the tight muscles and do away with any knot he might have.

I shook my head and took the towel he offered. “Use whatever you want, and I’ll leave some extra clothes on the bed for you.”

“Clothes? You don’t have to do that. I’ll use mine.”

“You kinda, umm...” His gaze dropped to the ground before his eyes met mine. “You kinda ripped those off.” I winced at the reminder of the most unsexy stripteases that had probably ever been done on the face of the earth.

“Oh crap, that’s right. Umm...” He took a step forward. His hand took mine and squeezed gently.

“It’s okay. I got you taken care of. I promise.” He nodded and walked out. I moved to the door, and as I was about to turn

the knob, I was halfway tempted to call him back and offer to scrub his back, if he did mine.

But I didn't.

That would be crazy!

I'd already made a fool of myself. He'd turned me down.

When we have sex, it's going to be more than a fuck. You're going to be stone-cold sober because I want to get your body drunk off my touch. His words replayed in my mind, and I shivered.

No. No sex.

Especially with Northend, of all people. I didn't hook up with athletes, much less baseball players like my dad. I was pretty sure he would be fun. I'd have the time of my life with Peter.

Until he was done with me and moved on to the next flavor of the week.

I loved my mom, but I was not going to be like her. Silently crying into my pillow over a man who not only knocked her up but never bothered to acknowledge his paternity. Even when the court appointed tests proved it on my fourteenth birthday.

Nope. That's not for me. I'd shower, change, and call an Uber. Head downstairs and find him. Thank him for the offer, but I would pass.

Who needed an exclusive interview with one of the best professional baseball pitchers to play the game anyway?

CHAPTER 7

PETER

Walking out of my bedroom was the hardest thing I'd ever done.

I hadn't wanted to leave her alone, but I knew I had to. I hurried out of the bathroom and picked out a shirt and joggers for her. I was a big enough jackass to admit I liked the idea of seeing her wear my clothes. Of her sweet little body showering in my bathroom, using my toiletries so she would end up smelling like me while she wore a shirt with my name across her back.

I never knew I had that in me, the need to see my mark on a woman, but then again, I'd never met a woman like Wendy. I was about to leave my room when I saw it. Her phone. I picked it up and slipped it into my pocket of the gym shorts I'd chosen to wear to bed when I usually slept in the buff. Knowing Wendy, she was probably trying to come up with a way to escape quickly after her shower.

The night before had felt like a goddamn fever dream.

One that I'd been sweetly tortured to live out sober because the moment I saw her start to kick back the shots, I stuck to water. When I talked to her as Kirk, she told me about how she never really let loose.

In college, she had never partied or gone on a bar hop. I loved that she not only felt comfortable enough to go out with the guys on the team but to drink around them. Whatever she might say about not liking me, she sure felt safe around me.

I had watched her take drink after drink. She played darts and pool. Hustling a couple of the guys out of some serious cash she'd made them immediately Zelle her. Watching over her had been a privilege. I'd kept her safe, and after about the fourth bar, she was starting to doze off. I remember sitting at the booth with the last of the guys, her body pressed to my side, and when I looked down at her, her eyes, fuck me, those beautiful eyes of hers were starting to close.

She yawned and looked up at me like I was a mystery she wanted to solve.

And I'd taken all the torture I could take.

Or I'd thought I had.

She hadn't wanted me to take her home, so I brought her back to my place with every intention of putting her to sleep in my bed and crashing on the couch in the living room. But then her little seduction tactics started, and I'd been forced to not only put clothes on her and cover up a sight that was engraved into my head but sleep next to her.

The whole thing was heaven and hell all wrapped up in one.

In the middle of the night, I'd woken up hard as a rock. I slipped out and had to go into my bathroom to take care of business. I came embarrassingly fast. I should have left then, locked myself in one of my guest rooms. But having her under my roof soundly sleeping, I couldn't get my feet to take me anywhere but back in bed with her.

Over the damn sheets.

I shook my head, trying to forget the night.

I'd let her see part of my world, some unexpected and some I had a feeling were the way she thought I lived. And maybe I had. Clubs, bars, parties, and women.

But after I listened to her voice for the first time, everything changed. Something inside of me, that part of me that had always said never when it came to doing grownup shit, was asking *what if?*

What if? I shook my head and made my way to the kitchen and got to work. The whole time I made my girl and me a breakfast of champions, those two little words bounced through my head like a ball in a pinball machine.

What if?

What if I could come home to someone? What if baseball was not the be-all, end-all for my life? What if my heart could fall in love?

What if it already had?

Almost as if my heart and mind called her over, Wendy appeared. Dressed in the clothes I'd left her. *My* clothes.

"Hey, thanks for these," she shyly said, averting her eyes from connecting with mine.

"No problem." I turned the stove off because she had great timing. Breakfast was done. I leaned against the counter. "Coffee? Juice? Water?" I offered. She licked her lips.

"Water, please."

"So, you're not a coffee junkie?" I asked, and she laughed.

"Oh, I am. Coffee is..."

"The elixir of life?" I guessed, and she giggled again. The sound wrapped around me. My tiny heart somehow expanded. Crap, was this how the Grinch felt after his ticker grew three times in size?

"Take a seat, and I'll serve you breakfast," I offered gently, trying to keep my excitement at bay. But it was hard. *Like the rest of me.*

"Oh, umm..." Her eyes drifted to the plates of food I picked up and turned into saucers.

"You made all that?"

"Yep."

"For us? Or are there other people coming? Like the National Guard," she teased. I rolled my eyes as I neared her.

Being the needy dick I was, I made sure to get as close to her so I could brush my am along hers as I caged her body against the table. I set the plates down slowly, taking my time as I leaned forward, pushing further into her space. I made sure to breathe in her scent, and I didn't miss the hitch in her breathing. Her natural scent mixed with my shower gel only made me want her more.

And by the way she was breathing, I wasn't the only one affected.

I wanted to know exactly what we smelled like together.

What *we* tasted like.

A dirty, twisted image popped into my head, and it had my mouth watering. I could almost see it plain as day.

Her gasping my name as I flipped her over. I'd rip down the joggers I'd let her borrow and discover there was nothing stopping me from claiming her. Panty-less. There would be nothing, not a damn barrier to protect her from me because I wouldn't put on a condom. Shit, in my fantasy, she'd beg me not to. I'd bend her over, fuck her like both our lives depended on it.

Roughly, almost savagely.

But she would love it.

Scream out my name and beg me not to stop. I'd stretch what I knew would be the tightest sweetest little cunt I'd ever have, mold it to my shape. I'd make her pop off on my cock and not stop until I drained my balls inside of her. I'd turn and lift her, sit her perfect little ass on the table, and kneel down to lick her clean. Tasting the two of us.

My mouth watered and my nose flared at the fantasy.

"What are you thinking about?" Wendy asked in an almost whisper. That was when I realized just how heavy I was breathing and just how close I was to her.

"You smell good."

"I smell like you," she pointed out, and I grinned wolfishly. *I smell like you.* She had no idea how she'd just

stroked this predator's ego.

"Maybe I like you smelling like me." And just like that, the softness in her body as she pressed against me disappeared. It was like someone snapped their fingers. Her body froze, and she narrowed her eyes before she pushed me back.

"I need to go home." Whatever I said was obviously the wrong thing.

"Wendy—"

"Where is my phone? I should call an Uber and——"

"Babe, look, you should stay and eat and—"

"No." She shook her head, side-stepping around me. "You"—she pointed at me—"had me going there for a moment. Last night, this morning, and right—" She pointed at the table before shaking her head and looking away, like she was looking for something. "You almost had me fooled, but you say things like—" I grabbed her arm, and she looked at me from over her shoulder.

"Like what?" I cut her off and gently pulled her back toward me before sitting on a chair.

I pulled her down, fully ready for her to fight me. But to my surprise she just came with me. Like her body knew it belonged with me. *Maybe even her heart.* But her mind was telling her, reminding her of what a piece of shit she thought I was. Hell, and it wasn't like her mind was wrong. I had been a piece of shit.

"Like all... player like," she muttered. She blinked, and her eyes dropped to my mouth and back up. "Men like you only want one thing, and when you get it, you toss it aside."

"That's not true," I lied because she wasn't wrong. I hated myself for the man I'd once been.

"What's the longest relationship you've ever been in?" she asked, and when I opened my mouth, she stared right into my eyes and made me feel like she could see me.

The boy who had never been loved as a child. The man who had used countless of faceless women. The guy who

always felt like he would never be enough, so he never bothered to try for more on an emotional level.

The only person I let myself be close to was my childhood friend, and even then, I wasn't stupid. I knew I'd burned bridge after bridge with Carey and he was about to give up on me.

I knew it would have been easy to lie to her, too. To tell her what I could see in the back of her eyes that she wanted to hear. I knew why she hated me. I reminded her too much of the kind of man her father had been.

Reckless and impulsive.

Selfish.

Jesus, I'd thought the man was a fucking hero. I'd worshipped him from afar. No matter how much I wished Carey was wrong about him, he wasn't.

The guy had been terrible.

While I got to know Wendy, I also dug into the man I'd once idolized. He'd been a pig. And the kicker of it? She thought I was just like him.

"I've never been in a relationship. Not even a fake one like my management company suggested a few times," I confessed without thinking.

"What?"

"Not once. I've never in my life been someone's boyfriend." She blinked as she processed that information. "I've never been the guy someone took to meet their parents. Ever."

"Not even in high school?" I shook my head.

"Nope."

"Why?"

"You really wanna know?" I asked and read the hesitation in her gaze.

Everything inside of me was yelling and shouting at me to shut the fuck up. To get her off my lap and let her walk out. I could keep talking to her as Kirk and try again at the end of the season. I had no idea what the hell I was doing!

The season had just started.

Getting involved with my Wendy girl under any kind of pretenses was fucking idiotic. The only time I knew how to multitask was out on the field. Not in real life with actual people. *Never in real life.*

“Is this where you tell me if I want to know, I should take you up on that exclusive interview again? Because if you need someone to confess all your dirty little secrets to, I’m not sure I should be that person.”

“Why? Because you’re biased against me?” I asked; she was already nodding.

“Exactly.” To her credit, she didn’t flinch at my words or look offended. “Look, Peter, you’re not my type.” *Huh, turns out angels are terrible liars. Lie number one.* “And I’m not interested in doing this.” *Lie number two.* I could feel the disappointment as she said those words.

But I had to be smart.

“Okay, well, that’s that, then.” I shrugged, trying a new tactic.

“What?”

“Look, Wendy, I was asking if you really wanted to know why because believe it or not, I’m deeper than your usual fuck boys.”

“I didn’t mean—”

“Andt as stupid as it might sound, I thought there was something here. Between us.” I pointed back and forth between us before resting the pad of my finger on the bottom of her chin. “I might have used that interview as a way to talk you into hanging out last night so you could get to know me, but I see it was a mistake. And for that I’m sorry,” I apologized sincerely.

“So, you don’t want me to interview you for the podcast?”

“Oh, I do. I wanna be the biggest, baddest devil you ever have on there.”

“But?” she cut me off, and I smiled inwardly.

Wendy might look like an angel, innocent and sweet, but she had a feisty side to her. A dark one. One that liked to push boundaries and hand over control. I’d seen a glimpse of that little brat inside of her last night when she let down her inhibitions. I just had to coax her out.

I had to be patient.

“But not if it ruins whatever chance I have of getting to know you,” I blurted out almost vulnerably, and I knew by the way she stared at me that she hadn’t missed that underbelly I’d just shown her.

“Why me?”

“I like you.”

“You like the thrill of the chase.”

“That’s not—”

“Am I the first woman who’s said no to you?” she asked. I could see the sparkle in her eyes. She was playing with me.

“You haven’t said—”

“Peter,” she warned, and I sighed.

“No. You’re not. Believe it or not, not everyone trips over themselves to get on my dick,” I crudely rambled. But if she was shocked, she didn’t show it. If anything, my angel seemed to like my dirty mouth. Her bottom shifted, and I knew there was no pretending she hadn’t already noticed the bulge in my pants due to her.

“And it seems like a very nice dick.”

“You should know. You all but ground against it through the sheets last night.” She turned a pretty shade of pink. “Give me a chance, Wendy girl?”

“Why?”

“Because I think you’re incredibly brilliant. You’re fucking funny and full of life. Being around you makes me want to... I don’t know... do things I never thought I’d ever want.

“You just met me.”

“That’s not true,” I argued, and I realized I’d misspoken. Especially when her eyes seemed to catch on to the way I’d worded it.

“What do you mean?”

“Wendy—”

“What do you mean we haven’t just met?”

“I mean I met you on your podcast. I’ve listened to every episode you’ve done,” I corrected. Never mind the fact I’d spoken to her on the phone or told her all sorts of things about me not even Carey knew about.

But she didn’t know I was Kirk.

Or that there was no Kirk.

Or that I had cameras in her place, a device on her phone and car so I could track and watch her at any given moment.

“But that’s not all there is to me. You might get to know me and not be interested,” she pointed out.

“Maybe.” I doubted it. “But, Wendy, I’d like the opportunity to get to know you better.”

“You would?”

“Yes.”

“And how would you suggest we do that? A game of twenty questions?” she sassed, and fuck if it didn’t make my aching dick throb.

“Go on the road with me,” I requested, unsure of what the hell I was saying.

“Go on the road?” she repeated as if she could read my thoughts. A lot of players, especially the younger ones, took their girls on the road with them. It wasn’t unheard of. The

more I thought about this idea, the more I liked it. She would be next to me, with me in every city I traveled to. I couldn't see any bad in that.

“Yeah. Go on the road with me. Get to know me. Let me get to know you.”

“You have two more home games,” she reminded me as if I didn't already know the schedule by heart. That was one thing about me: no matter where I was in my life, I always knew what I had coming up game wise.

“Stay here for the next two games,” I quickly suggested. Or I tried to make it sound like a suggestion. Everything inside me wanted to demand her to stay.

“Here?” Her eyes looked like they were about to pop out of her head. And if it weren't for the fact that I was waiting on pins and needles for her response, I would've laughed. She was charming as hell, and she had no clue, not one freaking ounce of how adorable she was.

“Why not? There's so much space here. If you don't wanna stay with me in my room, I have got a guest room you can crash in.”

“A guest room?” she asked, her eyes suspicious as he stared at me.

“Yeah, a guest room. I have three upstairs and a guest house outside.”

“Then why did I stay in your room last night?” she questioned, not that I could blame her.

“You were drunk. I needed to make sure that you didn't get sick and choke on your vomit.”

“I didn't throw up.”

“I know. You're welcome,” I responded like the know-it-all I was used to being. The know-it-all who everyone was used to when it came to me. For some damn reason, that side of me in front of her felt fake. Forced.

She breathed deeply and slowly exhaled. Her eyes never wavered from mine. “Just when I think I can kind of get an

idea of who you are, you confuse me,” she admitted. I couldn’t tell if it was an observation or an accusation. Either way, she was still in front of me, in my house, breathing my air, so I didn’t care.

I wanted her in my space, and I would do anything to make that happen.

CHAPTER 8

WENDY

I had no idea how he talked me into it, but we were eating breakfast together. The man had cooked more than enough food to feed the whole baseball team, and probably some of the staff.

And he wasn't a bad cook.

The scrambled eggs were nice and fluffy, the bacon crispy. The whole wheat toast was perfectly buttered. It almost annoyed me how good he was at everything he did. As if it wasn't possible for Peter Northend to do anything incorrectly or half-assed.

The man was a perfectionist.

After breakfast, I helped clear the table and put the leftovers away. I knew he had my cell phone, but for some reason, I didn't ask for it again. I hadn't even brought up the fact that I should probably head home.

Crap, I should have checked in with Kirk.

Why? something inside of me asked. It wasn't like Kirk and I were anything more than friends. We might have flirted a little, but other than that shirtless picture he sent me, we had never crossed any lines.

An alarm went off on Peter's phone almost immediately after clearing up the table to let him know he needed to get ready for practice. Before I could find a way to suggest I head home, he already talked me into going with him to the stadium. Something about meeting more of the team, and for some reason, I just kept going with every suggestion he made.

I didn't question or argue, which was very unlike me.

Why did I like being in Peter Northend's space?

The day flew by in a blur. We went to the field, where I networked like a champ. He introduced me to everyone. Not only to the players on the team, but the coaching staff as well. I even set up dates to interview a couple of them for my podcast. He called me his girl to anyone we bumped into, and when it was time for him to hit the field, he set me up in the bleachers with an iced coffee.

Thirty minutes later, lunch arrived. I had no idea how he knew or if it was, most likely, a huge coincidence, but he had ordered my favorite.

The day had come and gone, and we were back at his place just as the sun started to set. He showered while I waited in the living room. I sat at one end of his couch, and I was a little disappointed when he walked in and sat down on the opposite end.

But before I could overthink the reason for the space he'd set between us, my feet were in his lap and he was rubbing them. We watched some docuseries about quarterbacks on Netflix in comfortable silence.

The whole thing felt so domestic. Right almost.

And it blew my mind.

I might not have liked him before I met him, but I had eyes. I could see why people were drawn to him. Not only was Peter Northend sexy as sin, as charismatic as the devil himself, but he was also, in a weird way, extremely down to earth. Anytime he gave me a glimpse of the vulnerable person hidden under all the arrogance and cocky behavior, it made me feel like I understood him a little better. But the way he did it, it felt like he wasn't used to letting anyone in.

Like seeing that side of him was just for me.

He was like gravity. Slowly pulling me toward him. Being in his atmosphere felt addicting.

I could see how women would throw themselves at him. I could see why he was a known womanizer. One look into those bright green eyes could leave any red-blooded woman wishing and hoping for so much more.

It made me wonder about the trail of broken hearts Peter Northend left in his wake. I had always viewed him as this man child. A boy in the older man's body who refused to grow up. *A modern-day Peter Pan*. Idiotically enough, after forty-eight hours of being around him, I was worried I'd end up being just one more part of the trail of women who had bitten off more than they could chew.

I tried to avoid glancing over at him, but no matter how hard I tried, I failed. He looked too hot for his own good. His hair was still slightly damp from his shower. All he'd worn coming down from his shower was a pair of dark gray joggers that hung low on his hips. The V of his abs was exposed and on display. Not to mention the ladder of abs and muscled chest.

"Did you forget your shirt?" I blurted out and immediately felt my face get hot. He might not have turned to look at me, but I watched as his lips twitched.

"Do you mind me being shirtless?" he responded, and I playfully rolled my eyes.

"No." My eyes moved back to the huge TV screen. "I just, I don't know..." I moaned when the pressure on his hands tightened around my foot as he rubbed it.

"What, Wendy?" I shifted on the couch. I tried not to squirm, but I couldn't help it.

I was turned on.

Hot and horny.

Between the foot rub and scent of his body wash, my body felt hot.

"I just wondered because your skin has broken out in goose bumps." I sighed softly. My lips parted when his hand tightened around my foot.

“Goose bumps?” he repeated, his tone low.

“Yeah,” I whispered.

“Wendy,” he groaned, and before I knew it, he pulled my leg and I yelped. Suddenly, I wasn’t on the far end of the couch but straddling his lap. My hands rested on his muscular shoulders. “It’s you. You make me like this,” he rasped, and I shivered. “Wendy, you need to tell me to knock it off before we reach the point of no return.”

“Point of no return?” I repeated, a little breathless. Mesmerized by the way his bright green eyes had darkened to a rich mossy color. Peter made me feel like I was in the eye of a hurricane. Completely surrounded by his masculine body.

Why did the big jerk face have to be so damn good-looking? Just looking at him muddled my brain.

“Peter...” I shut and opened my mouth, not really sure what I wanted to say. I should be pushing him away, but the man had short-wired my brain.

“I know,” he groaned. His forehead rested against mine. I shifted in his lap, and the apex between my legs ground against his thick length. We both groaned. His breath tickled my lips. “I should stay away from you,” he said. I blinked slowly. I felt buzzed with sexual frustration and an ache that wouldn’t quit.

“Why?” I asked. *Aren’t I the one who should stay away from him?*

“You make me want things I never thought I’d want.” His words swam through my mind. I knew better than to ask a question when I wasn’t ready for the answer, yet there I went, opening my big mouth.

“Like what?” I asked, knowing I was not only peeking into Pandora’s box but busting it wide open. *Consequences be damned.*

“Everything. With you.”

“Everything with me?” I wasn’t sure what that all entailed, if he was talking about a night or forever.

Normally, the idea of a one-night stand with someone like Peter would be the hugest turn-off, but there was something different about him. Something beautiful and disarmingly different than I'd expected.

Maybe I was being foolish? Letting myself get caught up in hurricane Peter? Or maybe I'd been alone and lost for longer than I realized and seriously deprived of someone else's touch. He'd suddenly become my very own happy thought to help me fly off to never-never Land. It sounded ridiculous, but there was no other way I could explain being in his home, straddled on his lap, about to ask what I asked next.

"Kiss me," I urged, drunk in a lusty haze. My hips moved and my mouth parted while my breath hitched.

"I kiss you, that's it, Wendy girl. You're mine." His warning almost sounded like a threat. One I didn't seem to mind.

For how long? The words were on the tip of my tongue, but I knew if I spoke them out loud, I would ruin the moment. The night before, I'd had a blast going on my first and only bar crawl. I'd enjoyed the way he called me his last night and at practice every time he introduced me to someone. Then coming home with him, cuddling and being given a foot rub by the league's best pitcher. Man. if this was his seduction technic, I had a lot to learn. It worked a lot better than the lousy little drunken dance I'd given him last night.

"Yours," I repeated softly. My eyes drifted from his green gaze to his mouth. His lips were perfect. Full and firm. I wanted to feel them dance with mine.

"Wendy, you keep looking at me like that, I won't give you a choice." He groaned.

"Liar," I whispered. Peter was a lot of things, but skeezy wasn't one of them. He would never take anything he wasn't absolutely sure was being handed right over to him.

"Wendy—"

"Shut up and kiss me, Northend."

"Wendy, that'll mean you're mine."

“For tonight I am,” I whispered as my eyes shut closed and I found the courage to take what I wanted for the first time in my life.

I had always played it safe, even with my career and my podcast. But it seemed being around the sexy pitcher made me feel brave to try all sorts of new things. His lips froze against mine with surprise that I initiated a kiss. I’d never done that, had never made the first move, and for a split second, I worried. It took him less than a second to recover and take control of the kiss.

His hands tangled in my hair, and he gripped tightly. I gasped at the slight twinge of pain then swallowed a growly groan. His tongue swooped in. He deepened the kiss. His taste and presence overwhelmed me in the best way possible. He pulled away when our lungs burned deliciously, and before I could open my eyes, I felt his perfect mouth against my jaw and then on my neck.

I’d been kissed there before but never like that. Nothing had ever felt that way. It was like Peter’s mouth had a special key that unlocked all sorts of nerve endings.

“Peter,” I whimpered.

“Fuck,” he hissed. “You taste so damn good. Knew you would. Like apples and vanilla and me.” I was about to smart off when his teeth dragged against my flesh. I lost my train of thought and moaned. Loud. Louder than I’d ever moaned.

“Peter,” I whimpered again.

“Tell me you’re mine. Tell me you’re my very own little Tink.”

“Tink?”

“It’s you. You’re my Tinkerbell.”

“I thought I was your Wendy girl?”

“I’ll call you whatever you want as long as that means you’re mine.” He panted.

Deep sounds vibrated through his chest; it made thinking fuzzy. Blood rushed in my ears, and it felt like heat flashed in

my veins. His lips found mine, and with every stroke of our lips, my body became less and less mine.

“Tink, Jesus Christ. Look at you. Look how tiny and pretty you are.” I pulled back to look at him. One of his humongous hands cupped my face.

Without thinking, my eyes fluttered shut and I leaned into his touch. I could feel the callouses on his palm. The heat and strength. He should have scared me. He was over double my size. both in height and weight. He might not seem menacing, but his body was nothing but lean solid muscle.

“Peter,” I gasped.

“Tell me, Wendy girl. Tell me you’re mine.” His voice sounded distorted in my ears.

Almost animalistic. A man gone feral as the words vibrated off my skin, leaving a mixture of hot and cold zings in their wake. Heat pooled between my legs.

God, I wanted him.

I wanted him more than I’d wanted anything in my life. It was stupid and reckless. I just didn’t care. I wasn’t going to hesitate. I was going to enjoy my momentary lapse in judgment to the fullest.

“I’m yours,” I whispered, sealing my fate for more than the night.

Before I could take my next breath, I was in the air and then back in his arms. Sheer natural instinct kicked in, and my short legs wrapped around the narrow part of his waist, the heels of my feet digging into the top of his ass.

“Peter.”

“Stay with me, sweetness. I got you,” he promised. He was the walking, living, breathing definition of confidence, his torso still bent as his mouth attacked mine in a wet deep kiss. One that had the heels of my feet digging deeper, causing my chest to press into his tighter and closer.

It wasn’t graceful.

We were too hungry for one another for gracefulness.

He was walking and bumping into things, stopping halfway up the stairs to press my body against the wall and dip his head down to my neck. Halfway up the stairs, he didn't stop at my neck. His mouth traveled to my collarbone. His hands rose from my hips to my stomach. I felt a cool whoosh of air hit my overheated skin as his shirt went up and over my head, leaving me in nothing but my unlined white lace underwire bra. It gave me a little extra support but was sheer above my tan skin. It made me feel cute and sexy. But the way he was staring at me, that look alone could become addicting. I felt beautiful Like a goddess in his eyes.

“Wendy,” he groaned my name, and before I could string two words together, his mouth was there. Taking one stiffened aching lace-covered nipple into his mouth. He nipped and sucked around the bud before I felt the width of his tongue lick the tip. His mouth against the fabric created a friction that had my back arching and my head hitting the wall.

“Oh God!” I cried out.

“Not God, Wendy,” he growled before popping my nipple free. “Say my name. Tell me, pretty girl, tell me what I need to hear.” The man sounded possessed as he turned his attention to my neglected breast and repeated his torture.

“Peter!” I cried out with a whimper. “Please don't stop. I need—”

“I know what you need,” he grunted, bending and lifting me all without falling down the stairs or losing his breath. Peter draped me over his shoulder like I weighed nothing more than a sack of potatoes.

“Peter! You're going to hurt yourself!” I gasped.

“Bullshit,” he mumbled under his breath.

Every step he took, he took with purpose, and when he was almost at the top, he took them two by two. He pushed his bedroom door open and flipped me back up, setting me on the ground and putting space between us. A cold chill washed through me. I missed his body heat. His touch.

Me! I missed him even though he was within view. The fact that he wasn't in front of me, pressed close, had my body aching. But I didn't say a word. For a moment, I watched as his broad shoulders rose and fell, his breathing off. But I could tell by the dark shade of green in his eyes it had nothing to do with exhaustion.

"Peter—" I started to say, but his hand rose in a stop motion. His eyes shut, and he took a deep unsteady breath.

"I'm trying to keep a hold of my control here, Tink."

"Why?" I dared myself to ask. His eyes opened, and I trembled at the unadulterated desire reflecting in his gaze. He was like a predator about to pounce on his prey, and I hoped he'd hurry before I lost my nerve.

"Why, Peter? Why are you trying to keep your control? I told you what I wanted. Unless you changed your—" I wasn't able to finish my sentence.

One moment he was a good five feet from me, and the next he was right there. Right in front of me. So close, I could breathe in the scent of his sun-kissed skin and feel his hard body against mine and see the dark brown flecks in his green eyes.

"Never, not ever say that again. Do you understand me?"

"Peter—"

"I told you. I warned you," he gritted through his teeth. "I told you if I kissed you, you would be mine."

"For tonight?" I didn't mean to make it to sound like a question, but my voice trembled, along with my body. I felt like an exposed electrical wire needing to be wrapped up and contained.

"Forever," he answered, leaving me speechless. Not that I was able to say a word when his lips crashed against mine and he lifted me up again. His hands on my ass, my legs wrapped tight around him, I held on to his shoulders like my life depended on it. He kissed me like he needed me to live, and I gave as good as I got.

For the first time in my life, I was unabashedly selfish and greedy.

Need and desire mounted and swirled with sexual tension. Higher and hungrier until we were both tugging and ripping each other's clothes off. One piece of clothing came off after another until all we were left wearing was our underwear as we lay on his huge bed. He peppered kisses all over my face, and I started to giggle. I'd never thought laughing and sex could mix, but he was showing me so much I never thought possible.

He flipped us around, his back against the headboard and my thighs straddling his. His heated gaze dropped to my chest, and I felt myself get hotter. I wasn't self-conscious about my body. I had always been comfortable in my own skin. My thighs were thicker, but that meant I had a booty. But I wasn't the biggest or the perkier in the chest area. I was not like the usual models Peter was photographed with and probably hooked up with. I was about to raise my hands to cover up when he licked his lips.

"Look at these fucking tits," he groaned. "Prettiest set I have ever seen in my life. Jesus," he muttered.

I was about to call him on his bullshit when his mouth took one nipple while his hand held and squeezed the other in the same way his mouth tugged. The pressure and friction made me grind against him. Made me forget what I had been thinking. All I could manage was rolling my hips back and forth against his thickness. Trying to find a release that felt so damn near but too far away all at the same time.

"That's a good girl," he praised, and I felt like I was lit up from the inside out at his words. "My good, horny girl needs to come, doesn't she?"

"Peter," I whispered. I clung to him, and he grinned.

"Not yet. You can't come until I tell you to, do you understand?"

"Bossy," I complained, but he just smiled at me.

“Trust me?” he asked. His eyes seared into not just my gaze but my soul. It felt like a heavy question that had such an easy answer it surprised me.

“I do.”

“Good girl.” He kissed me and reached for something next to his bed. Not that I was paying attention when his free hand still played with my breast, pulling on my nipple while his mouth licked and sucked on my neck. He growled and pulled back with a frown on his face.

“What is it?” I asked. He had a paper in his hand, and he opened it. His jaw clenched. Whatever the note said didn’t seem to be good. “Peter?”

“I’m outta condoms.”

“Out of... oh.” Reality slowly settled in. Whatever Costco bulk-sized box he had in there was gone because he’d screwed his way through it. *You’re one of the many. The rule, not the exception*, the cynical yet realistic side of me whispered in my head.

“Umm...”

“It’s not what you think,” he groaned. “It’s my manager.”

“He used them?” I asked. He chuckled and shook his head no.

“He took them as a joke,” he muttered; it made me relax. That was better than him just running out from fucking whomever had been in his bed before me. Not that I wanted to think about the endless line of models and actresses who had been where I was right then and there.

“I don’t find it funny,” I pouted. His hands cupped my face.

“Just so you know, no bullshit, I’ve never brought a woman here. Not once. Not for a quick fuck, not for anything.”

“I slept here last night.”

“I know, Wendy. I told you, you make me want shit I never thought I’d ever want, and that includes sharing my bed.”

“So...”

“What?”

“I mean, you’re not a virgin. Where would you... you know, take them?”

“Hotels. Other properties I own in the city.” He shrugged. “But never to my home. Only you.” I wasn’t sure what to make of that, so I changed the subject.

“Your manager took your condoms? As a joke?” I asked, my mind still hazy with lust. The throbbing between my legs hadn’t simmered down.

“Yeah.” He frowned. “It’s complicated. But he thinks he’s being funny. He’ll see how funny he is when I kick his ass,” he complained. I shifted and felt him. I was slick and wet and felt empty.

“You know...” I licked my lips. “We could do other things. I mean, I’m on the pill, but I understand if—”

“I’ve never gone ungloved, Wendy. Never. Not once.”

“What if...” My voice dropped as I pressed my chest against his. I lifted my bottom, and his thick dick slid between my lips.

“Fuck, you’re wet,” he hissed.

“What if we do other things?” I asked.

“Shit,” he cursed. His square jaw clenched tightly. “Wendy.”

“We can still mess around.”

“I want to fuck you.” His dirty words went straight to my head as I worked my hips back and forth. Slowly. Our breathing changed, and his hands slid down to my hips and then to the back of my thighs, pressing me closer against him.

“I want that, too.”

“Shit,” he cursed. His head fell back against the headboard. He watched me through a hooded gaze while I ground against him. My clit pressed perfectly against his length.

“Peter.”

“Fuck, Wendy, you look like a fucking goddess on my lap like this.” He swallowed hard “You’re so goddamn wet and warm. So fucking warm.”

“For you,” I found myself telling him. “I’ve never felt this... never been this wet. Oh god, Peter.” I was inching closer and closer to my destination of euphoria and grand central orgasm.

“Wendy, fuck, I need to taste you.” He flipped me over, and before my body bounced twice, his was draped over me. His body between my legs as his mouth devoured mine. I clung to him and whimpered when his lips left mine. But I didn’t complain when I lost it and his mouth traveled south. His tongue swiped at my flesh, and deep groans filled the room.

“Taste so good,” he muttered, making me squirm. “Still,” he ordered. His gaze caught mine as his shoulders moved under my knees and he opened me wide. “Look at you. Look at this wet, tight little pussy.”

His head dipped, and my eyes fluttered shut. But his mouth didn’t move to where I needed him. Instead, he kissed the inside of my right thigh.

“Love these thick thighs. Toned and pretty.” He gave the other side attention. “You ready to make these my very own personal pair of earmuffs?” His fingers stroked the outside of my thighs. The sensation kind of tickled.

“Peter.” My breath caught in my throat.

“Eyes on me, gorgeous. Give me those caramel eyes,” he demanded, and I did what he asked. I watched as he took that first taste of me. He looked like he was in heaven, like eating me gave him as much or more pleasure than he was giving me.

“This,” he hissed, “this is going to be my new favorite treat. My dessert. Morning, noon, and night. Right, Wendy?” Before I could answer him, he flattened his tongue and really got to work.

My body shook as his tongue did wonders. I’d had sex and experienced foreplay in the past. I wasn’t a blushing virgin, but nothing had ever come close to what Peter made me feel.

“Oh god!” My head fell back, and my knees tightened around his head. The deep feral sounds he made vibrated and helped feed the need in me. There was a tightness coiled tight and ready to spring free inside of me. When his mouth left my sex, I lifted my body up on my elbows. I watched him swipe at my lips with the pads of his fingers slowly, his gaze fixated on my most intimate parts.

“I’m going to own this,” he muttered under his breath, and I half wondered if he was talking to himself or telling me.

Either way, it was hot.

The pressure of his touch increased as he slid the tips of his fingers up and down my slit. I gasped. My hands clenched the sheets below me.

“Look at you opening up for me.” His fingers caressed my clit and then teased my entrance before leaving and dropping lower. I clenched as his fingers moved south, to a part of me no one had ever breached. The puckered hole tingled as his thumb grazed it “I’m gonna own this, too.” His voice vibrated, and my toes curled. I watched as an evil wolfish grin appeared on his face. “You like that. You like the idea of me taking every hole.” His free hand moved up my belly and between my breasts, leaving a trail of heat in its wake. His thumb shoved past my lips, and my mouth parted.

“One day, I’m gonna stuff you full. All three of your holes will be mine,” he promised. The thought should have turned me off, but it didn’t. It made me wetter, and I sucked on his thumb harder.

“Good girl,” he praised. I squirmed under his gaze, but my eyes never left his. I loved the way he watched me. The way

his greedy eyes were solely focused on me as if he didn't give a shit about anything else.

Getting that kind of attention could be addicting.

I'd only seen that look on his face when he was out on the diamond about to strike a player out. Like the world could burn around him, but his attention was trained on the guy up at bat.

"Good fucking girl," he praised again, shifting his body so his cock could rub between my lips. "One day soon," he promised, "I'm going to plug this cute little asshole while I fuck you and have my thumb in your mouth. Soon, Wendy girl, I'm going to devour you whole," he gritted. His hips thrust harder, faster. I was breathless and panting. The way his dick rubbed against me felt so good it almost hurt.

"Peter," I whined, and he hurried.

"Come for me," he demanded. A drop of sweat rolled down the side of his face. Something came over me, and I pulled his face down and licked it off him. I liked how it tasted. Salty and very him. He growled and buried his face in my neck. "Come for me. Come. I'm too fucking close. I'm not even inside you, and you have me close to losing my load on you like a goddamn teenager."

"Good," I answered. His finger moved between us and pinched my nipple hard. I gasped, and my dropped fell to the mattress. "Be a good fucking girl for me, Wendy. Come." His fingers circled my clit.

Not ten seconds later, I shattered.

My body shook and strained as wave after wave of pleasure soaked up my body and pulled me under a wave of ecstasy.

"Peter!" I cried out, and he groaned, low and deep, his face hidden in my neck. White-hot warmth hit my belly, and he pulled back to watch. His release splattered all over my body. I looked between us to see his seed on my skin. White streak after white streak marked me. I smiled up at him. His green

eyes were no longer as dark as they'd just been, but they weren't the grassy shade I was used to.

Something came over me.

I dipped my fingers into the cum that rested on my quickly cooling skin and licked it off. He tasted salty and sweet all at once.

"Fuck," he groaned. His nose flared when our gazes connected. "That was..."

"Incredible," I cut him off with a smile.

"Fuck yeah, it was."

"We need condoms for the next round, though." I sighed happily. He rolled off me, and my body automatically froze. Reality hit, and I was almost positive this was when he kicked me out of his bed.

He got what wanted and would be done with me.

But he wasn't.

I watched as he stood up in all his naked glory, bent to grab his shirt, and moved to hover over me.

"I don't want to wipe it off, but I don't think you'd appreciate wearing me." *Wearing him*. The idea had me pressing my still trembling thighs together.

"I wouldn't mind," I whispered.

"No?" I shook my head. and he tossed his shirt over his shoulder. His hand came to my thighs and stroked me up and down, a little higher, to the mess he'd left behind. Silently, I watched him rub his cum into my skin.

I liked the idea of having him on me.

Wearing him.

Of smelling like him.

By the way his breathing had changed and his semi-hard cock started to thicken, I could tell he liked it, too. I wanted him again. I needed him.

"Peter," I whispered his name, and our gaze connected.

“I know.” He pulled me to the edge of the mattress, and I watched him kneel.

“Your knees—”

“They’re fine,” he grunted, then I didn’t think of anything else.

I couldn’t.

Not when he started to eat me all over again. My clit was still sensitive from the attention he’d given me before. It was clear with the way he ate me that it wasn’t a chore for him. From the sounds he made, it was obvious he enjoyed it.

“I want to taste you,” I moaned as I reached to touch the top of his head.

“Come for me,” he demanded as his fingers slid inside of me. My toes curled.

“Peter! Oh yes!” I gritted.

“Come for me, Wendy.”

“Not without you,” I found myself arguing. Begging.

“Shit,” he cursed. His fingers worked in and out of me, but I shook my head against the mattress.

“Please, Peter. Please. I want you in my mouth.”

“Fuck.” I watched as he stood and hurried onto the mattress. “You wanna take me?”

“Yes, please.” I nodded. He lay on the mattress and bent his finger in a quiet come-hither motion.

“Sit on my face.” I blinked and felt my cheeks heat up.

“I’ve never—” I didn’t have to finish my sentence. I knew by the way his chest puffed that he was happy at the idea of being a first for me.

“Good,” he grunted. His tongue slid over his teeth. “Sit on my face, Wendy,” he demanded again.

“Peter—”

“Now. Be a good girl. Sit on my fucking face and suck on my cock,” he laid out, and I hurried.

“How do I—” I started to ask, but he helped me straddle his face. “Oh yes,” I hissed. At that angle, his mouth felt different, almost more consuming.

“Good girl. Goddamn, Wendy girl,” he drawled, leaning forward. I did as he asked and held his cock in my hands. He was long and thick. As disappointed as I was he was out of condoms, I was also kind of glad.

“How are you going to fit inside me?” I wondered. The words slipped past my lips before I could stop them.

“Perfectly. I’ll fit perfectly,” he mumbled. “Stroke me.” I did as he asked and heard him groan behind me. I wished I were on my knees to watch the pleasure on his face, but I forgot all about that when a clear drop of fluid seeped out and rested at his tip. Without hesitating, I leaned forward and licked it off him. The salty sweet taste bloomed on my tongue, making me hungry for more.

Another first.

Blowjobs were not my thing, but with Peter, I craved to have him in my mouth. I wanted to do anything I could to make him feel good.

“Fuck,” he growled. I smiled and watched his toes curl. He continued licking me, and soon, we were not only in sync but racing to get the other off. We came almost simultaneously, our names and groans echoing off the bedroom walls.

“Did we just sixty-nine?” I asked out loud, a little breathlessly after coming down from our beautiful high.

“I think you sucked my soul out of me,” he teased, and I giggled. His big hands stroked the back of my calves. I glanced over my shoulder.

“That was seriously hot,” I shared. I was telling him something he already knew, but the way his eyes softened and looked at me had my silly little heart flipping on its side.

Carefully, he flipped over so we were lying across the end of the bed, side by side. He tucked me into him, letting me use his broad chest as a pillow. His hand played with the ends my hair. My eyes grew heavy. Exhaustion from the day and two earth-shattering orgasms pulled me under. Just as I was drifting to sleep, I could have sworn he said I was his, but I was too tired to do anything but smile and head straight to dreamland.

CHAPTER 9

PETER

was going to kill Carey.

I was rock hard, and she was tucked perfectly against me. In the early morning light, her skin has a golden hue. My hands got the better of me and started to stroke her arm softly with a barely-there touch, but she didn't stir. Her breathing was deep and slow while that sweet perfect ass was cradled against my cock.

We were both stark naked. All I would have to do is lift her leg and worm my way into her body like I was hoping I was inching my way into her heart.

But I couldn't.

I didn't have any fucking condoms thanks to my asshole best friend. But as I looked down at the woman in my arms, I couldn't, lie. I was tempted. More tempted than I ever had been. Before Wendy, if I had found myself in this situation, I wouldn't have even accepted a goddamn blowjob without a rubber. But in our night of hot and heavy foreplay, the feeling of her lips wrapped around my dick had been as close to heaven as I'd ever been before.

"Mmm," she sighed happily as she shifted, digging her head deeper into the pillow. My head dipped down, and I kissed the delicate slope of her shoulder, and her body froze. I waited, watching her. I didn't bother to fucking blink. I was too afraid I'd miss a moment. She turned, and her bright eyes settled on mine. "Morning," she whispered, almost shyly. We

had done everything but have sex, and yet she was shy. *She is freaking cute.*

“Morning.” My voice sounded scratchy to my own ears. “How’d you sleep?”

“Too well.” She stretched and turned her body. Her eyes dipped between us, and I knew what she was looking at.

“Ignore it,” I muttered.

“How?” Her eyes sparkled as she looked up at me. “That thing—”

“Thing?” I asked, pretending to take offense.

“Monster?” she corrected.

“That’s more like it.” I winked, and she giggled, cozying her body up closer to mine. Her face settled against my chest.

“What do you have to do today?” she asked almost dreamily. “I mean other than play a game.” She pulled back and stared at me.

“Practice. See the trainer about my shoulder,” I shared.

“This one?” she asked. Her hand moved to my bicep, and I nodded. “How did you throw the game you did last time?”

“What do you mean?”

“You haven’t done that in... well, no offense, but a while.”

“Why do I find you knowing my stats sexy as hell?” I groaned.

“Because you’re kinda full of yourself?” she teased. I rolled us over, so her back was against the mattress and my body was draped over hers.

“You’re the one who’s going to be full of me soon,” I warned her, but she didn’t seem to take it that way. Not with the way she smiled softly, almost dreamily, up at me. I had no idea how I’d been able to change her mind about me, but I was glad.

“Soon,” I repeated and dipped my head to kiss the tip of her nose before rolling out of bed and stretching.

“I should go home,” she noted. My heart seized in my chest. *When the hell did that organ become dramatic?*

“Why?” I asked, looking over my shoulder as I grabbed some gym shorts, not bothering to get any boxer briefs.

“I need clothes and do some work. Return calls.” She frowned. “Have you seen my phone?” she asked. I scratched the back of my neck.

“I think I saw it downstairs,” I replied, hoping she couldn’t tell I was half lying. It was most definitely downstairs, where I had purposely left it to keep her attention focused on me. A pretty brow rose, but she didn’t question me. “Are you coming to the game?” I asked, trying to act like I was okay with whatever she chose.

Not that I would be if she said no.

“I’m not sure.”

“Why?” I asked too quickly. I knew I’d shown my hand when her lips twitched. She looked like a beautiful perfectly mussed-up, sleepy angel sitting in my bed, the covers up to her chest.

“Do you want me to go to your game?”

“Wendy, I asked you to go on the road with me,” I reminded her after I tossed on a shirt and moved toward her.

“I don’t know about—”

“Don’t say no,” I cut her off. The mattress dipped with my weight when I sat down next to her. I took her hand and traced her fingers with the other. “Your hands are so tiny,” I muttered, observing not for the first time our size difference. I wasn’t the kind of man who begged a woman for attention. But Wendy was different. “Please don’t say no,” I repeated and gazed up at her. Sitting this way, we weren’t exactly at eye level, but I leaned forward, bending my body so we would be.

I didn’t want her to be intimidated by me. I didn’t want her to feel like I was pressuring her to do anything she didn’t absolutely want to do.

“Let me think about it,” she whispered. I exhaled slowly. It wasn’t what I wanted to hear, but it had to do.

“Come on. I’ll take you to your place before I have to head to the stadium,” I offered. The only thing that made me feel better was the fact that if she was home, I could still keep an eye on her. *You sound like a fucking psycho!* the small reasonable part of me shouted.

“I can call an Uber or a Lyft—”

“You could, but you’re not going to,” I interrupted.

“Peter—” she started to argue like I knew she would. But again, I cut her off.

“Please? Let me take you home. I just want to make sure you get there safe. If not, I won’t be able to concentrate at practice,” I blurted out honestly. Her face softened as she watched me. I could see her thinking, but I wasn’t sure if the coin would land in my favor.

“You’re not at all who I thought you were,” she whispered. Her hand moved up and cupped my face. My eyes fluttered shut as I soaked in the feeling of her tender touch.

I wasn’t who she thought I was.

If she knew who I was, everything I’d done and the way I’d lied to her already, she would realize I was much worse.

CHAPTER 10

WENDY

I stretched in my living room and looked around the small space that suddenly felt extremely tiny. Maybe it was because of the size of Peter's living room. The space was so open and big. Mine, on the other hand, was extremely... cozy, to put it nicely.

I shook my head and smiled.

Peter Northend was nothing like I'd thought he would be. I still couldn't believe I had spent almost two days with the man. From the moment I met him outside the locker room to about two hours ago when he'd dropped me off, he'd changed my opinion of him.

And we'd hooked up.

Sorta.

We'd made it to third base.

I'd made it to third base with the notorious pitcher and for some reason found myself wanting so much more. If I was honest, though, I felt kind of guilty. I'd been talking to Kirk for a couple of weeks. Not in a dating kind of way, but we had sort of been at the same time. We'd been getting to know one another.

Peter is a hookup. Not forever, the cynical side of myself reminded me while the hopeless romantic I had no clue even existed shook her head and disagreed. *Maybe there could be more with Peter,* she whispered.

It felt like I had a proverbial tiny angel and devil on each shoulder playing tug-o-war with my heart.

I grabbed my phone and checked emails and returned calls and texts. Kirk had been radio silent since the night before the game.

Me: Hey you, checking in. How did training go?

I shot off the text without thinking much about it.

Almost three days wasn't a long time not to hear from someone, but since he'd DM'ed me, Kirk and I had talked on a daily basis. I saw the bubbles pop up on the screen, and then a message came through.

Kirk: Hey. Okay. How was the game?

Me: Northend pitched the game of his life.

I shared even though I had a feeling with what a baseball nut he was, he'd most likely already heard.

Kirk: I read about that. Did you meet the players? How were the seats?

Me: Incredible seats. Right behind the pitch! And I did meet the players.

Kirk: Northend, too?

Me: Yeah.

Kirk: What did you think about him?

Boy, was that a loaded question. I smiled and chewed on my lower lip. It was tough to put into words what I thought about Peter. Especially when it felt like everything I knew about him hadn't been the complete truth.

But do I actually know him now? Or was the serotonin from really great orgasms clouding my judgment, making me look at him through rose-colored glasses?

Me: He was cool.

I typed out because there was no need to share all the dirty details with Kirk.

Kirk: Cool?

I sat down on the couch, nibbling on the tip of my thumb before turning to look toward the wall by my plants. I hadn't watered them in a while.

Kirk: You there?

The phone chimed again, and I sighed.

"I'm here," I mumbled to myself as I typed out the same.

Me: I'm here. He's different than I thought he would be.

Kirk: In a good or bad way?

Good in a really bad way, I started to type out and then deleted it.

Me: Good.

I corrected.

Me: He's nice. He offered me an interview.

Kirk: Wow! He doesn't do interviews.

Funny, that was exactly my first thought.

Kirk: You should do it!

Me: I would probably have to go on the road with him.

I shared. When I first started talking to Kirk, I thought there might have been a possibility for more. Then he sent a picture of himself shirtless. Thinking about it now, his body

was almost as ridiculously ripped as Peter's. Before the game happened and my life had been shaken up like some kind of snow globe

Kirk: Would that be a bad thing?

Me: No.

I responded immediately.

Me: I think it would be cool to get to know him a little better.

My face felt hot as I remembered the night before and just how well I knew him already.

Kirk: That's good. You should give him a chance.

Me: You'd be okay with that?

I asked. Maybe I'd read our friendship wrong?

Kirk: Why not?

He sent quickly, and I saw the bubbles light up again.

Kirk: He's a good guy, Wendy. You should give him a chance.

Me: A chance? At what? It's just an interview.

I argued, knowing very well I was lying. If I went on the road with him, I was risking so much more than a possible episode on my podcast. I was risking my heart.

Worse, I was worried I'd already put it in jeopardy.

Kirk: Your podcast is one of the best. You get him on there, it will raise your ratings and get you more followers.

He wasn't wrong.

An interview with Peter Northend, who didn't give them at all, would set my show on a whole other level. Might even push me to what I'd always wanted to do, which was become a sportscaster on ESPN. I'd sent applications and had even been interviewed. But the moment they put one and one together with who my sperm donor was, they'd turned the tables on me, changing the way they were interested in me from being someone who worked for them to being interviewed by them.

Me: Maybe. I have to think about it.

Kirk: They have a home game tonight. You going?

It was the same question Peter had asked me when he walked me to my door. And I still had no idea what I should do.

Me: I think I'm staying home.

I typed out, and as I read the words, something tightened in my gut.

I needed space. Space would be a good thing. Being in Peter's atmosphere muddled my brain and didn't let me think straight.

Kirk: That's a shame. Those great seats going to waste.

Me: I'm kinda wiped out. Talk later, 'kay?

I stared at the words and pressed *Send*.

Kirk had totally friend-zoned me, and part of me wondered if it had to do with my change in opinion of Peter. Kirk was always a vocal defender of Northend and the way he played the game on and off the field. Maybe he was bummed we couldn't keep arguing about him?

But then again, why would that matter?

It didn't, I decided.

I stood up and went to the kitchen to make sure I watered my plants. I took care of each one, and by the time I was done, my head was a little clearer. I had a plan. A smart one. I'd stay home and call Peter later. Maybe ask if I could still hit the road with him, but I would find my own transportation and hotel.

I didn't need him to take care of me.

I'd learned a long time ago from watching my mom that it was better to count on yourself because more times than not, people disappointed you. And I didn't need to find myself stuck in the middle of Nebraska when they played the Omaha Plowers.

With a plan set in mind, I showered and changed into comfy pajamas. A huge, oversized Dirt Devils hoodie I'd bought at a thrift store that had been washed a billion times and was buttery soft, and nothing else. I lay down on the couch and watched some TV. My eyes started to drift closed just before the highlights from the first half of the game.

A loud hard knock sounded at my front door, and I jumped up from my couch and groaned. I stretched, and the knock sounded again. Urgent and loud.

"Coming!" I shouted as I hurried toward the door. I peeked through the peephole, and my eyes widened.

I opened the door to find Peter standing there in his uniform looking like steam was close to coming out of his ears. "What's going on?"

"What's..." He blinked and then frowned. "Where were you?!" he growled. His hands fisted at his side. But I just stared at him. I blinked and tried to process what was happening.

"Peter—"

"Where. Were. You." Each word was clipped and almost angry.

"Here. I've been here. Why? What's wrong?"

"I called you."

“Oh.” I patted the hoodie for the pocket in the front, but my phone wasn’t there. “My phone must have fallen from my pocket.” His eyes softened as his gaze moved up and down.

“You were sleeping?”

“I drifted off.” He moved in closer, caging me against my front door.

“I got worried when you didn’t show up.”

“Why?” I shook my head. “Look, Northend—”

“Northend?” he clipped and shook his head. “We’re back to that?”

“Back to what?”

“You calling me Northend instead of Peter.”

“Look, I just—”

“I left you alone too long,” he mumbled under his breath. “You got in your head.”

“Look, North—”

“Peter,” he corrected. I had to bite down on my lower lip.

“Peter, the world doesn’t revolve around you. I had things to... catch up on.”

“Catch up on?”

“Yes,” I lied. I mean, I’d caught on emails and things on my social media pages, but I hadn’t done much more when it came to work after texting with Kirk. A muscle twitched beneath his eye.

“Like what?” he asked, and I rolled my eyes.

“Like... hmm...” I feigned to think for a moment. “None of your business—”

“Wendy.” his body shifted closer, and my back hit the doorframe a little too roughly. I winced, and he stilled. His eyes filled with worry. “Shit, did I hurt you?” he strained.

“No”. I shook my head, but my eyes dropped. My heart was suddenly racing.

“Why are you pushing me away?” My eyes rose to meet his green gaze. “Back at my place, you were sweet as sugar, and now—”

“What?” I asked, cutting him off for once. “What am I now?”

“Cold.” The muscle at his neck twitched again, and I swallowed hard. “Like you don’t like me.”

“I don’t know you.”

“Bull,” he called me out. “You know me. We’ve talked and slept together.”

“Sex doesn’t count!”

“We didn’t have sex,” he needlessly reminded me. I knew we hadn’t hit a homerun, so to speak. “I told you. I warned you, didn’t I?”

“Peter—”

“I told you, if I kissed you, you’d be mine.”

“And you had me last night,” I reminded him, ignoring the way my face felt hot under his gaze.

“You’re mine forever,” he demanded, and I blinked.

“Forever?!” I exclaimed.

“You weren’t at the game, and it freaked me out. I couldn’t get a good connection, and reception sucked. You didn’t answer your phone. You scared me. I left a no-hitter game at the sixth inning!”

“You what?” I gasped. “You left a— wait! You had another no-hitter?”

“Wendy, focus!”

“No! You focus! Are you insane? Leaving?!” I shouted back. He lifted me up and moved into my apartment, kicking the door shut behind me, then he turned us and caged my body between the door and his body.

All I could see was him.

All I could smell and feel was Peter and all his crazy, masculine beauty. He growled, and the sound made my nipples harden beneath the hoodie.

“I was worried about you.” His hands held my face. “I looked for you, and you weren’t there. I thought you’d show up. Inning after inning, but nothing. You never showed. You didn’t text, nothing. So, by the bottom of the sixth inning, I felt like I was coming out of my goddamn skin.”

“That’s crazy,” I whispered.

“Maybe, but I had to get over here to make sure you were okay.”

“You could have called.”

“I did. And I texted.”

“You did?”

“Yeah.”

“I— I’m— I didn’t get much sleep.” I blushed. “I kind of dosed off. I didn’t mean to worry you.”

“Are you going to come with me? On the road?”

“Peter,” I whispered his name, and his head dipped a little lower. His mouth hovered right above mine. His breath was minty and warm, almost inviting.

“Are you coming with me?” he asked, and I blinked.

“Do you still want me?” I asked vulnerably and shook my head. “I mean, do you still want me to go on the road with you for the next two games?”

“Two or thirty. All of them.”

“You’re crazy.”

“And you’re perfect, my Wendy girl.”

“Hardly...” I huffed. I chewed on my lower lip. His hand came up to pull my lip free. “You’re kind of intense, Peter.”

“Yeah.” His eyes burned. “I can be, I guess.”

“You guess?” My lips twitched.

“I’ve never done this,” he blurted. The apples of his cheeks turned a shade of pink. He was blushing! Peter Northend was capable of blushing! “I’ve never worried about anyone or anything but the game,” he confessed, and I knew enough about his life before going pro to see where he came from. He’d been in the foster care system since he was born and had never had any family. No one had ever claimed him, not even after he became a famous pitcher.

“If I go with you, I’ll take care of my own transportation, room, and board and—”

“No,” he cut me off. I frowned.

“Excuse me?”

“I said no,” he repeated slowly.

One moment I was standing in front of him, and the next I was in his arms, my legs wrapped around his waist.

“You can’t just pick me up and carry me around all the time,” I halfheartedly complained. We both knew I didn’t mean it. I was kind of getting used to it.

“Watch me,” he grunted. I rolled my eyes. He carried me around my living room and sat us down on the couch. “Guessing this is yours?” he asked as he picked up and handed me my phone.

“Thanks,” I mumbled. “Peter—”

“Don’t,” he clipped. I’d never seen that look on his face. Stern and almost angry. “You’re coming with me. Flying in the same plane, sitting your cute little booty next to mine.”

“Peter—”

“And then you’re going to stay in the same hotel room as me.”

“Don’t you guys have rules against—”

“You’re going to sleep next to me,” he demanded. “Night after night. Starting the new day next to me until we return home.”

“And then what?” I asked, searching his gaze fiercely. “Would that be it?” I asked out loud because I needed to be prepared. Eventually, he’d be done with me, but that didn’t mean I had to be stupid about it. I needed to be ready.

But he didn’t react.

He didn’t say a word.

“Yeah,” I whispered. “That’s what I thought. You’ll what? Have your fun with me? Distract yourself? And once you’re done, you’d be done.” It wasn’t a question but a statement. He wasn’t as different as I’d thought.

“Wendy—”

“At the beginning of your career, you said you were a fan of Tony Quezada.” His jaw clenched and relaxed.

“I did say that.”

“He was my dad.”

“Wendy—”

“You knew that, though, didn’t you?” I guessed, and my shoulders slumped forward.

“Wendy.” His Adam’s apple bobbed.

“What else did you know about me?” I asked and saw something in his eyes. It flashed for a moment, and it almost felt like it looked a little like fear. He knew more about me.

“Tink—”

“What else?” I asked, shimmying off his lap and standing up. I crossed my arms over my chest and felt the hoodie rise, but I ignored it.

“You didn’t like me,” he disclosed, sounding almost a little defeated. “Your podcast was getting a little too much attention, and my manager—”

“The one who stole your condoms?”

“Yeah,” he sighed. “We grew up together. We were in the same group home in high school and then went to college

together. He's... he's my family. We're close. Anyhow, he wanted me to—”

“Seduce me?” I guessed.

“No.” He shook his head. “He wanted me to settle down. Behave.” He rolled his eyes and crossed his own arms over his chest. “He asked me to quit acting out. So... I did.” I believed he was telling me the truth, but something inside of me was yelling at me that he wasn't telling me the whole story.

“There is more,” I called him out on it, and he winced. His gaze dropped from mine. He dropped his arms, and when he looked back up, his hand reached for mine. I let him take it. I loved the way his calloused hand covered mine.

“I started listening to you,” he admitted. “And I kinda learned about you.”

“Kinda?”

“Okay, I might have gone down a rabbit hole. Your parents' story...”

“Was public, I get that.” I shrugged, and his green eyes caught mine.

“Did you ever meet him?” I opened and shut my mouth. I didn't talk about my dad.

Not to anyone.

Not even to my mother.

“Forget it.” Peter shook his head. “You don't have to tell me. Look, honest? Yes, growing up, especially the way I did, I thought the guy was a fucking god. But you gotta remember, I literally came from nothing with no one. Not till Carey came into my life. The way Tony Quezada looked like he lived his life, shit, who wouldn't have wanted that? Money, fame, a freaking legend on the mound? Some of the most beautiful women always on his arm? Yeah, I looked up to the guy. He was living the dream. Carefree, looking like every day he breathed was a goddamn party. But...” He swallowed, and I squeezed his hand.

“What?”

“He fucked up.” His jaw clenched and his eyes went dark. “What he did to your mom? What he did to you? That was fucked up, Wendy.”

“Peter...”

“I’m not stupid. I know there are a lot of similarities when it comes to your dad and me, and you see me like a walking, breathing red flag.” I pressed my lips together because he wasn’t wrong. “But I’m not him. I see you. I want to get to know you. Can I promise you forever? Yes.”

“What? How does that—” He pulled me back into his arms and onto his lap. “Peter!”

“I know. I knew the moment I saw you. You were talking about a game I’d played shit, and you were going on about how it was time for me to retire.”

“Peter I didn’t mean—”

“You weren’t wrong. I probably should have retired two years ago, maybe longer than that.”

“I was wrong,” I found myself telling him. “You threw a no-hitter, and today—”

“I wanna finish the season, take the Dirt Devils as far as we can go, and then walk away.”

“You’re serious?”

“Very,” he responded, and I believed him. I actually believed him.

“Why now? Why not two, three years ago?”

“Probably because I had no idea what I wanted to do if I wasn’t playing baseball? But if I’m being honest? Probably because my ego was too fucking big.”

“And now? What’s different now?” I ignored the tremble in my voice and the big red flag waving in the back of my mind. *Don’t ask a question unless you’re ready for the answer!* a voice shouted, but it was too late.

The intensity in his gaze, the honesty in his voice, and the tenderness in his touch as the tips of his fingers stroked the

small of my back, I knew whatever he said was going to rock my world.

“I know what I want to do with the rest of my life.”

“What’s that?” I asked just above a whisper.

“Spend it with you,” he answered confidently and without hesitation. I searched his gaze for a hint of something. Sarcasm. Humor. Waited for him because I knew at any moment, he’d say *just kidding*.

But he didn’t.

“Did you hear me, Wendy?”

“You’re a man child,” I blurted out, probably ruining the most romantic moment I would ever live. But if I thought he had shaken up my world with his words a second ago, he blew it out of the water a moment later.

He laughed.

“I am,” he agreed too easily and leaned in, resting his forehead against mine. “I was.” His voice turned deeper. A little breathier. “You changed the game for me, Wendy.”

“Peter...” I searched his eyes. God, I wanted to believe everything he said. I had no idea how he had wormed his way not just under my skin but into my heart. In less than two days, he’d done what I could have sworn would have been impossible. “We just met,” I whispered.

“We didn’t.” He shook his head, his eyes clear and beautiful. “I know you. You know me. The good and the bad.”

“Peter—”

“Go on the road with me,” he pleaded, unashamed of being vulnerable in front of me. Him. The notorious pitcher who was known to be the bad boy of baseball. “Give me a chance.”

“What happens after we return from being on the road?” I asked, needing to know.

“In an ideal world?” I found myself nodding. “In an ideal world, we’d get back from Omaha and come here.”

“Here? My place?” I asked, and he nodded, his gaze darkening.

“Yeah, here.” He exhaled roughly. Like he had been holding his breath and was done. His breath tickled my lips. “Right here.” The tip of his nose dragged against the bridge of mine, and my eyes fluttered shut.

“And then what?” I asked, ignoring the way my voice hitched and nipples tightened.

“Pack.” *Pack?* That was not what I thought he’d say. I was sure he’d say something dirty. Filthy. But instead, he wanted to do one of the unsexist things known to man.

“Pack?” My lips twitched as I breathed in his minty scent.

“Yeah, we pack you up and move you to my place.” My eyes opened slowly only to meet his head on.

“Move me in?” I asked, not daring to blink.

“I didn’t answer before because I didn’t want to freak you out. But I still fucked it up and probably did it anyhow, huh?”

“No.” I smiled. “I mean, maybe, yeah. I’m a little freaked out, but it’s just a little. But, umm...” I bit my lower lip. He was being honest, and I owed him the same. I didn’t hate his plan. “Maybe... maybe, I like what you’re saying.”

“Yeah?” His green gaze filled with hope so bright I could feel it.

Take a chance. Take a risk, a very faint voice in my head spoke up. The very one that had told me to try out creating a podcast on something I knew inside out. The one that had told me to go with him after the game and to trust I was safe around him while I drank.

I didn’t know Peter perfectly, but as mind-blowing as it was, he was worth the risk.

“Okay,” I found myself saying, probably getting caught up in a whirlwind of excitement and anticipation.

“Okay?”

“I’ll go on the road with you. But you have to promise me something.” His body stilled, and I could have sworn he stopped breathing.

“What?”

“The moment you change your mind about me—”

“I won’t—” The tips of my fingers brushed his full lips.

“If you do,” I reworded, “I need you to tell me. No games, no bullshit.”

“Wendy—”

“And no lies.” Something flashed in his eyes. Something I’d seen before. “I’d rather know you did something—”

“Something? Like what?”

“I don’t know.” I shrugged. “I just have to be realistic here, Peter. You’ve lived your life for you. You’ve never answered to anyone, not that you have to answer to me, but you’re used to partying and women and—”

“You’re more than enough for me. You’re it.”

“But if you did something bad, I’d rather you tell me first. I don’t want to hear about it from anyone else,” I pushed through.

“Wendy—”

“From here on out, no lies. We are both open books. Deal?” I extended my hand, placing it between us. “Can you do that for me?” I asked, letting myself drown in the green pools of his eyes. “Promise me?”

“I promise. From here on out, no lies, no crap, no games.”

“And if you’re over me—”

“I’ll tell you,” he reassured me. “But I can tell you right now, that’s not gonna happen.”

“How can you be sure?” I asked, knowing just how vulnerable I was making myself. He was older and a hell of a lot more experienced.

“Because since the moment I heard the sound of your voice, you woke something up inside of me.” He hesitated, and I saw a muscle clench at his jaw. “This hunger. And that hunger only grows the more I get to know you and am around you. It might make me a little sick in the head growing obsessed with you, but, Wendy...” He paused and held my face with both hands. “But you have to know I am. I’m seriously fucked in the head when it comes to you,” he confessed. I could tell by the serious way his gaze didn’t waver from mine that he was being genuine. And maybe I was sick in the head, too? Because I didn’t mind him being obsessed or hungry for me.

“Now my turn.”

“You want me to promise something?” I teased, but his head jerked in a nod.

“No matter what you hear about me in the future because, as you know”—his eyes sparkled— “people like to tell stories about me—”

“I wasn’t—”

“Shh.” His forehead rested gently against mine, almost tenderly. “Come to me. Talk to me. Don’t jump to conclusions.” His voice dropped, and I could hear the importance of his request in his voice. “You hear something, you come to me for the truth. I won’t lie to you.”

“Even if you think I won’t like the truth?” I asked, watching him closely.

“Even if I think you won’t like the truth,” he repeated without hesitation.

“I promise,” I found myself saying before I overthought it.

“Thank you.” He swallowed. “I promise I’m going to work my ass off to be the man you need.” That thing in the back of his eyes flashed again. Something a little dark, maybe twisty.

Something I found myself gravitating toward and purposely ignoring. Two days after meeting him, I was already too deep in the quicksand that was Peter.

And I willingly and knowingly let myself drown. He was in his uniform and had walked away from a no-hitter game. For me. The night before had been incredible. The way we had explored one another without taking it all the way.

But I was done waiting. My body felt hot, and my breasts ached for his touch. I cupped his face and kissed him. He didn't need to promise me anything. I might have hated the idea of him, but getting to know that man had demolished that idea of him. The kiss deepened, and before I knew it, I was crawling onto his lap, straddling his hips. My own undulated above him.

"Wendy," he growled a sexy little warning, and my lips quirked upward.

"I have condoms," I whispered against his lips. A deep vibration sounded through his chest.

"Wendy," he rasped. His mouth left mine and moved to my neck. I tilted my head to give him space as my eyes shut and I just felt as he brought to life every single nerve ending. Consumed in the sensation of his mouth and scruffy jaw on my sensitive skin. Peter's teeth scraped their way down, and I moaned. Loud. "You taste too damn good."

"Please."

"Please what, Wendy girl? What do you want?" he goaded. Taunting me. Challenging me to ask for what I wanted.

"You. I just... I wasn't sure how to ask."

"Like last night? Do you want me like last night?" He licked my skin, and I shivered at the feel of his rough tongue. Memories of the night before and how he had used that tongue time after time to make me see stars floated to the surface. Heat pooled between my legs, and I rolled my hips to get some kind of relief.

"No." My hair swayed when I shook my head. "More than last night," I whimpered.

He nipped at my neck. I was almost sure he'd leave a mark. I'd never had a hickey, but the thought of Peter leaving one, going out and wearing his jersey the next day, turned me

on. Maybe I really was sick in the head, too. Why would the idea of him marking make me so hot?

“Mmm,” he rumbled and moved to the other side of my neck. “More than last night? Is that why you have condoms? Or were you thinking of using them with someone else?” His gaze lifted, but his mouth didn’t stop.

His big, calloused hand roamed up my hips and my stomach. It didn’t stop until he held my breast and gently squeezed. I wished I weren’t wearing that damn hoodie. The one I’d loved for so long suddenly felt bulky.

“Peter.”

“You’re wearing too goddamn much.” His hands dropped, and he lifted my hoodie. But instead of taking it off, he slipped inside.

“What are you— Oh! Ugh,” I groaned. One of those big beautiful talented hands held one breast, and the other, oh god, the other was attacked by his mouth. It wasn’t slow or sweet. He was hungry. His teeth dragged this way and that. The slight twinge of pain danced perfectly with the pleasure. Especially when he pulled one hardened nipple into his mouth and sucked. He was relentless, and there was no staying still for me. My hips rolled and ground against the bulge below his uniform pants.

“Yes,” I hissed. He popped his head out of my hoodie and roughly tugged at the hem. I lifted my arms. The offending material flew off my body and left me completely bare for him on his lap.

“Fuck,” he cursed. His eyes darkened. The grassy-green gaze was mossy now as gold glitter swirled while he took his fill of me.

“How can you be so damn perfect?” he asked, almost in awe.

“I’m not—” I started to argue but quieted at the look he shot me.

“You are,” he reassured me, then his hands disappeared from my body. I was about to complain when the tips of his

fingers touched the top of my thighs.

“You’re the best-looking dessert,” he admired. Tightness grew between my legs. I felt so needy. Achy and empty. Almost desperate.

“Peter—”

“I just don’t know where to start.”

“I don’t care, just touch me,” I pleaded. His lips tipped upward in a sexy half-smile.

“Just touch you? You’re a greedy girl, aren’t you? Look at these shiny tits.” With the back of his hand, he grazed my breast, brushing it with a barely-there touch. “You like that, don’t you?”

“Peter,” I huffed impatiently.

“Shh.” His eyes met mine as his hands roamed upward and his mouth wrapped around my nipple. A jolt of electricity shot through me and straight to my clit. I felt like a throbbing mess, and he was the only one who could take care of it.

CHAPTER 11

PETER

She tasted so damn good. Like apples and vanilla mixed in with every hope and dream I had no idea I was capable of. I didn't know about family. The idea of white picket fences and two point five kids and a damn Golden Retriever had always seemed like such a fucking joke. A sham. How many times had I seen the guys around me, other players on teams I'd played on, have that but have a side chick in every city we hit while we were on the road? How many times had I rolled my eyes at them? Yet while I sucked on her tit and listened to her pretty little purrs, all I could think about was getting inside of her.

Bare.

Breeding her.

Keeping her barefoot and pregnant, next to me. Creating a family together. A family. The idea was as insane as what had pushed me to put cameras in her place that were currently filming us.

Recording us.

I stilled, and she whimpered. I felt her pouty sound at the base of my dick as I thickened further. *Fuck it.* I was the only one who had access to the recording. I peppered kisses over her sternum and then sweetly tortured her other breast.

“Yes,” she hissed. “Peter, please.”

“Please what, Wendy girl? What do you want?”

“You. You, please.”

“Me? How?” I taunted again.

I pulled back and watched her for a moment. Her lips were swollen from my kiss, her olive-toned skin flushed, and my mark clear as day on her neck.

“How do you want me?” I asked her again, and I saw something in her eyes flash. Something that looked like stubborn determination.

I liked when my Wendy girl caught fire.

“Fuck me,” she demanded. I chuckled, darkly shaking my head.

“No.”

“No?” Her eyes narrowed. “What do you mean, no?” She searched my gaze.

“I’m not going to fuck you.”

“Peter—”

“Even when I’ve had you a million times and I do dirty filthy things to your beautiful body, I won’t ever just be fucking you. Not when I tie you up and use you, not when I watch my cum spill from your body and get hard all over again will it ever just be me fucking you, Wendy.”

“Peter.”

“You know what it is, don’t you?” I kissed her cheek and then the other. “I’ll be making love to you,” I promised.

My lips dropped to the delicate slope of her right shoulder, and I kissed a freckle on it. “When I spank you and leave marks all over your body with my mouth like I did on your neck, it will always be more than fucking.” She trembled. Full body, her skin covered in goose bumps I loved the way she reacted to my dirty words.

“You’re teasing me,” she whined, and I laughed again.

Fuck me, I never knew laughter and sex could mix, but there she was, teaching me and making me want all sorts of things.

“Get off my lap,” I ordered and watched as she didn’t even blink, not a smidge of hesitation as she did what I asked. She hopped off my lap and stood completely naked in front of me. “Go to the bedroom. Get on your hands and knees at the edge of your bed.” She blinked, and my brow rose, silently challenging her.

She turned on her heel and walked off, swaying her peach-shaped ass with every step. Ripe and juicy, the way it jiggled had my eyes trained on it. She disappeared into her bedroom. The light turned on, and I stood.

My hands flexed and clenched at my sides.

I felt like I was about to come out of my skin.

I was rock hard and breathing like I’d run a homerun when all I’d done was stand. I dropped my eyes to the ground. I needed to get myself together. If I went in there like this, I’d ravage her body like a fucking savage. It had been too damn long since I’d had sex. I couldn’t remember the last time.

I couldn’t remember anything but Wendy-fueled fantasies and self-pleasure sessions to the sound of her voice or the image of her face.

Tersely, I tore at my jersey. The buttons felt too bulky for my own fingers, but I finally got it off, tossing it on top of the hoodie she’d been wearing. I liked the sight of the pile of our discarded clothes on the ground. I kicked off my shoes and socks. Undid the belt at my waist and clasp of my uniform pants. My dick needed relief, but I would be damned if I spilled my seed on the ground when my sweet little Tink was waiting in her room.

On her hands and knees, a little voice reminded me. I pulled at my pants and took them off roughly. My cock sprung out, almost hitting my belly button with the way it was straining. I took myself in my hand and stroked it once before making my way to her bedroom. I stood at the doorway and breathed in deep. The scent of my beautiful Wendy permeated the room. Apples and vanilla and some kind of spice that was uniquely hers filled my lungs. With it I caught the scent of her pussy. After last night, I was all too familiar with her essence.

She turned to look at me, and I grinned at the way she stared at me from over her shoulder.

“That thing’s going to split me in two,” she muttered. My grin turned into a full-on smile. I shook my head and took a couple of steps forward.

“Theres no way I’d hurt you.”

“Not on purpose,” she defended, and that little voice in the back of my mind started to quip up.

Remind me of all the things I’d already done.

Hell, this whole scene was viewable with a touch of a button on my phone. She’d hate me if she ever found out. *Then don’t let her find out*, the devil inside me spoke up.

I wouldn’t.

Not ever.

After tonight and while we were on the road, I would have someone in here to take the cameras out. I’d have someone pull the device off her car. And I’d delete any scrap of Kirk Carraway to ever exist.

“You think so?” I asked. My open-palmed hand rested at the small of her bare back. “You don’t think I wanna make it hurt so damn good you’ll beg for more?”

“Peter.” I could see the excitement in her gaze. I lifted and dropped my hand. The loud smack echoed in the air. She gasped from the shock and then moaned. I looked down between her legs, and she was nice and dewy wet for me. Her pussy lips glistened with moisture. “You liked that?”

“Peter.”

“Yes.” My hand rose and fell again, spanking her again, and another smack. “Or no?” I asked with one more spanking.

“Yes!” she hissed, biting her lower lip. My cock fucking throbbed.

“Made for me,” I grunted, letting my hand move between her legs. My fingers traced her folds. “So warm and wet,” I muttered. I could see the dark star of her forbidden hole

clench, and I grinned one day my thumb grazed the spot. Dirty, filthy things filled my brain. “One day, I’m gonna take this,” I warned her, “take all of you.”

“Oh god,” she groaned, burying her head into the pillow. If I wasn’t mistaken, her thighs parted, and I teased the entrance of her pussy. I could see her squeezing, trying to get me inside of her.

She pushed her cute ass toward me, but I didn’t give her more than the tip of my finger. I loved the way she looked in that moment.

Her back arched.

Ass up.

Pussy dripping for me.

Only for me.

“Please, Peter,” she whined. My needy girl.

“Shh...” I moved my hand away from her and gripped both her cheeks, one in each hand, and squeezed.

“Oh god.” Her soft breathy whimpers filled the room. “Please, I need—”

“I know what you need.” I smacked her ass once, twice, three times. “Look at that Jesus Christ, I love the sight of the imprint of my hand on your ass.” I dropped my hand once again on her ass. Her skin bloomed brighter, and her flesh grew hotter under my palm.

“Peter!” she cried.

“Shh...” I soothed and rubbed her ass cheek. I took myself with my free hand and stroked the hard length.

A droplet of fluid seeped out of the tip, and I used the pad of my thumb to lubricate my dick. “I can’t wait to get inside of you.” I rubbed the tip of my dick up and down her slit, loving the way her dewy juices coated me.

How hot and soft she felt.

I was dying to take her bare.

Raw.

Breed her. Breed her and tie her to your side. No matter what happens, she won't be able to run away.

“Peter,” she sighed and tossed something closer to me.

A foil square.

A condom.

“Here.” She licked her lips, and I swallowed hard. I wanted to plunge into her hot heat and never leave. Never have anything between us.

“I should take you raw.” I hardly recognized my voice. Her pussy clenched around my tip like she wanted to suck me in.

“You said you needed a condom.” *I did.* It's why I held back the night before. I picked it up and ripped it open. I wrapped myself up in it before I did something she would regret. I didn't want to trap her.

Yes, you do, a voice chimed in. *You want to trap her. Anything to keep her forever.* The voice in my head spoke louder. Images bombarded my mind's eye.

Easy Sunday mornings. Sitting around a Christmas tree to counting down toward a new year. Watching fireworks light up in the sky. Grocery runs and walks in the park. I wanted it all.

A lifetime of moments.

All with her.

Only her and the family we'd create.

I started to roll the condom down my shaft when her eyes caught mine. “I need you,” she said, and without another thought, I thrust forward, plowing my way into her tight little snatch.

We both groaned as I stretched her perfect pussy, molding it to fit my dick. “Fuck,” she cursed and squeezed tightly, almost painfully around me.

“Bad girl,” I growled. My hands pulled her cheeks apart to watch my length slide out, but not fully.

“Peter,” she whined.

“Good girls don’t say bad, filthy words,” I taunted, teasing her, me, both of us, for no other reason than because I could. “You’re just desperate for this fucking cock, aren’t you? Like I am for your tight, little cunt.”

“Yes!” she shouted. Her hands fisted the sheets below her. I thrust forward, pulled back and forth, rutting in and out of her body.

She felt incredibly tight and hot despite the barrier between us. All I wanted to do was rip that fucking rubber off my cock and bury myself balls deep inside her sweet body. Sweat started to drip all over us. A light sheen covered my chest and her back. She tossed her hips back each time I thrust into her. Each time felt like I slipped a little deeper inside her, connecting us. Making us one.

“Peter!” she cried out. “I’m, oh god, honey, you got me close.” *Honey*. She called me honey. That made me want to puff my chest out and preen like blue-ribbon peacock. I pummeled in and out. I sounded like an animal while fucking. I felt my balls tightening as they drew up, and heat started to work its way at the small of my back.

“Wendy. Wendy. Wendy,” I grunted, holding her hips so damn tightly I knew I would leave marks.

I reached between us and loved how swollen her clit was for me, silky smooth. I rubbed it just like she enjoyed, and I felt her before she cried out my name. Her body contracted around my length, pulling me, milking me deep into her body as she shuddered. Her orgasm hit, and mine followed right afterwards, spilling my release ribbon after ribbon into the damn condom. She fell forward, and my body dropped onto hers. My forehead rested at the center of her back, and I kissed her.

“Wow,” she panted, resting the side of her face against her mattress. “I can’t wait till we do that again.”

I had just come hard, harder than I knew was possible, yet my dick stirred. Twitched inside of her. “I felt that,” she

laughed softly, and I kissed her back. I pulled back and slipped out of her body as I continued kissing her back and the swell of her perfect ass. Peppering and tracing my handprint. I could feel her gaze as she looked behind her to watch what I was doing.

“Look at this pretty pussy,” I whispered. My fingers slid up and down her used cunt. “You look so damn good.” My finger slide inside her, and I wished it were my cum I was pushing back in.

I shook my head and stepped back. “Stay there,” I ordered gently before walking into her bathroom. The space was small but cute. Colorful. Like Wendy. I grinned. I took the condom off and tossed into trash bin. I ran a washcloth under warm water before heading back into her room.

Wendy was exactly where I left her. I got into bed and pulled her up next to me. Quietly and as tenderly as I could manage, I cleaned her up with the warm washcloth.

“You okay?”

“Oh yeah, I’m very okay.” She smiled dreamily.

“Did I take you too hard?” I asked, worried I’d been too rough. A knot formed in my gut, one that didn’t loosen until she answered.

“It was perfect.” She leaned in and kissed me. Fuck, every time she willingly put her mouth against mine felt like a fucking gift. A prize.

“Thank you,” I found myself saying like a fucking sap.

“I’m pretty sure I’m the one who should be thanking you. I’m not sure when I worked up a sweat like that the last time,” she teased, but I shook my head, brushing the stray sweaty strands of hair off her face.

“I’m serious, Wendy. I just...” I was at a loss for words.

I’d had sex numerous times throughout my life with countless faceless women. But never, not once in my thirty-five times around the sun, had it ever meant anything.

“I love you.” The words should have felt foreign as they tumbled past my lips.

“Peter—”

“I love you,” I repeated.

“It’s been two days.”

“No.” I shook my head. “It’s been longer than that. My whole life—” I swallowed hard. “I’ve never said those words. Not to a fucking soul. Not once, not ever. I didn’t think love was real,” I confessed like a freaking moron.

Jesus, every word I said sounded worse and worse.

It was a miracle she hadn’t jumped out of bed and run.

“It’s just, the way I was raised without a family, not a real one. The only person I had was Carraway—”

“Carraway?” she repeated, and I quickly corrected.

“Carey.” I shook my head. “It doesn’t matter. I love you. Your spirit, your joy, your light... everything about you draws me in in a way I didn’t know was possible. I know I’m fucking this up, but—” Her fingers covered my lips, and that’s when the nerves and fear that had my heart racing triple time disappeared.

It hit me.

She wasn’t rolling out of bed and running away. The world hadn’t crashed to an end. If anything, she was cuddling in closer, her lips tipped up in the purest smile I had ever seen in my life.

“You’re not messing anything up.”

“You don’t have to say—”

“Shh,” she hushed. “You’re not anything like I thought you would be. I was so sure I’d hate everything and anything you’d say. I was—” Her eyes dropped, and I tipped her head up so our gazes would connect. “By the time the press conference was over, I think I was enamored by you.”

Enamored. I could work with that.

“But then this morning and tonight?” I watched her inhale and exhale slowly. “I fell in love with you, too,” she whispered softly. “I tried really hard not to fall, but—”

“I’m kinda persuasive?”

“Yeah.” Her lips twitched. She leaned in closer until her face was at my sternum, and she kissed my chest.

Before long, she was straddling me, and whether it was subconscious or not, when she slid down on my length, there was no barrier between us, and I found out that heaven was reachable on earth.

Even for a devil like me.

CHAPTER 12

PETER

When I first started playing in the pros, I'd loved time on the road. Traveling in private jets, staying in great hotels, women literally shouting my name asking me to sign anywhere on their body I wanted to. What twenty-something-year-old kid right out of college wouldn't have loved that?

And I'd indulged.

Had more than my fair share.

One-night stands. Dirty, filthy trysts in the alleyways of night clubs or leaving beautiful women in hotel rooms exhausted and satisfied as I traveled from city to city. Carey had warned me at the time, saying that one day, I'd regret being such a man whore. I'd laughed. Right in his face. I had also rolled my eyes telling him he had no clue. That he had to go get laid since he lived like a monk.

But for the last couple of years, even though I'd made a show of being a bad boy, the whole thing had felt forced.

Boring.

Stale.

But this time was nothing like the rest.

None of those times on the road compared to being there with Wendy. Sitting next to her, holding her hand. Every moment with her gave me more of a thrill than the couple of times I'd visited a sex club in Orlando. Walking into the hotel

room and watching her eyes light up filled me with more excitement than parachuting out of a plane.

And fuck if she wasn't a damn good influence on the way I played. Unbelievably, another six no-hitter games were now under my belt. We'd slaughtered the Denver Brewers but struggled playing the Plowers, yet we still won. We were 9-1 for the new season, and my pitching was making headlines.

And for the first time in my life, I didn't care.

I might have said I didn't give a crap in the past, but this time, I actually meant it. I was one hundred percent invested in what Wendy and I were building together. A foundation, of sorts, for something I hoped would last a long damn time.

If she doesn't find out about you catfishing her, a voice whispered in my ear. I glanced next to me and leaned in, pressing my lips to Wendy's sleeping face. She's going to send you to hell when she finds the cameras and trackers. I tried to shake the thoughts away, but they were creeping in more and more often.

Never say never, Carey's voice played through my mind.

Damn, if only he knew how right he was.

I'd fallen.

Hard and fast.

I was so damn deep in love I didn't know which way was up, and I genuinely didn't give a fuck.

I cuddled in closer, wrapping my long arms around her just a little tighter, breathing in her scent. We traveled together and spent a lot of time together. I'd even managed to get her to sit in the dugout while we played so I would have her near because there was no way I would risk her safety out on the stands.

We had been insatiable for one another. Every time that door shut behind us, leaving us to feel like we were the only two people on earth, we got tangled up and heated up the sheets. The world could have been burning to the ground, and we wouldn't have noticed it.

And condoms were completely forgotten about. I was going after her, and hard. I planned dates and special little surprises in every city we visited. The first two we missed out because we got so caught up with one another we'd stayed in and had to order room service.

She had stopped texting Kirk, well, me, since the night I left mid-game and rushed to her place, when I'd lost reception and with every tick of the clock felt like I was about to come out of my skin.

But that night had turned out better than I could have ever expected.

Now she was here. Under my roof and in my bed.

And I couldn't sleep.

My phone pinged, and I carefully reached for my cell, noticing it was a text from Carey.

"Peter?" Wendy whispered. I turned to see her eyes flutter open. "Sorry, baby, didn't mean to wake you."

"What is it?"

"My manager texted."

"Your best friend?" she asked. I rolled my eyes playfully.

In between rounds of sweaty lovemaking, we talked. A lot. Got to know one another on a whole other level. I'd told her shit I would have never imagined sharing with someone without them signing an NDA.

"Yeah, Tink." I kissed her forehead.

"Is he okay?" She stretched a little.

"I'm gonna check it later."

"Why later?" She gave me a sleepy smile I felt not only in my dick but in my gut. *In my soul*. "Call him back right now."

"You were sleeping."

"But you weren't," she noted and sat up. She was wearing my shirt, and I loved the way it looked on her. Oversized, the material almost seemed to swallow her up.

Much like I wanted to anytime I breathed.

“What’s wrong?” she asked. Her hand moved to stroke the side of my face. I leaned into it. I’d never had anyone touch me like she did. There was such a strength in her hands, a strength that shocked me because of how gentle and tender she was as well.

“Nothing, Tink.”

“Bull. I thought you promised no lying.”

“I couldn’t sleep, because I was holding an angel in my arms.” I winked, and she rolled her eyes.

“Shut up, seriously.” She laughed softly.

“Seriously,” I sighed, “I don’t know.”

“Is it me? Was I hogging the sheets?”

“No.” My lips twitched. “You were snuggled up perfectly against me. I was just thinking about tomorrow.”

“Your game? Are you stressed out about keeping your—”

“Shh.” I put my finger over her lips. “This is going to make me sound a little superstitious, but we’re not going to talk about the you-know-what.”

“Right.” Her lips twitched. “So you’re not worried about... your work?”

“Maybe.” I shrugged. “I just had some stuff on my mind.”

“And Carey texted you?”

“Yeah.” I glanced down at my phone and opened the text.

Carey: We need to talk.

“What does he say?”

“He needs to talk. Probably about the way I’ve been playing,” I guessed even though I had a feeling it had to do with the woman in front of me.

Carey: Open the front door.

“He’s actually here,” I shared.

“Oh.” She sat up, pulling the sheet over her chest. My body started to stir again. I loved that we slept naked. She frowned. “Is that normal for him to show up at— one in the morning?” she asked as he glanced over my shoulder to check the alarm clock on my nightstand.

“Sometimes.” That was the truth. Carey worked all sorts of hours and traveled all around the country. “Let me go open the door and see what he needs.” I leaned in and kissed her.

“Oh, okay.” She watched me carefully. I slid out of bed and tugged on some gym shorts and a shirt.

“I’ll be right back.”

“Okay, I’ll be right here.” She lay back down as I left our room. I hurried down the stairs and to the front door. Sure enough, Carey was standing there in one of his signature black suits I knew were custom tailored to his broad body.

“Kinda late for a—”

“Don’t.” He pointed at me and walked in. “What the hell, Peter!”

“Keep it down.” I pointed up at the stairs.

“She’s here?” Carey’s eye opened wide. “You never bring your sluts—”

“Watch it,” I clipped and started to see red. “You need to watch the way you talk.” His eyes flared and then his head shook.

“I need a drink.”

“Look, it’s late. I have a game tomorrow and—”

“You and I need to talk. Now.” He stalked to the kitchen, and I followed.

Quietly, I watched him pour himself two fingers of scotch. When he shot it back, I winced. Carey was not a drinker. Not a heavy one, at least. I usually made fun of him for how long it took him to finish one. Now he was pouring himself another.

“What’s up, Care?”

“Nothing.” His jaw clenched, and his eyes rose from my kitchen counter. “Is this real? You two?”

“What?”

“I’ve seen you with her.”

“I haven’t been hiding it.” I crossed my arms over my chest. His eyes scrutinized me, and I knew he saw it. The worry in my gut that reflected in my stare.

“Shit,” he sighed under his breath, “We’ll go back to that.” He pointed at me, and I blinked.

“Back to what?”

“Is this thing with you and Tony’s illegitimate kid real?”

“Carey,” I clipped.

“Is it the real deal?” he asked again, his voice graver than I’d ever heard it, and that was saying something after all the crap I’d put him through.

I opened and shut my mouth. My usual knee-jerk reaction was to ask why or to shrug it off, maybe even change the subject. My eyes moved to the counter, and I felt my lips tip upward. There were two water bottles sitting next to one another. One deep green and the other lime green. Hers and mine. She’d made us stop at the airport when we landed in Denver. She’d gone on and on about how many water bottles we’d gone through and how we should get reusable ones. And I hadn’t minded. The bottles held more liquid and kept it ice cold.

She’d put a sticker on mine in Omaha, and I’d put one on hers when we landed in LAX.

Now they were sitting side by side. On my kitchen counter. Ours if she agreed to move in completely.

“Yes,” I answered. “Yes, this is the real deal, man.”

“You said you’d never—”

“I know, and you told me to never say never.” I shrugged. “You were fucking right.”

“Wow...” He swallowed. Carey looked like he could have been knocked over by a spring breeze. “I never thought I’d heard those words from you.”

“Shut up. What do you want?”

“Whatever you did before... you two became a thing...” I frowned. “Is that all in the clear?” My heart started to pick up pace. “Don’t think about bullshitting me. Did you take care of whatever shit you did before?”

“Yes,” I cut him off. “Yes, okay!” I hissed quietly, afraid she’d overhear. “I did, okay? It’s all taken care of.” The cameras had been removed from her apartment. The tracker on her car and cell were gone. Anything about Kirk Carraway had been wiped off the Internet.

“Press got wind of her.”

“How?”

“How? Peter, you have her in the dugout with you!” he exclaimed. “You’ve been seen with her, Peter. Everywhere. And you’re playing like you’re on fire. You’ve never played like this! You had to know that someone would notice Tony fucking Quezada’s—”

“Fine! So what?”

“Story is going to break in the morning.” My jaw clenched at Carey’s news.

“What story?” A knot formed in my gut.

“That the legend pitcher is dating the daughter of—”

“A Hall of Famer?” a feminine voice sounded. I shut my eyes. “Is that the story?” Wendy asked calmly, and I turned. Our eyes connected, and the hairs on the back of my neck stood up.

“You must be Wendy Quezada.” Carey cleared his throat and walked out of the kitchen. I turned just in time to watch my best friend, the one person on earth who had my back, moved toward my woman and offer his hand. They shook, and I felt my gut bunch up.

This feeling of possessiveness overwhelmed me. I didn't like him touching her. Not when all she was wearing was one of my hoodies over a nightgown.

"Nice to meet you." She smiled and dropped his hand. She moved directly to me and slipped into my arms. "Peter has told me so much about you," she added kindly as my arms wrapped around her. I could feel Carey scrutinizing and overanalyzing every move I made. And who could blame him?

"You shouldn't believe him," he teased and leaned against the breakfast counter. His eyes bounced between Wendy and me, and I could read Carey like a fucking book. He couldn't believe it. Having her in my home was tough enough to believe, but seeing the way my arm was wrapped around her? "I'm sorry we're not meeting under better circumstances," he said. I felt her hand start to stroke my back.

"Me too. But how about I make us some pancakes, and we can talk?"

"Pancakes?" His lips twitched and our eyes connected. He knew how much I loved pancakes. And it seemed Wendy had picked up on it, too. I always ate a plate of them after a game. "That's sweet of you, Wendy, and I really appreciate it, but maybe next time," Carey turned her down gently. I glanced down at her and was about to argue he should stay for a plate because I hated the disappointed look on her face.

"I understand," she said.

"So..." He looked at me. "We should talk and prepare."

"Prepare? Because he's seeing me?" Wendy asked. Carey's eyes softened. His gaze rose to meet mine, and I nodded, silently letting him speak freely. *Hopefully not too freely.*

"I'm not going to sugarcoat this. Once this news hits, your life in particular, Wendy, is going to be crazy. The press and paparazzi will make your life a living hell," he warned. That thing in my gut tightened. A slew of things popped into my head. I needed a game plan. I needed to hire security, increase the one here in my home.

Me! The man child everyone loved to hate was coming up with a plan!

“They won’t care.” She shook her head. “I’m not anyone important—”

“What?” I asked, glancing at her. “Why would you say that?”

“Because it’s true,” she argued. “All I have is a podcast.”

“A podcast with a huge following,” Carey corrected. “And no offense, you made it extremely clear that you are not exactly Peter’s fan.”

“I got to know him and—”

“And you still fell.” His tone had me standing straighter, bracing for the unknown that might come out of his mouth.

Technically, Carey didn’t know the extent of the things I had done to win Wendy. But by the way he was looking at me, I had a feeling even if he didn’t, he had an idea.

“Wendy, I know we just met, but I gotta ask you something, and I need you to be honest.” The tightness in my belly coiled up. “I’m asking as his agent and as his only damn friend.”

“What do you want to know?”

“Carey—”

“Do you love him? Is this real for you?”

“What the hell, Carey?” I stepped forward, but she gripped my wrist. I glared at him and turned to face her. “You don’t have to tell Carey shit.”

“I do.” She wasn’t looking at me. Her eyes were fixed on my brother from another mother. “I love him, Carey. You don’t know me, and I get that you two, with how you were raised and grew up—”

“He told you about that?” His eyes bounced to me then back to her. She simply shrugged.

“I was wrong about him.” The knot in my throat tightened. “Well, I was mostly wrong.” She winced, and her lips tipped upward when she looked at me and shrugged. “You did some crappy stuff.”

“Before I met you,” I reminded her, giving her my most charming smile.

“Yeah.” She grinned and moved toward me. “I love you, Peter. I don’t care who knows.”

“Peter, you need to tell her.”

And just like that, the other shoe dropped.

CHAPTER 13

WENDY

“Tell me what?” My eyes bounced back and forth between Peter and his friend. Peter seemed almost pale under the lights and in the reflection of the floor-to-ceiling windows that surrounded us.

“Peter,” Carey called his name. I could tell something was going on between them. “You need to lay it all on the table.”

There was something about the way they looked at one another that made something heavy settle in my stomach. Carey ran his fingers through his perfectly coiffed almost black hair. I had no idea how the guy could look so perfectly put together so late in the night.

“You know it, and I know it. Hell, Peter, Wendy probably does, right? Look, these guys are going to be like vultures. I was fucking shocked there weren’t cameras and vans outside your place when I got here.”

“Why are you here so late?” Peter asked, almost as if he had read my thoughts. “You don’t even look like you went home from the office yet.”

“I was at the office working late when I got the call.”

“Working late?” Peter asked. A cocky grin appeared. “You and the guys and your pretty little assistant?” *Assistant?*

“Peter,” Carey warned. “After this, I am going on a goddamn vacation,” Carey huffed, crossing his arms over his chest.

“You guys!” I shouted to get their attention. “What do you need to tell me?” My eyes locked with Peter’s green ones. “What does he think you should tell me?”

Peter opened and shut his mouth. His eyes dropped to the ground before he turned to look at Carey.

“She needs to know,” Carey pressed.

“What do I need to know?”

“About Kirk,” Carey announced. Everything inside me went cold. Chilled to the bone. The energy changed immediately.

“What the hell, Carey?!”

“I’m sorry, Peter, but someone found out.”

“Who?” he hissed. His hands were clenched at his sides. I shut my eyes.

“How do you know about Kirk? I’ve never mentioned him.”

“Wendy,” his voice rasped, and with my eyes shut I heard it. A familiarity to his voice. Slightly tortured but way too much like the friend I’d made who had encouraged me to accept the Dirt Devils season tickets. The voice of the one person in my hemisphere who had a nice word to say about Peter.

Just, give him a chance. Kirk’s words floated into my head, and my eyes popped open.

“It was you!”

“Tink—” I stepped backwards.

“You lied to me.” My whispered accusation thundered in my chest.

“No. I haven’t. Not since you made me promise that I wouldn’t and—”

“Kirk,” I repeated. My head felt like it was spinning. “You lied. You... you what? Catfished me?” I thought of the picture

Kirk had sent me. It had been of Peter. Peter was Kirk, and Kirk was Peter.

No. Kirk didn't exist.

"No. You didn't lie, though, did you? You just, what? Were having a good laugh at my expense? You'd show me, right. For what? What would make you so freaking angry or pissed that you'd do all this." I sounded hysterical and hated it. I could almost hear my mom's own hysteria anytime my dad tried to drop by in my own voice.

And I hated myself for it.

"I have to get out of here."

"Wendy!" Peter called after me. I started up the stairs and stopped. I turned to look at him. He rushed to the bottom. "It's not what you think!"

"Peter, let her go."

"What the hell, Carey?!" Peter shouted. My feet were nailed to the stairs. "You can't be happy, so that means I can't either?"

"Fuck you!" Carey shouted, reaching for the bottle of scotch that was sitting on the kitchen counter. "Do you have any clue of all the shit you put me through? Year after year! I kept hoping you'd grow the hell up. But nothing! You still haven't!"

That isn't true. The words were at the tip of my tongue.

Despite the truth bomb that had exploded in my face, I found myself wanting to do the one thing I never thought I'd want to do.

Defend Peter.

"You don't have a damn clue what you're talking about, Carey!"

"Peter, how long have we known one another? She was going to get hurt. I just saved her from wasting her time!"

"Bullshit," I whispered under my breath as they continued to yell at one another. "Bullshit," I repeated a little louder.

Both men were full of crap!

“Bullshit!” I shouted and got their attention. Their eyes widened as they watched me rush back, one stair at a time. I would have found it funny if I hadn’t been so damn pissed!

I walked past Peter and didn’t stop until I stood in front of Carey.

I knew what I felt for Peter.

“Wendy,” Peter called my name, but I ignored him.

“You don’t know. I don’t know why you pushed Peter to tell me something he wasn’t ready to tell me, but that was a fucked-up move.”

“Wendy.” Carey’s eyes softened. “I don’t want him to hurt you. You seem like a nice girl who has already been put through the ringer thanks to a spoiled ballplayer with an overinflated ego—”

“No shit,” I cut him off, and I could tell that surprised him. “You don’t think I know that? That I don’t, what? Remember Tony and all his bullshit? But that was then. That was a whole other situation. Completely different than what’s going on here. That’s not Peter. He’s—” I glanced over my shoulder and rolled my eyes at the man I loved.

Right or wrong, I knew I loved him.

But I’m not wrong, I reminded myself. I’d been afraid to be like my mom. Stuck in the promise of something more with a man who couldn’t keep his dick in his pants. We might have only been together for a week, but I knew in my gut and heart and soul that Peter was mine.

And I was his.

I’d known in the back of my mind that something hadn’t added up. Now it made sense. The reason it felt like we knew one another right off the bat. Because we had. I just hadn’t known he was Kirk. Kirk, who had been sweet and gentle and really freaking funny. *A good friend*.

Peter was more than that. Making what we had together so much better.

“He’s different. I know it sounds crazy, trust me, I do, and I know it’s only been two weeks of us being a thing, but—”

“Wendy, I’m sure he has you thinking—”

“How many women has he brought here?” I asked. “That you know of,” I added. I could tell by the look on his face I’d made my point. A muscle ticked under Carey’s eye. “Exactly. I’m here. He asked me to move in with him.”

“Move in?” His eyes rose to meet Peter’s, who I could feel had moved forward and was standing *right* behind me.

“Wendy.” Peter’s hand touched my shoulder. I turned toward him. “You’re sticking up for me?” he asked, looking at me like he was seeing me for the first time all over again. My heart squeezed.

“I am.”

“Why?” Carey seemed to take the words out of Peter’s mouth, but I ignored him.

“Have you broken your promise? Of not lying since making it?”

“No,” he answered without hesitation. “But, Wendy, he’s not wrong. I kept something from you.”

“I know.” I sighed. “I think I knew that.” I winced.

“I have to tell you what I did.” His hands held my face in place as his head dipped down until our gazes were at eye level. “I catfished you.” My lips twitched.

“I think Carey kinda told me that already.”

“And I had cameras installed in your place and trackers set on your cell and car,” he blurted. I froze.

“You what?” I asked softly, not sure if I’d heard him wrong.

“Jesus Christ!” I heard Carey groan.

“Cameras?” I repeated. Peter nodded, and I tried to make sense of what I was feeling. “What else?” I asked, never taking my attention away from the man child standing in front of me.

The one who had never had to do anything other than for himself and had never cared about more than what would make him happy.

Until I came into the picture.

“The season tickets were all me. I asked one of the PR girls to hook you up.”

“Okay... and?”

“And you remember how I came over? When I walked out of the game?”

“Yes?” That was a night I would never forget.

His head dipped further, and my eyes fluttered shut. My heart was pounding in my chest and felt like it was about to burst out of it. His lips touched my ear, and despite finding out all his crazy, I shivered.

Not in fear.

Never in fear when it came to Peter.

“Those cameras recorded us.” His voice gave me goose bumps. I remembered the first time we had sex on my couch in my living room. My face felt hot when I opened my eyes and floated in the grassy gaze in front of me.

“Did someone watch?” I asked, trying not to freak out.

“No, I would never let anyone see you that way. You’re mine.” But I saw hesitation. “Though, I did. I watched it,” he admitted low enough for only me to hear. I had to squeeze my thighs together at the knowledge he’d watched us. Peter’s lips dipped to the shell of my ear. “It was fucking beautiful, Wendy. I couldn’t get myself to delete it. I will if you want me to, but I promise you, no one else but me will ever see it,” he vowed.

“Wendy, this is crazy!” Carey argued, reminding me of his presence.

“I love him.” I smiled and turned easily to face Peter’s agent. “I do.” He stared at me and nodded.

“Okay, then. Good.”

“Good?” Peter repeated, and he sounded a little pissed. “I know that was fucked up, but I had to make sure she was the real deal and not using you. No offense.”

“No offense?” Peter growled. “Do you even—”

“It’s okay.” I rested my hand on my man’s chest. “It’s okay, Peter.”

“How can you say that?”

“He was making sure I was in it for real. And I am.” I stared at Carey. My gaze never faltered. “I love Peter.”

“And he loves you. And I’m fucking glad. But we gotta prepare in case there is any kind of fallout about his crazy.” I giggled.

Actually giggled and could feel the two men staring me.

Call me a lunatic but I enjoyed Peter’s crazy and his stalker-like tendencies.

“We’ll be fine.” Peter pulled me into his arms.

“You don’t know that. This could get messy.”

“Not if I give an interview,” Peter suggested. I frowned.

“Peter, I don’t think I should do the interview.”

“Why not?”

“Because it could look like a conflict of interest.” Carey took the words from my mouth.

“Fine. I know the perfect person, then.”

“You said you’d never do an interview,” Carey reminded him, looking at Peter like he had most definitely lost his mind, and me like he wasn’t sure if I was a good or bad thing in his life.

“Never say never, Carey,” my guy joked, pulling me in and kissing the top of my head.

Three weeks later

“Never say never,” Austin Storms, the local reporter, repeated Peter’s words with a smile.

“Yeah. My new motto to life,” Peter said with an easy smile, dripping charm while ignoring the cameras. “I used to say a lot of sh—stuff,” he corrected and winked. “But that was before I found the love of my life.”

“Incredible.” Austin nodded. “So, what does this mean for your career? A lot of people are speculating that retirement is around the corner.”

“Well, I guess we’ll have to see what happens at the end of the season,” Peter teased perfectly.

I glanced at Carey, who stood next to me in another black suit as he nodded, his eyes glittering happily.

“Well, you heard it here, folks. Never say never. We will be back with the best pitcher this season after a message from our sponsors.”

“Cut!” someone called, and Peter’s eyes met mine.

Never say never.

The thought was daunting. The idea that the impossible was actually possible.

My mom thought I was a fool for not only seeing Peter but for moving in with him after the news about us broke. She thought I was following in her footsteps. She had no idea, not yet, that Peter was nothing like the man who had shattered her heart such a long time ago.

But she would.

With time, I knew without a doubt he’d prove it to her. Not with lavish gifts like he had suggested at the beginning. What could I say? Change didn’t come overnight. But she would realize it with time.

Time I was more than happy to take.

The press had taken our story and spun it.

At the beginning, they tried to paint it in an ugly way. The bad boy of baseball preying on a younger woman with daddy issues. But the fans didn’t buy it. They loved Peter through his bad boy era and, from the looks of it, in this new stage of his

life as well. They loved the idea of him dating the daughter of a Hall of Famer.

The change in narrative and the fact no one had mentioned anything about the extent of the things Peter had done when it came to me had surprised me. But when I turned to look at his best friend, I had a feeling Carey had a big part in squashing any negative story.

Carey admitted he hadn't wanted to pressure Peter into telling me about the catfishing and his stalkerish tendencies but needed to. He'd needed to know if I was in it for the long run and the real deal because he might be Peter's agent, but first and foremost, he was Peter's best friend. His brother by choice.

And I had to admit, I respected that.

A few hours later, we were back at his place, *our* place, as Peter liked to remind me.

"You ready?" I asked when we walked into the recording space he had converted for me so I could do my podcast from home.

"Always."

"You know you don't have to announce it on my show," I reminded him, and he grinned. "And not give my favorite girl the story of the year? Come on," he teased, and I rolled my eyes.

He was still on a no-hitter streak.

Not that we talked about it. When he went to play, I sat in the stands and watched him shine. The Dirt Devils were leading the league with wins, with only one loss under their belt. The playoffs and World Series were still a couple of months away, but it wasn't only Peter who was confident; the whole team and management were positive they'd be heading to the big game come October.

He was going to announce his retirement on my show, and we were dropping the news the day before the World Series was going to begin. We didn't know if they would even go, but Peter had taught me a lot the last couple of months together.

A lot about love and about life.

About how to really let yourself trust in someone.

And about never saying never.

EPILOGUE

PETER

The window was open.

I'd known it from the moment I left the stadium. My sweet little Tink was up to something. She knew better than to taunt me like that. She knew that while I was at the stadium, I checked in on her. There was not a moment during her day at home when I didn't have my eyes on it.

Anyone else would have been freaked out by that.

But not my Wendy girl. She seemed to preen on it, thrive on the attention I gave her when I was gone. And I'd been gone all freaking weekend due to some stupid-ass team-building shit the coaching staff had insisted on that Carey hadn't been able to get me off the hook from.

My body felt like a damn live wire. Exposed and crackling. Needing something. Something only my woman could give me.

I turned the lights off my SUV before I pulled my car into the driveway and put the thing into *Park*. I stared out at the darkness.

I reached for my phone and pulled up the app I shamelessly checked a million times a day. Morning. Noon. Night. It didn't matter. Sometimes I checked it while she was in another room.

The screen filled with multiple squares. Each one a different view from cameras in and outside the house. My eyes bounced from one to another, desperate to find what they were looking for. My nose flared when I saw her.

My sweet Wendy girl had surprised me in the best of ways. After Carey left that night when shit had hit the fan, we had a deep heart-to-heart. I had confessed clearly and honestly everything I had done. And when she asked me to show her the video of us having sex on her couch, I'd known. I'd known my sweet, innocent-looking Wendy had a dark side.

A filthy one that fit mine perfectly.

Now she was taunting me. She knew exactly what she was doing by soaking in the master tub. Our two French doors that looked out to our enclosed balcony were wide open. The sheer curtains that hid nothing from the view of what was inside billowed in the light fall breeze. My hands clenched and relaxed at my thigh. I was going to spank her perfect ass for that. I was going to make sure the sound echoed off into the air so anyone outside would know exactly who she belonged to. Especially when her little gasps would surely turn into whiney pretty little purrs.

I slipped out of my vehicle and shut the door quietly. As I rounded the house, my jaw clenched. I felt like I was about to come out of my skin. Then I heard it. Her voice. She was inside our bedroom, talking. Talking about the game I'd just played.

Recaps for her show.

I loved hearing her tell stories about me. So did her listeners. But how couldn't they? She was easy to fall in love with. I knew that firsthand. Carefully and as quietly as I could manage, I climbed the post at the darkened side of our house, pulling myself up to the balcony, and when I got up there, I watched her from the corner of the darkness the night gifted me.

Wendy was fucking perfect.

My sweet little pixie come to life, my everything. I had no idea how the hell I had managed to make her give me a chance. Not just after Carey made me come clean, but at all. I must have done something incredible in a past life to allow a man like me in this one spend the rest of his life with the woman of his dreams.

I moved = out of the shadows and smiled at the way she jumped when she noticed me. Her hand went on her chest, and she shook her head. But my eyes were pinned on her hand and the ring on her finger.

One I had given her. One that promised forever and made sure other motherfuckers out there knew she was mine.

I'd never imagined falling so damn hard and deep with anyone. But that went to teach me the biggest lesson of my life—never say never.

“Peter!” she gasped as I slowly walked toward her. “Why are you climbing over the balcony?” A wolfish smile covered my face.

I felt like a predator happily stalking its prey. Her eyes widened and then darkened. Yeah, my Wendy girl looked sweet as sugar, but she had a darker side. One that I was going to enjoy.

Tonight. Tomorrow. And for the rest of our lives.

“You’re not supposed to leave the windows open, Wendy girl,” I taunted. She matched my steps. Taking one back for every step I took forward until her thighs hit the mattress. “You never know who can fly in,” I whispered against her lips.

“Peter,” she gasped. Our eyes connected, and I could see it.

Heat.

Lust.

Desire.

All of it simmered to the surface and was wrapped up with a big bow of love. My girl wanted me. “This why you wore this?” I asked. The tips of my rough fingers skimmed her shoulder, tracing the teeny tiny strap of the mint-green satin nightie she was wearing. The thing hugged her curves and ended just above her thighs with a black lace edging.

“Yes.”

“Were you trying to drive me crazy?” I asked.

“I missed you,” she confessed. My eyes shut tight. I had no clue what the hell I had done to deserve her, but I would work every damn day of my life to make sure she knew how much I appreciated her. How much I loved her.

I breathed in deep in an attempt to control my baser urges. All I wanted to do was push her down onto our bed and fuck her. Lover her thoroughly, reminding her she didn’t need to miss me. That she would always have me.

My lungs filled with her all-too familiar scent. Her perfume and the lotion she used blended with her unique feminine scent. No, pushing her into bed wouldn’t do. Not tonight.

“Tell me your happy thought,” I demanded in a hushed raspy tone.

“You,” she answered. My lips crashed down on hers. My hands tangled in her damp strands.

“Never leave the window open,” I rasped before deepening the kiss. “It’s not safe.”

“Peter,” she whimpered as my lips moved to her neck.

“Never,” I repeated after making sure my teeth scraped along her sensitive skin.

“Always.” She pulled back, and my nose flared. “Always, if it means you’ll be the one who flies through.” She smiled beautifully.

How could I punish her when she answered so damn honestly?

I picked her up, making sure to drag the nightie up her thighs. A deep guttural sound escaped from me as I walked us to the balcony. My Wendy girl was feeling adventurous tonight, that much was clear, and I was going to give her anything and everything her heart desired.

“Peter,” she whispered, rubbing and grinding her sweet body against mine.

“Pull my joggers down,” I demanded, and she did as I ordered.

I sat down on one of the chairs we kept outside and had her ride me. Hard and fast, demanding she slow down when I knew she was on the edge. Hell, who the hell was I kidding? I was too close to losing my nut. She was so damn wet and tight. Her hot body pulled me in impossibly deep.

“How are you still so damn tight, Wendy? You like how I stretch you?” My lips were on hers. “Look at us. Look how you take me, baby.”

“Peter!” I smacked her ass. The sound echoed through the air. The thought of someone hearing her, hearing us, had me turning almost feral as I bucked up into her.

But she didn't shy away.

Wendy met me thrust for thrust until we both found our release, jumping over a proverbial cliff of euphoria only to come up for air on the other side.

Together.

Forever.

Exhausted, she draped herself over me, and we sat there until our breathing evened out. My hands stroked her back. “Peter?” she said into my chest.

“Hmm?”

“You know how we talked about getting married after the World Series?”

“Yeah?” I pulled back. She was chewing on her bottom lip. “What is it?” I asked.

“You might change your mind,” she whispered.

And that was when I saw it.

Worry.

A sliver of fear that she was trying to bat away.

“I'm not sure how this happened,” she continued apprehensively. “I mean, I know *how*, but...”

“What, Wendy?”

“I love you. Just... I didn’t...” Her eyes dropped, but I wasn’t going to have that. I was still inside her, for fuck’s sake. I tipped her head up with my fingers on the edge of her chin.

“What happened?”

“I’m pregnant,” she whispered. I blinked.

A baby.

The baby I had been praying and hoping for was already taking root inside her body.

“Peter?” she whispered as she pulled back, but I didn’t let her go far. My hands wrapped around her tightly, and then I cursed.

“Shit. Wait, is that too much? Will that hurt the—”

“Are you mad?” she cut me off.

“No.” I shook my head. I felt my body start to harden inside of her.

“Peter—”

“You feel it? Feel how knowing I bred my Wendy girl makes me feel? How hard you just got me after I spilled myself into your body only minutes ago?”

“Peter,” she gasped, rolling her perfect hips against me. She was wet and messy from both our releases, but fuck, she was sucking me into her body beautifully. So much my toes curled.

“I gotta confess something, Wendy.” My face dipped, and I licked the column of her neck. “I have wanted to breed you since that first time on your couch.” She clenched around me. She liked knowing how fucking filthy and depraved my mind was when it came to her.

“Peter.”

“Shh.” I rolled us over and got her settled on all fours. “You’re going to take me. If you weren’t already pregnant, tonight would have done it.” I slammed into her, and she cried my name into the night.

I was relentless. Greedy and starving. But my girl was on the same page. Meeting me thrust for thrust. Even though I just had her and we both came hard, there was still a desperation in me. One that needed her more than anything else to live.

“You’re going to be a mom. The best mom any kid has ever had,” I grunted.

“Peter,” she squeaked.

I knew that sound.

Knew those pretty little mewls.

“Come for me,” I growled, and she did as I asked. Her back arched and she cried out my name.

And my second release was not far behind.

I spilled into her, exploding ribbon after ribbon of my seed. I pulled back and watched the beautiful sight of her well-used pussy spilling my cum. I picked her up like a groom would his bride and carried her into our bed, not bothering to close the French doors behind me.

“I got my ring on your finger, your things mixed in with mine. I want this. Forever. I want you and the family we create. In any way we do that,” I told her when we were settled in bed together. I could see the questions in her eyes, so I kept sharing. “I wasn’t going to say anything until it was time, but shit... I wanna adopt, too, Wendy. How Carey and I grew up —” My voice cracked, and I watched her eyes turn gentle.

“I love that idea.” She smiled, and I kissed her. Sealing the promise of the future in that moment.

Every time I looked at her, I was glad I had been wrong.

That never hadn’t happened.

Because she was my always and forever.

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ROOM THIRTY: PERFECT LITTLE DOLL

A reverse harem, Club Sin Story

Coming Nov.30th

Ronan and Fox kept sighing under their breaths, and I couldn't blame them. The three of us were pissed. And for good reason. Serena Mendoza, our sweet mild-mannered, drop-dead gorgeous assistant, had slipped out of the office early.

"Where do you think she went?" Ronan asked, finally breaking the heavy silence in the conference room.

"My guess is lunch," Fox replied. His blue eyes were fixed on the papers in front of him, but I knew he wasn't paying attention to shit while he highlighted who knew what the fuck. The papers were literally backwards.

I had no idea how a five-foot nothing woman had us tied up into knots.

"She had a date," I shared, and if I'd thought the room was quiet before, it was worse now. "I went to her desk and saw a Post-it reminder she left."

"What did it say?" Fox asked, looking almost as distraught as I felt.

"Lunch date, With a heart." I stood up and shut the door and crossed my arms over my broad chest. I was done. I was done putting off a conversation that very much needed to be had.

"We're different. The three of us. We know that," I started to say.

Fox rolled his eyes while Ronan simply shrugged.

“I know we all said we’d keep our hands to ourselves when it came to her. We all... well, let’s be honest, we want her. The three of us. Has that changed?” Ronan and Fox looked at one another before turning to me, and each shook their head slowly. My hands clenched.

“Then I think it’s time we make a move,” I suggested.

Serena called to the three of us in a different way. It was more than sexual. We wanted to take care of her. Protect her. Cherish her. She was different than anyone else. There was more than a baser sexual need.

It went deeper.

Dirtier.

“We?” Ronan asked, sitting up, his interest obviously piqued.

“We,” I repeated confidently.

Fox, Ronan, and I had met in college, and one night, at a party, we discovered we had similar interests. Not only had we gone into business together, creating the number-one sports agency in the country, but we’d become best friends. Closer than most seeing as our sexual interests were different.

We came as a team.

In and out of the office.

We liked to share a woman.

At first, I thought it was a phase. Sharing a woman between the three of us had never seemed like a long-term possibility. But we’d done it. As members of a sex club called Club Sin, we were able to find women more than willing to give in to our dirty needs. Especially when we made sure they were more than satisfied by the end of the night.

But we’d never had a repeat.

Then in walked Serena with her long dark hair and cherry lips and changed it all.

I wasn't even sure she'd be interested in a foursome. She looked so sweet, innocent almost. Then I'd noticed the way Fox and Ronan looked at her. The way they talked to her. Touched her any chance they got.

All professional but different than any other female employees we had.

Need had driven us mad.

Serena was too sweet. Too soft and gentle for the dirty things we wanted from our perfect little doll. Too pure for the way we wanted to control her. The three of us were different in bed, but what we'd ultimately want would be control.

The right thing would have been to let her go. Transfer her into someone else's department. Instead, we promoted her to our personal assistant. We shared her in the office, and now I was suggesting we take the last step, hammer the last nail in our proverbial coffin.

Share her outside of work.

"She wouldn't be interested," Fox scoffed, but I knew he didn't believe his own words.

None of us did.

We'd all watched how affected she was by us, the way she looked at the other when she thought no one was watching. She wanted us, too. Our sweet-as-sugar Serena was just waiting and hoping for us to play with her.

"We both know that's bullshit," Fox mumbled, stretching out in his seat. "If we do this, we need to be very clear."

"I know."

"No, Carey. We need to be clear, not just with her but with ourselves. I want her. I don't mean that as a one-time session so I can use the memory of her as part of my spank bank. I want her forever."

I glanced at Ronan. He swallowed. *Hard*. His Adam's apple bobbed up and down, probably much like mine.

"I want that, too," Roan added.

“Same,” I finally gave in.

I was the reason we hadn’t made a move. Me and my hangups on love and relationships. One that the other two had thankfully respected and understood.

Forever? The thought had been daunting before. I was man enough to admit it had even terrified me. But seeing my first client and childhood best friend, Peter Northend, fall in love had made me think.

What if? What if it would actually be possible?

Forever.

Forever with our perfect little doll.

Jesus, that sounded like a dream I wanted to make reality.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mayra Statham resides in Southern California with her three kids and husband. When she isn't writing or hanging with family, you can find her hidden behind a romance novel while enjoying a highly caffeinated drink.

She loves hearing from readers.

Connect with her on social media platforms or email her at mayrastatham@gmail.com

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