



One Night

With My

**GRUMPY
PROFESSOR
DADDY**

HALEY STORM

One Night With My Grumpy Professor Daddy

An Off Limits Single Dad Romance

Haley Storm

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For the unapologetically courageous Baddies who, despite their fears, stand firmly in their feminine power, bravely saying “yes” to a second chance at their happily ever after.



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CHAPTER ONE

AVA



“HEY GIRL, WHERE ARE you?”
“Hi babe, take *a guess*.”

My bestie, Daphne, squints at my phone screen, trying to figure out my surroundings.

“What! You’re at the mall without *me*? I’ll meet up with you.”

“*Girl*... that’s not happening— I’m halfway across the ocean.”

“Holy shit! That’s why you weren’t answering—what the hell, Ava? You can’t just get up and leave when you’re stressed.”

“Well, that’s what I’m doing, so-”

“Really, Ava? You’re *nuts*.”

“Yeah, *Really*, I’m done. I want to be *Happy*. Not a *friggin marionette*.”

“*Wow*...tell me how you really feel— I don’t know what you think’s gonna happen when you get back— You’re still their

only kid, so you'll be taking over the firm at some point, right?"

"Honestly, I can't think about that right now. I just need to figure my shit out and enjoy some me time. And, if hopping on the next available flight is the way I can get it, that's what I'll do."

"No...Ava, I hear you—*loud and clear*. So, spill, where are you?"

"In the Caribbean," I whisper loudly, "I got here two days ago, but don't say anything to anyone."

"What? No way... I won't — that's fucking awesome!"

"Yeah, It's beautiful here."

"Ava, You're crazy."

"*Crazy?* It's called *living*, and once I find my soul mate, I'm coming back," I crack up, breaking my soap box speech.

"Nothing's better than *sex on the beach at sunset*."

"Hahaha...Girrrl... that's you in a nutshell, Ava, the hopeless romantic. The only one I know whose head's further in the clouds than mine ... My girl, full of lust, heart and fairytales."

"Daph, *don't* kill my vibe—it's about enjoying the moment, every moment."

"Yeah, I get it!"

"It's just who fucking does that? Who hops on a flight to escape adulti-"

I bust out laughing ... "*I do*."

I saw this ad showing how amazing it is this time of year, and I booked my flight two days later. Let me tell you, they weren't lying."

"I think I saw it too. It was... ah..."

"...in Cosmo magazine." We both chime.

"See, that's why I love you, Daph."

"Why, because I support your wild, crazy ass? Love you too, girl.

"Damn, I'm jealous...I wish I could travel whenever."

"*Girrrl*...you totally can." I hiccup, and Daphne shoots a brow.

"Ava Miller. Are you, like, drunk in the middle of the day on a remote island?"

"*Hic-cup.*"

"*Maybe* a bit *buzzed*. But I wasn't when I got here—just a teensy tipsy... Daphne leers. "I couldn't say no to free champagne."

"Really?" her brows crash."

"But I'm definitely not drunk." A traitorous hiccup escapes. Daphne shakes her head, "Listen, that's enough, this is dangerous. You're young, gorgeous and traveling *alone* in the middle of nowhere—You shouldn't be getting *butt-ass drunk* in the middle of the day."

"Pffft...really, who says, *but ass, drunk*? Is that even a thing?"

"Daphne cuts in, "It's not funny." A peal of giggles bubbles in

my throat. She rolls her eyes, “Please, go to your room and sleep it off—Don’t forget the top lock, and put a chair under the handle.”

“*Yes, mom.*” I gulp the contents of my glass. Who rejects complimentary champagne? The room swerves, and I place a hand on my head to stop everything from spinning and groan.

“What was that you said about not being drunk?” The voice sounds like it’s coming from a distance.

“Hun?”

I glance at my phone to see Daphne’s smug look. “Sorry. I didn’t notice I was still on the call.”

“OK, I’m going. But first, I’ve got to pay for this scarf.”

“Ava, Please, just get out of there and head back to your hotel.”

“Even after drinking their free champagne? I think that’s rude.”

“Oh my God. OK, just call me when you make it to your room, got it?”

“Yup... got it!”

“Ava, I better not hear your name on the 5 o’clock news.”

“Byeeee,” I smirk. I make it to checkout in one piece, pay for the scarf, and turn toward the exit. The room swims, and I take a deep breath.

OK, I’ll just place one foot in front of the other and walk out of the store. How hard can that be?

Left foot, right foot.

You got this.

When I make it to the door, I fist-pump my arm in the air.

It's either the alcohol giving me super strength, or I got too confident because just as I reach out to push, it swings open, and I lose my balance.

Oh shit, oh my god, no.

Flailing haphazardly, I squeal, trying hard to break my fall or at least prevent myself from busting my head. Everything's swirling so badly, and I can't make out where the floor starts or where it ends.

I mouth, "*Oh my God, I'm gonna die.*"

or get a concussion, or worse.

I close my eyes, bracing for impact.

Holy shit.

When I don't crash, I open one eye to see a man looking at me.

"Are you OK?"

"Do you need an ambulance?"

My brain snaps awake and pieces what's wrong together. I opened my eyes to see he's holding me up while I grasp him with one hand, holding the door with the other.

"No, no. I'm fine, thank you."

Did he just Save me?

OK, well, he didn't exactly *save* me— I grabbed onto the poor man while looking for something to break my fall. And what perfect timing! I feel bad for him, but I can't exactly let go, or I'll end up on my ass. And I'm not about mopping the floor with my skirt.

“Let me help you up.” He swoops me to my feet before I figure out how best to stand.

“I'm sorry...thank you so much.” Standing firmly, I tip my head back to get a good look at my savior/victim. *And good God.* With that face, he must be used to women falling all over him. Dressed in a navy-blue suit that complements his gray eyes, I take in his strong brows, chiseled jawline, and sandy-cropped beard, sobering up immediately.

Holy shit, who actually looks this good—is this a Tik Tok prank? His lips move again, and I hardly register what he's saying till I reply. “I'm fine, thanks for asking— I just slipped.” I look back, realizing that because of my buzz, I missed the fact the door was automatic. My cheeks flush with heat, and it sobers me up even more.

“Well, I'm glad you're fine,” the navy blue suit says. His voice sounds like honey, butter, and dark chocolate. I could listen to him speak for hours and not get tired. Like he could whisper dark things in my ear, and I'd melt. I'm aware of everywhere his gaze touches: my arms, neck, and face. It's like a caress. I look up at his eyes and instantly avert my gaze. Something about them makes me feel like he can see through me, making

me more self-conscious by the minute. And his perfectly chiseled face doesn't help matters.

This man is a damn god.

I feel another blush creeping up my cheeks. "I should go—my ride is waiting. Thanks again." I grab my bag and head toward my Uber. This time around, I take care not to trip or cause any more drama, but drama has other plans because just as I'm about to enter the car, a voice rings out, "Hey, you, stop!"

CHAPTER TWO

DRAKE



EVERYTHING IN LIFE USED to be either black or white, no in-between— And now I don't know what it is anymore. Sitting in this room of entitled lawyers, I wonder who among them, if any, are like my father, laser-focused on winning no matter the cost.

“That concludes our session for today. Thanks everyone for...” The moderator's voice jolts me to reality, and I turn my attention to the stage. I should be focusing on the lecture, not thinking about all the tragedy my father's caused.

Thankfully, I've cut all business ties with him. Everyone shoots to their feet to disperse. I try to avoid letting my stray thoughts get the better of me. I should've disowned him years ago. My blood boiling, I force a breath and think of something else that makes me happier, the embodiment of life's potential. I take out my phone to call her.

“Daddy!” Her little voice screams from the other end of the line.

“Hey princess, how’s my favorite girl?”

“I’m doing *great*, Daddy!”

“Good, honey, how was school today?” Getting married was never in my plans. But I did it anyway because isn’t that the order of things? My family had expectations for me, and I went along. I don’t entirely regret it because at least I have my little angel. Zoe’s voice brings me back to reality.

“School was great today! I drew a rabbit in art class, and Mrs. Robinson said it was cute. Ella drew a wolf, and everyone loved it, but I love my rabbit more.”

“Me too, pumpkin, I love your rabbit more.”

She gasps. “You do? It’s white and fuzzy with a little pink nose.”

“Really? Oh my, then it must be super cute.”

“It is.”

“OK, here’s what we’ll do— I’ll call you on Facetime once I get back to my hotel, and you can show it to me. Can we do that?”

“OK.” I can hear her joy through the phone. I can’t wait to see her so we can sign. She has much more to say when signing than speaking.

“What about you, Daddy? How are you?” I can’t help the way my face stretches ear to ear. My little angel is asking about me.

She's just three and a half years old, so cute and smart.

"Daddy's fine, honey. I'm Missing you, that's for sure." I'll be home soon, OK? Do you want me to get you anything?"

"Hmm...."

"I want a big bow for my hair!"

"A bow, huh?"

"I want a red one—that's my favorite color."

"It is, I thought it was pink?"

"That was when I was three, but grandma says I'll be four years old soon. So now my favorite color is red."

I smile softly at the logic. "Oh, I see. A big red bow. Coming right up."

"Yay!"

"OK, baby, Daddy will see you soon. Make sure to be a good girl for Claudia and Grandma, OK?"

"OK, Daddy, I will."

"Daddy loves you, angel."

"I love you too, Daddy."

The call ends, and I look around, realizing I'm almost at my hotel. It was a smart choice getting the closest penthouse to the venue—I get to walk the city rather than driving everywhere. My busy life has its perks, but there's nothing like some solid alone time.

Just before I make it to the hotel, I change my mind and quickly detour, deciding to pick up the red bow for Zoe. With the help of my phone, I walk around checking all the different stores—I'm amazed that all she can think to ask for is a simple little bow. And I know it's only a matter of time before she'll be extorting me for a lot more than that. One day, it'll be a Porsche or, who knows what. And God help me because I won't hesitate to give it to her. "Here you go, sir." The cashier packages the bow perfectly and hands me the little bag. "Thank you."

Walking out of the store, my phone dings—I glance to see the title of the mail. *'Offer of professorship.'* My eyes widen as I'm about to click open the mail when a sudden movement forces my phone out of my hand. "Shit!" I look around, confused by the flurry of moments, when I feel hands pulling at my jacket.

Tilting my gaze toward the floor, I see a woman holding on to me for her dear life. Her eyes are shut tightly, and she mutters, *'Oh my God, I'm dying.'* Thanks to Zoe, I read her lips perfectly—

Is she dying?

"Should I call an ambulance?" I ask while looking around for my phone.

"No, no. I'm fine." Her grip tightens, and I figure she's trying to stand.

"Let me help you up." I grab her, helping her to her feet. Once she's finally upright and not hanging from my jacket, I get a

good look at her. And, wow, she is a stunner. Auburn brown hair, pink full lips, and plump tits, nearly spilling out of her dress— it's no wonder my cock responds the way it does.

“Hey, are you sure you're OK?”

“Yeah, I'm fine, thank you.”

For a second, her face almost matches the color of her hair. I take in her features again and conclude it's not just the one thing that makes her beautiful—it's all of her. But looking at her flawless skin, it's obvious she's way too young for me.

“OK, Daphne is right, maybe I am drunk,” she mutters again. Does she always talk out loud to herself? Then as if she remembers I'm in front of her, her cheeks grow flusher, causing my dick to flinch against my slacks.

What is this girl doing to me?

“I'm so sorry,” she says. But my tongue is stuck, glued to the roof of my mouth, and I'm unable to say anything else. Her beauty is obvious, and her energy wild, not the glossy magazine type, but radiant all over. Her features stand out, and so does my skin from where we had contact.

Just gorgeous.

She'd be running, not apologizing, if she knew what was going through my head right now— And honestly, at this point, I couldn't blame her.

I'm not good for anyone.

As though she can read my thoughts, she turns around to leave. “I should go. My car is waiting. Thanks again!” She blurts, picks up a paper bag from the floor, and disappears. I shake my head. She’s hot, young and carefree.

Sounds like freedom to me.

I grab my phone and the bag with my daughter’s gift in it. That’s when I realize it’s different; I look to double-check it’s not a bow.

It’s a... scarf.

I turned in the direction of the woman, panicked that she might have driven off with the red bow I spent all afternoon looking for. And, as loud as I can, I call out. “Hey, you, stop!”

CHAPTER THREE

AVA



“HEY GIRL, YOU GOT me over here thinking about what to even call you— I’m stuck between runaway tourist and bag snatcher,” Daphne says before I get to say hello.

“I didn’t know I told you about that.” I don’t remember much after I got in my Uber.

“Well, you called me from your hotel, frantic to tell me a drunken recount of what happened. You slurred a lot and said other things, but I got the gist.” I groan; I don’t remember doing that. “You know what, I’ll call you in like thirty minutes, Daph. I’m walking to my hotel, and by the way, both are terrible name ideas.” A peal of laughter sounds back at me before I hang up.

I pocket my phone and walk in the direction of my hotel. A blush creeps up my cheeks as I think of Daphne’s joke and

yesterday's debacle. Just before I get to my hotel, I catch sight of an ice cream truck and make a quick detour. Ice cream goes perfectly with this steamy Caribbean weather. Strolling toward the truck, I think about falling into the arms of that hunky blue-suited hottie. Boy, that man can dress. I have a little fun imagining all the dirty book boyfriend names I could think of, but Daddy is the only one that sticks, "Hahaha."

He could be my daddy any day.

Oh, the questions. What was he doing at the store? Is he a local? He didn't look like a local from his swag. I wonder if I asked around, could I find him? Or maybe I should go back to the store?

No.

I can't do that.... I'm not going back there, not after that dramatic show of events yesterday. And especially not with what happened *after* the fall. So embarrassing. After making my way to the Uber, he called out to stop me, and the drunken, hopeless romantic part of me turned around, thinking he wanted to ask for my number, but he just gestured to the bag in my hand, and we switched off. He was sweet about it, causing my cheeks to flush another shade of red, then he turned to the guy and told him to drive safe. Daydreaming about those deep-set eyes and his gorgeous face, he has me watering at the mouth while the memory of *him* plays on repeat.

"What flavor would you like, Miss?" The ice cream vendor raises a brow, leaving me to wonder if he'd asked that question more than once. I shake my head, wondering how I could get

so lost in the thought of a stranger in a suit. “I’ll take one strawberry flavor, please.” While licking my ice cream, I keep thinking about it, his eyes gazing into mine. It wouldn’t be an exaggeration if I said he was the sexiest man I’ve ever seen in my twenty-one years of living. I share a full recount of the incident without sparing a single detail. Daphne squeals, “Since when are you into older men?” This was after she laughed her ass off about me falling and rubbing my face in it with an obnoxious, I told you so, as loudly as she could.

“I’m not into older men, but I think I’m into him.”

“Into him like you might like him, or into him like you want to suck-”

“Daphne!”

“Ok, OK. Well, whether you’re into older men now or just him. I love and support you.”

“Shut up, Daph. For real, there’s something about him— I was just joking to myself how he gives off daddy vibes, the man is hot.” I giggle.

“Omg, Ava, you dirty bitch, look at you, drooling over *Mr. Irresistible*. No, but really... I mean it...and you never know with these kinds of things.”

“Oh right, girl gets swept off her feet by sexy older ma-”

“I’ve heard stories, just saying. You do what makes you happy.”

“Could you even imagine?”

“Ava, what I don’t get is, you met this man for all of what, 20 minutes or less? What is this wild attraction to him?”

“I don’t know, but I felt something, I know I’m not crazy, and I know it wasn’t the alcohol.” Her lips twitch, and she looks at me, smug, “Says the crazy lady who stole an Innocent man’s paper bag.”

I facepalm myself, embarrassed. “C’mon, I told you. I just thought it was mine.”

“I know, but it was funnier to say it that way. Speaking of fun, what’s on the agenda for tonight?” I smiled and sent a picture of the flyer my tour guide gave me. “It’s supposed to be a beach party, and I already have the perfect outfit.” Daph’s eyes widen in excitement.

“Ooo. Let me see.”

A few minutes later, I’m in a short, backless mini dress with my diamond-studded barefoot sandals that make my feet look amazing.

“Adorable!” Thanks, I’m going full-on combination of sexy meets boho Caribbean beauty... I figure when in Rome, right?

“I love picking outfits over the phone. But I swear you’re going to pay my next bill. I laugh pick up a purse that’s just big enough for the essentials, my phone, and some cash.

“OK, I’m off now. Bye.”

“Wait!” She yells before hanging up, “So I don’t have to hear about this Mr. Amazing anymore find you some fine ass man to fuc-”

“Really, Daphne, bye.”

Heading to the venue, my spirits soaring. A party? Exactly what the doctor ordered. I came to this island for one thing—letting loose, having a blast, and leaving all the serious crap behind. Approaching the beach is like stepping into a party paradise. Music pulses through the night beneath the starlit sky—bodies sway in rhythm with the beat.

Before I know it, I’m swept away by the mood, my body moving effortlessly to the groove. I grab a drink from the waitress moving through the crowd, but I have to consciously make sure not to overdo it because, honestly, I’m not entirely recovered from yesterday’s show of events. But hair of the dog has worked for some, I guess. I dance wildly with not a care in the world, tossing my hands in the air, sipping until I catch a delightful buzz, and reveling in the carefree atmosphere.

“What’s your take on the party?”

I glance up, thinking I’m about to politely turn down another admirer, only to lock eyes with someone familiar. It’s Carl, our dark-haired tour guide.

“It’s a blast, Carl! Thanks for the tip!” I yell over the music. “Are you having a good time too?” I ask, but as the words leave my lips, I realize it’s unnecessary. Two sets of hands encircle his waist, and he shares a passionate kiss with a sexy shirtless dude.

Well, well, well. He’s hot.

For a moment, my eyes widen, and an amused grin spreads across my face. Carl, with his impeccably ironed shirt and nerdy glasses, didn't strike me as someone who swayed in that direction, but hey, love has its surprises.

A thought goes through my mind—it's a familiar one. I don't have to ponder for long before it clicks. Daphne had said something like this earlier today. Even though she meant it as a joke, my mind wanders back to the mystery man from yesterday. Is he a regular at these parties? I shake my head, highly unlikely with that sharp navy-blue suit of his.

“Hey there, gorgeous.”

For a quick second, I entertain the idea that the universe heard my thoughts and brought him here for me, but reality quickly sets in as I turn around. I take a good look at the man behind me. blonde hair, a cute smile. I would have probably considered him attractive on a typical day, but I have someone else on my mind.

“Would you like to dance?” He asks with a wink.

“No, thanks,” I reply. I keep dancing, but I don't expect to feel someone so close to me. I look behind to see blondie dancing really close, like we're together. Even though I keep inching away from him, he doesn't take the hint; the dude's relentless. And I've seen lots of serial killer movies start like this. So, I just slowly inch away from him, away from the dancing crowd, till I lose him.

A wave of nausea hits me. I think a combination of the booming music, the heat from the dancing bodies, and the

strong smell of alcohol is getting a bit too much. I stumble out of the crowd, desperate for some fresh air. I keep walking till I get past the party, past couples getting it on and other partygoers, to a more secluded part of the beach. I'm almost at the edge of the beach, near what looks like some sort of cave, when I stop taking in my surroundings.

I enjoy the cool ocean breeze, and the crashing of the ocean that dulls the booming music of the party to a distant memory, and the way my hair is picked up in the breeze is so freeing. The unmistakable sounds of footsteps come from behind me, and I stiffen. I'm a single woman in a dark, secluded corner; not many good scenarios start this way. My heartbeat picks up, and I'm suddenly aware of the clammy feel of my palms.

It's probably nothing, Ava, calm down.

For a second, I think about the asshole from the party, hoping he didn't follow me here. I look around, but it's super dark, so I can't see much. At this point, all I hear is my heartbeat pounding in my ears. I notice the movements again, and that's when I know I'm truly not alone.

Unable to stop myself, I call out. "Is someone there?"

CHAPTER FOUR

DRAKE



I 'VE ALWAYS HAD A thing for the ocean. It's a reflection of me, cool and calm on the surface but hiding a storm underneath. I know it looks like I've got it all together—a billionaire single dad handling my business despite the loss that's torn me apart. Guilt eats at me; memories of grief and that haunting moment—my baby girl in those icy hands—keep rippling through my soul. Pain shoots up the side of my face from clenching my jaw too hard, but the memories won't quit. Staring at the ripple of the waves, I wish the ocean could just let loose—to show the world not to judge on looks alone. Maybe I should've seen it coming—maybe I should've fought my old man harder. Then, none of this would've happened. But if I never married her, I wouldn't have my precious Zoe.

“Hey, who's there?” A soft voice slices through the walls I've built in my mind. I close my eyes, stretch my legs out, and

take a deep breath, hoping if I pretend not to hear, they'll just walk away.

“Oh, hi there, it's you!” The voice calls again, sounding closer this time. I'm in no mood to deal with any reporter or fan right now. Besides the conference, one of the reasons I'm on this private beach is the solitude. Nobody knows me here, and that's exactly how I like it—I needed this break. Even with all its seclusion, I'm never really free from the damn paparazzi on Star Island; Miami has a way of bringing shit to its boiling point.

Though the voice is a bit familiar, I honestly couldn't care less who the owner is— all I want is for them to *go*. But that's out of the question when I sense them inching closer, taking a seat beside me on my blanket.

“Isn't it beautiful?” The soft voice disrupts my solitude again. “I mean the ocean,” she continues, despite my silence, “It's so calm, you never know what's hidden in its depths. It's kind of scary, really,” she giggles. Most people would've taken my silence as a rejection, but she doesn't seem to mind. Either she's used to having her way, or she just doesn't care. I finally open my eyes and look at her. I don't see all her features, but I see enough to recognize she's that beauty from yesterday. Her face looks ethereal under the soft glow of the moonlight.

“Don't you think it's beautiful?” She says, glancing at the ocean, then back to me.

I look into her eyes and reply, “Yes, it's very beautiful.” She blinks, blushes, and looks away. I'm sure she realizes I wasn't

just talking about the ocean.

We sit and watch the rippling waves in silence for a minute. She pulls her legs to her chest, and our shoulders brush against each other; her hair tickles my skin. She turns to look at me, and the second our eyes meet, time stands still. Glancing at her under the evening sky, I'm trying desperately to place exactly what it is about this woman that has both my heads' attention. Somehow, she's managed to disrupt my calm in the most unexpected ways, not once but twice in one week. And instead of being annoyed, she has me intrigued.

“So, you're just sitting here in the dark?”

I'm surprised she beat me to it because I was just thinking the same about her. My gaze falls to her pink pout as she yammers on while my mind fantasizes about what else it can do. “Why so grim? There's a party over there —looks like you could use one.”

“No thanks,” I reply flatly, not letting on to my interests. I can't remember the last time I went to a party. I snort.

The thought of me dancing wildly is comical.

“What's funny? You hate parties?”

“I haven't partied year.”

Frankly, I'm getting tired of this small talk. The downside? I'm holed up at the hotel right behind here, so even though I'd rather not be anywhere near all this shit, there's no escaping it. I scoff, annoyed.

“Fine, suit yourself, your loss.” She says, turning toward the ocean. There’s part of me that feels bad for shutting her down and, in a way, misses some of her enthusiastic attention.

“I’m just not a good dancer,” at least that’s half a truth, anyway. She turns back to me with a teasing, warm smile on her face.

“Really?”

I’m lost in her beauty, and the shape and outline of those full hips nestled in my blanket cause dark urges to grow below. She’s gorgeous, the kind of pretty you don’t see every day. The way her curves fill in that dress is absolute perfection. This girl is something, that’s for sure. Her strappy diamond anklets catch the moon perfectly, shooting glints of light along her thighs.

“Looks like you’re missing something,” I tease. “Where are the soles?” She looks down, realizing what I’m talking about. “Oh, I like them this way. There’s nothing like feeling the sand between my toes... it’s grounding, you know?”

“I guess.”

“C’mon...try it, set your piggies free.” Though I don’t see why I should, my interest is peaked, so I go along anyway. Slipping off my shoes and socks, I dig in. The sand is cool and firm with just enough give. She’s right; it really does feel good.

“I’m glad I convinced you.” She smiles, and I’m instantly reminded of yesterday’s encounter. The thought makes me

smirk. Her eyes widen, shining bright, “Are you laughing at me?”

I shake my head.

“But you’re smiling.” I didn’t even realize I was. She’s bright like sunshine, a breath of fresh air. I mean, who prances around with their head in the clouds, drinks in the middle of the day and walks alone barefoot at night? I tear my gaze and look at the ocean. But I can only look away for a moment before my traitorous eyes stray back to her. Yesterday, her auburn hair was tied in a ponytail, and she wore a loosely fitted colorful dress. Today, her hair falls softly down her back, and the little black number she’s wearing does nothing to hide her body beneath.

“You’re staring,” she says, slowly turning to look at me. The second she does, she lets out a small gasp, and her hand goes over her mouth as though she just realized something.

“You know what you remind me of?” I raise a brow at her question, and she answers herself.

“The ocean...in a way. I mean, your face may be plain and give off nothing— don’t get me wrong, you are cute, but it’s those eyes. Your eyes are so stormy, I can’t tell what you’re thinking. But, you look like you think a lot.”

“Well, it’s nice to know you think I’m cute.” My eyes dart away from her again. The way she looks at me makes me uncomfortable, not in a bad way, because she’s warm and welcoming, but it’s like she sees through my soul...and that’s not allowed. Breaking into a huge grin, she blurts, “That’ll be

five ninety-nine for the free consultation.” A chuckle slips out of me. “You’re a bad shrink.”

“Well, after the way we met yesterday, I figured I needed to reintroduce myself for a better first impression.”

“And this is what you’re going for?” I shrug, “I think I kind of liked knowing you as the woman who fell for me.” My lips clamp shut as soon as I say that.

Where did that cheesy line come from?

She laughs, shoots to her feet, dusts the sand off her hands, and stretches one out to me, “Nice to meet you,” she smiles. You can now know me as the woman who charmed you with her dancing— Or the woman who brought the party to you, whichever.” “Hahaha!”

“What?”

“A dance, come on, take my hand,” she repeats like we’re having a normal conversation or like it’s normal to offer a stranger on the beach to dance.

“Why?”

“Well, you look like you need some cheering up, and some idiot interrupted my dancing earlier tonight, so win, win, right.”

My lips twitch— this woman has amused me more in one night than anyone has in my lifetime.

“Are you always this...Interesting?”

“I don’t know, that’s subjective — I just do me... I’m a free spirit, you know... Or a nuisance,” She laughs. Her hair blows wildly with the ocean breeze. I’m not ready to let on, but this beautiful creature has caught all my attention tonight. She’s light, airy, and reminds me of summer.

Geezus...first sunshine, now summer? OK, what the hell.

“If you don’t want to dance, I could sit here, telling you stories about my life all night instead.” My eyebrows shoot up, “Are you serious right now?”

Yup, pure personality.

She’s the total opposite of me. And if I’m being honest, I’d probably snuff the personality right out of her. She shouldn’t be near me.

“Please leave,” I grunt. “Or I’ll have someone remove you.”

“I’m not as easy to remove as you think,” she says, unfazed by my harsh tone. “I’ll start with how I lost my virginity in the back of my mother’s truck and-”

“There’s hardly any music.” I shift my gaze up at her.

“There’s music enough for us. C’mon... just follow my lead.” Her hand stretched with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes.

This woman is unhinged.

“If you stand up now, I promise not to butcher your feet while we’re at it.” I raise my brow towards her and look back at the ocean again, knowing that if I don’t have that dance, she’s not

going to leave me alone. Of course...I could walk away, but there's something about her that convinces me not to.

“Just one dance?”

She nods, reaching for my hands. I groan inwardly, taking hers into mine. They're so soft and small. Her body against mine, the scent of her faint perfume teases my senses, wrapping around me like a breeze on a hot summer day. Swirling auburn hair surrounds us.

She's awakened something primal in me.

I want to taste her, kiss her, and feel her skin against mine. But I've got to keep myself in check because if I don't, I might break her.

“C'mon, loosen up, don't be so stiff... move your hips.” For a few minutes, I allow my body to move alongside hers to the sound of the music playing in the background. She laughs, twirls, and squeals. Her energy is infectious...I spin her and pull her into me.

“See, don't you feel better by just dancing?”

“Hmhmhm,” I chuckle. Hyperaware of her curvy bare thighs rubbing against the hard planes of my body, the last thing I'm thinking about is dancing. I need to stop, but my bulge is ready to make good on its promise to deliver.

“Is something wrong?” she asks breathlessly. Trying to distract myself from my raging hard-on, I ask what's been on my mind all night,

“How are you so happy?”

She giggles, “I’m just trying to enjoy my few days of freedom,” she says, looking up into my eyes. The music we were dancing to fades in the background. It’s just us, our bodies locked in sync together. I see that mischievous spark in her eyes just before my world tilts, and I’m tumbling, unable to save myself.

“Oh shit!”

CHAPTER FIVE

AVA



I 'M FALLING, AND I'M falling fast.

When I pushed dark and dangerous – a much better name than Mr. Navy blue suit, I didn't expect him to pull me with him. I landed flat on his hard body as we hit the sand, his back to the ground and me on top of him. I burst into laughter at how ridiculous we must look.

“Why'd you push me?” My tall, dark company asks from underneath me. I feel the rumble of his voice reverberates through me. I stop laughing and look at him under the moonlight—I can make out some of his chiseled features and salt-and-pepper dark hair. His face is so close to mine —his breath fans my forehead. He's truly a gorgeous man.

“Do you always dance with random strangers, then shove them to the ground?”

“You needed to lighten up. You were doing so well while we were dancing, then you got serious again.”

“Is that how you saw it?” I try to stand, but somehow, I just end up doing a weird wiggle-shuffle on his body. And I feel his hardness pressing against me.

Oh my.

He shakes his head, and for some reason, that makes me want to push his buttons even more. I wiggle again. But it feels more like a slow grind.

“Stop.” His voice now thick. He looks at me. There’s a spark, so instant, so undeniable, so unbelievably raw, and real that for a second, I can’t breathe. And with the way his dark eyes catch mine, I know he feels it, too.

“What is it about you?” His breath travels along my skin, giving me chills all over. And I can’t help but show I’m feeling the same.

I flirt back, “What is it about you?” The heat of desire rushes through me so intensely that my surroundings blur, and my head spins. Before I can stop myself, I lean into the curve of his neck. He smells amazing! Something about this man has me dizzy.

“Maybe I’m a little buzzed,” I whisper. That’s the only explanation for why I feel so lightheaded.

“Oh, really, do you want me to stop? Maybe I should get you inside?” His arms slacken as our gaze locks, and as though he’s fighting himself, he tightens his grasp around my waist. How

much did you have to drink?” he asks after a while. The sound of his voice rumbles through me and shoots between my legs. I don’t know if it’s the feel of his skin on mine, his breath against my neck, or my nipples pressed against his hard body, but hot damn, I’m ready to let go all over this man. I shake my head. “I’m not drunk.” Maybe on desire, but definitely not on alcohol.

“Can you stand?”

“I don’t want to.”

“Why not?”

Because I want to kiss you so much right now that I feel like I might pass out.

I think the words, but nothing comes out of my mouth. I raise my head to look at him, my eyes swing to his lips, wondering what they’ll feel like on mine.

Soft and sweet?

Hard and insistent?

How would his lips feel on other parts of my body? His breathing becomes ragged. And I can tell he feels this, too. Our hunger grows hotter with each second.

“You’re spectacular,” he says against my lips. His soft breath sends warmth around me.

I wiggle-shuffle again, and this time the slight friction catches my clit just right, and it feels so good. Deciding I’ve had

enough of these small teasing touches, my hands travel from where they're wrapped around his neck down to his firm chest.

Even though I should stop, I sneak lower, my breast pressing harder into him as my core presses against his hard bulge. His hand rests on my thigh and starts moving higher before he stiffens. I can tell through the low groan he releases that he's fighting himself for control.

"You can shut it out, you know?"

"What?"

"The voice in your head that keeps you from making any bad decisions." I raise my brow assuredly, at least for a few minutes or however long you can last."

"How?" he asks, catching me off guard and adding fuel to the fire between my legs. Granting more permission, I place my hand over his, moving it higher on my thigh.

His eyes don't leave mine as I bring his hand to my center. The sounds of the waves crash between breaths as unbreaking eye contact has me even more turned on.

"Like this," I say, and do what's been on my mind all night.

Sliding up his rock-hard body, I bring my lips to his, a soft moan escaping my throat as our lips intertwine. In a matter of seconds, the kiss goes from soft and unsure to hungry and urgent.

Our sounds escape us in a sweet melody as he kisses me like his life depends on it, and I kiss back with as much intensity.

My hands slip under his shirt, feverishly exploring the curves of his back.

Wow, his body is Amazing!

Feeling his cock firmly pressed against me as his tongue crashes in and out of my mouth causes my pussy to quiver with want. With every growing pant, we tear at each other, and in one swift movement, faster than our hearts are beating, his clothes are off, and my dress is over my head. I'm left in just a thong, desperate and vulnerable, in need of any kind of relief, lying on top of him. Realizing we're exposed with only the night sky to protect us, I look back and see the beach is cleared—how long were we dancing for? Time is distorted. He pulls my head up toward him, and I moan at the invasion of his tongue. He moves from my waist to my breasts, cupping them in his big hands. God, everything about this man feels and smells so good, and I'm too far gone to have any rational thoughts—all I know for sure is that I want him. The only thing separating us is the thin layer of my thong and his boxers.

“I want you,” I pant.

His stiff hard-on against me as he pulls my ass closer, rubbing his bulge against my sweet spot. And before I can think myself out of it, I reach for his cock. He pulls back, holding my wrists. “Are you sure?” I can see him hanging on to the last strand of self-control. I nod impatiently, not wanting to give myself any chance to back out. Any nerves and thoughts that plagued me before being pushed to the back burner.

I'm ruled by my body and controlled by my lust.

This is exactly what *this* girl needs *right now*.

He thrusts his hips forward, signaling me to slide his boxers down. His cock springs out at full attention, and my eyes widen at the sight of him.

Holy shit.

I gasp, looking down at what may be too big to fit. My hand reaches out, cupping him.

He leans into my ear, and in a deep, guttural voice, he mumbles, "I just want you to know that if we do this, I'm gonna fuck you so good your legs are gonna tremble through tomorrow—do you think you can handle that?" Intimidated but determined, I squeeze him in response with a glint of lust in my eyes.

"That's a *good* girl."

Fuck.

Did he just say that?

My pussy begs for his attention, and a flood wells up between my legs,

His eyes are lit with a hungry fire that threatens to consume us both. A reassuring waft of cedar-salted air fills my senses. His big, roaming hands move between my legs, and he slips his fingers into my wetness. I bite my lip as he thrusts his finger in and out of me, stretching me as he slips in another.

"Ahhh... mmmm," I moan.

His slick fingers rub between my folds.

“Dam sunshine, your pussy feels so good and wet— I want to taste you.” I’m undone as his rumbling tone fills my ear. Each thrust pushes me closer to the edge. A blinding need overtakes me; my chest is pinched so tight it’s almost painful to breathe. I need more now. Gently removing his hand from between my legs, I sit up and replace it with his cock, sharing my silent, obvious message.

I’m ready—please, fuck me now.

Using his head to tease my clit, I stimulate my juices, lowering myself on his shaft. My walls sting as he stretches me out. I roll my hips, maneuvering his thickness inside me. My pussy yearns— it hurts so good as I ride him slow and intentional, gasping and panting heavily, as his cock widens my wanting walls. His pelvis finally meets mine, “Gaah,” I gasp, but it’s too good to stop. It’s just us—no other care in the world.

“That’s good, sweetheart,” he mumbles and gently bites my neck, ravishing me as chills cascade all over my body.

“You’re doing it, sweetheart—take it all in.”

My head swirls in pleasure as my moans crash against the sounds of the ocean.

“Mmm...yes.”

“Do you like that?” His pelvis pumps against mine, and I gaze into his stormy orbs, panting back a whiny “Yes.” Grabbing my hips while thrusting intently, he mumbles, “Your pussy

feels like heaven.” I buck on command, rolling my head in ecstasy,

“That’s it, sweet thing... That’s a *good* girl.” As I ride him like a trotting horse, he commands my body, pumping back. With each sweet stroke, I’m wetter, spilling my juices at his every whim.

A giggle builds in me as I realize he must have the patience of a saint. Because with his dick size, this is a hard-won ride for any lady. But I’ll be damned if I’m not up for the challenge. He moves his hand, thumbing my clit, adding to the flood dripping from my center. My stretched walls wrapped snugly around his shaft begin to vibrate. I swirl and buck my hips to meet his. An ache moves through my belly from his big cock filling my center; I bite my lips to stop from crying out. It’s the kind of pain that you only feel with pleasure.

“Oh yes, fuck. Right there. I’m c...coming.” I pant out, my insides clench, and my head falls back. With my walls still quivering in ecstasy, he smiles, raises his brow and says, “My turn.” In a sudden movement, he switches position so he’s behind me, and we’re on our knees. He grabs hold of the back of his dick, easily sliding into me. I scream and moan as he pumps in a steady rhythm. His fingers dig into my ass, forcing me against him. I lose it again; I’m melting, my body trembling and weak.

“Oh fuck,” I cry out at every delicious thrust as he plunges deeper and faster, hitting my spot from behind, each stroke sending me higher than the last. I bite my lips and look back as

he's sinking himself into me. His eyes are sparkling in the moonlight, and the sweat that streams down his chest makes me want to run my tongue all over him.

"You're... you're spectacular," he says, staring directly into my eyes. The moment those words leave his mouth, I believe him. I want to believe everything he says.

You're spectacular.

As opposed to the criticism I've received from everyone in my life lately.

I regain strength in my hips, and I buck back in time with his pumps. My climax hits another peak, rolling in waves, crashing into me, and blinding all my senses. I'm falling from the delicious high I was climbing earlier, my body convulsing all over.

He joins, releasing a deep groan from the back of his throat as he spasms, holding on to me even tighter.

"Fuck," he grunts out as we ride our climax together. Collapsing against him, the darkness of the evening covers me,

Regret has nothing on how I feel right now. It's officially the best moment of my life. So beautiful. So absolutely... spectacular. Lying on his blanket wrapped securely in his arms, I look up, admiring his strong, stippled jawline in the moonlight.

"Do you always fall for random girls in the Caribbean?"

"Only when they're as unforgettable as you," he says, leaning closer, our lips almost touching, "And the way you purr under

me, kitten, is a fantasy I'll never forget." His broad arms envelop me as I nestle closer, melting into him. Little did I know, this random beach encounter was just the beginning of a journey that would challenge everything I thought I knew about desire and connection.

CHAPTER SIX

DRAKE



***F**OUR YEARS LATER.*

I wake up from what might have been the most incredible dream ever. And the funny part is I don't even have the name of the star that's showcased in it. Even though it's been four years since that night, she still pops up as one of my most memorable rendezvous. Years have passed, and I'm still stuck on her sweet essence.

A lot has changed since then. life has settled into a pretty predictable rhythm.

I groggily brush my teeth, trying to figure out why I keep dreaming about that little seductress. I jump into the shower and crank the knob to ice-cold, praying the arctic blast calms my raging hard-on, helping me regain some self-control. With the water crashing over me, I do my best to shove all thoughts of that night to the back of my mind. It's been four long years,

and even though I've had some casual hookups, nothing comes close to matching that intensity.

Every now and then, I toy with the idea of jetting off to the Caribbean just to track her down. But here's the reality check—I don't even know her name. And secondly, going on a reckless hunt for some woman I barely met? I scoff at the idea because that just isn't in the cards, not with my little girl to look out for. So, every time those memories resurface, I slam the door shut, focusing on the more important matters, like I'm doing today.

I leave my mornings clear, dedicating the time to Zoe and our daily routine. I get dressed, wake her up, and get her ready for school.

I'm already making pancakes by the time she strolls in the kitchen. "Good morning, Daddy," she signs as soon as I turn around.

"Morning, princess. How are you today?" I mouth back, a smile tugging at my lips.

Even though Zoe's deaf in one ear and can hear me if I spoke out loud, we switch it up. I want her to be comfortable embracing her differences, so we either read lips or use sign language. I place a plate in front of her and plant a kiss on her forehead.

"Thanks, Daddy... Let's be fast—I can't wait to get to school!"

It's a fun age, we have cute conversations, and she's still excited to go every morning.

“So,” I smile, “what would you like me to get you for being so good this week?”

She lights up, “A new racket...one with a pink princess handle!”

“What did you do with the last one I got you?”

She sulks with no answer, and even though that's not an answer at all, we both know it'll work for me.

“Fine, I'll get you a new one, but this time, I better see you use it at your next match, OK?”

She gives me a toothy grin, nodding like she won a year's supply of cotton candy.

“Eeeeeek, she squeals...I love that one, Daddy! I will.”

“Let's get going, we— don't want to be late.”

Heading to the office, I'm relieved, knowing that despite me not being there, my law practice is booming. But it's no mystery— when you have the best partners and systems in place, a business practically runs itself.

Honestly, it's perfect, and I get to enjoy time with my little girl and be present for my professorship position at the University. And, as an added bonus, I don't have to deal with all the bullshit of corporate law on a daily basis.

My teaching assistant briefs me and hands me the materials I need to start the day.

Greeting the students of my first class, I introduce the course outline.

“Is there anyone here who’d like to discuss the specifics?” I ask, scanning the room briefly.

I notice a smaller audience staring back at me. I do another quick sweep

of the lecture hall— my heart skips a beat as disbelief washes over me and I do a double take.

What the—?

It’s been four years since we crossed paths— this girl’s hair’s wavier, but that face, I’d notice that face anywhere. No—

I’ve got to have this wrong; it can’t be her...or maybe all those dreams I’ve had about her lately are spilling into reality.

Trying my damndest to keep it professional, I compose myself and say,

“You, the floor’s yours,” pointing at the skinny black guy with his hand raised.

trying my best not to look over in her direction. I almost didn’t hear what he said because my mind keeps straying to that night.

“Thank you,” I say to the young man, although I hardly heard anything that came out of his mouth.

My heart pounding at double its usual speed, I switch through the pages of the PowerPoint, droning in on the end-of-year project like a robot on autopilot.

I've got to be hallucinating.

How can she be sitting here...in my class...pursuing law?

She didn't even strike me as the intellectual type. A student, maybe, but I never would've guessed a law student.

The memories of that night flood through me as I struggle to keep my composure.

Standing at the podium, I'm easily able to watch her every move. Maybe it isn't her because you couldn't tear the smile off that girl's face. She's sitting in the center middle row, but her head's been down the whole time— not once has she looked up. I definitely see some similarities, but maybe it's just a random girl that looks like her, and I just have *Caribbean beauty* on the brain.

I wrap up my presentation, preparing for an early dismissal, and I surprise myself.

“You know what, let's take some time to break the ice and introduce ourselves—let's start here.”

One by one, they ramble on as my boredom hits its tipping point, and I finally get to her. She stands, raises her eyes to mine, and in the same soft voice I heard on the beach four years ago, she says.

“My name is Ava Miller, I just transferred in from Nova University.” One look at her eyes, and I know undeniably it's her.

Holy shit, What the actual fuck?

CHAPTER SEVEN

AVA



IF YOU'D TOLD ME when I woke up this morning that I'd walk into a class to find out my one-night stand from four years ago is my professor, I would have laughed in your face and turned back to my books. But then, you'd be right.

I start by getting up at the same time every day, 6:00 am, on the dot with the sun— drink a cup of tea, go for a run, prepare for class, and look over my course load.

But out of the blue, I have a nagging headache in class today, so I keep my head down till class starts. And that's when I see him.

Tall, dark, and stormy...Mr. Navy blue suit walks in. Shocked, I keep my head down the entire lecture, my mind reeling with doubt as I try to avoid any form of contact. But then the time comes when I can't avoid it anymore. I stand and introduce myself.

“My name is Ava Miller.”

I don't know how I keep my composure as the words slip off my tongue.

I look directly into his eyes. His towering, bulky frame shrinks everything under him. Dressed in all-black, he looks as hot as ever, his hair perfectly styled with hints of white at the temples. Embarrassed, my body heats up under his intense gaze, and a blush tints my cheeks.

I don't know what I expected, maybe to see shock on his face, recognition, confusion, but his face is just as gorgeous as it was on the beach. He just nodded, and I swear he was telling a different story. He gazes at me with fire in his eyes. The same fire of desire that lit me up four years ago. The students continue with intros, unaware of the chaos running through my head. When class finally wraps up, I pack my books and hightail it out of the room—it's like neither of us could escape the space quickly enough. I can't tell you who packed up first, but I can tell you who got out of there first.

Me.

Thinking about the situation, I groan. The man I let it all go on all those years ago is my *professor*. Of all the damn jokes the universe could play on me.

I'm not the Ava Miller he met four years ago. I'm not anything like the carefree, wild, rebellious and maybe even slightly stupid woman who hopped on a plane to the Caribbean islands just because she could. I don't trust as easily anymore—heck, I don't think I trust anyone anymore. All I want is to make up

for the mistake I made years ago by finishing this law degree and making my family proud.

“Honey, are you there?” My mother’s voice brings me back to reality, “she asks how’s school? Today was your first day of your last year, right?”

“Yes, mom. It is.”

My throat suddenly burns a bit because hearing my mother say it out loud makes me a bit emotional. I’ve come a long way from the young, naïve girl that ruined her family’s law firm to almost being a lawyer who’s going to make up for her mistakes. It should make me feel slightly accomplished that I’m getting closer to my goal, but all I feel is determination, a burning determination to finally make up for the mistake reckless Ava caused.

My mother continues over the phone. “I just want you to know that your father and I love you, and we’re proud of you.”

I nod. Of course, she’s speaking for my father, and I don’t blame him...If it were me, I’d probably do the same thing. I know it must be hard to say that to a daughter who ruined your thriving law practice by making stupid decisions.

“OK, Mom, thanks. It’s nice to hear from you. But I’ve gotta go now.”

“Take care of yourself, honey.”

“I will, mom.”

The call ends, leaving my chest tight. Though it’s never brought up, every time I speak to either of them, my chest

feels like this—so much guilt hangs in the air.

Actions have consequences.

And I need to fix mine.

I grab my books and head to the library. I'm so close to my goal, and I'm not about to start slipping now. I won't let anyone get in the way, not even Mr. Tall, dark and handsome, who I now know his real name.

Drake Armstrong.

Something flutters in my chest as I turn the name over and over in my mind while strolling through the university campus.

Although it's been four years since I've seen that wild, reckless girl from that unforgettable night, I don't understand why my body reacts that way at just the thought of him. As soon as he stepped into the class, my heart froze and fluttered wildly. Even now, my heartbeat increases with every step.

It's obvious Mr. Armstrong has changed too, not just his hair or his beard, though that does work in his favor, making him look more like a Greek god. No, he's different now, lighter, more polished, with an air of academia making his even, somber appearance more noticeable.

Now, in the library, I set a book in front of me and try to read, but the words don't form. My brain relives the experience of that fateful night. The stars, his touch ...the memory is as vivid as if it happened yesterday. I can still taste the salt on my lips and feel the heat of his body.

My heartbeat quickens— this is stupid. I'm supposed to be reading, but all I can see is Drake Armstrong plunging deep inside me, calling me spectacular, licking my nipples, groaning into my ear.

My body grows hot, so hot. And now studying is a lost cause. I grab my stuff and head out of the library. When I arrive at my apartment, the silence of my room amplifies the beating of my heart, my thoughts spiraling back to him.

Needing an escape, I call Daphne.

“Wait, you fucked your professor?!”

“Keep your voice down, Daph.”

“Holy shit! That's crazy. I'm leaving work now —I'll pick you up. Let's grab a drink, OK?”

“Sounds good, I could use it.”

I sit sullenly and wait for my best friend. I'm lucky she stuck with me over the years—Daphne was by my side like a rock when my family scandal was splashed all over the news. She didn't care that no one wanted to be associated with my family. She was there then like she is now.

Sitting in the lounge, I'm still feeling all sorts of raging emotions clashing in my mind.

“So, what are you going to do?” Daphne asks.

“Nothing, Daph. I'm going to go to my classes like I've been doing.”

“Do you still have feelings for him?”

“I bet he still does.” She says, wiggling her brows.

“I don’t have time to think about that.”

“Oh well,” She nods and pushes a drink in my direction. “At least you can forget it all for today.”

“Yes, at least I can forget for now, and I’ll pretend we were never together.”

“Sounds like a plan.” Daphne raises her glass, and we toast before downing our drinks.

A few shots later, I’m back in my room, tucked in bed. I might be able to risk a couple of drinks on a weekday, but I make up for it by getting into bed early enough to sleep it off.

Drinks with Daphne helped me realize one thing – I might have chosen to ignore the man, but I can’t forget the way my body reacts when I see him.

I close my eyes and try to sleep; all I can see are the eyes that have been in my dreams for years. Now that I have a name to go with the face, I can’t get it out of my head.

Drake Armstrong

The thought of him consumes me—my skin tingles with the phantom touch of his fingers, and my breath hitches at the remembered taste of his lips. The weight of unfinished business hangs heavily in the air, and I know I’ve got to confront my emotions head-on. I find myself unable to resist the pull of desire any longer.

Closing my eyes, I allow my mind to wander back to that night, causing the spot between my legs to pulse, and I squeeze my thighs to feel some form of relief, but it doesn't help. My mind is pestering me with images of that night. The crashing of the waves, the cool sand beneath me, the warmth of his touch, and the way his eyes met mine ignited a fire within my soul. My fingers trace a path along my body; I surrender to the rising tide of my desire. My heartbeat increases, my body's taut, and my panties dampen.

I pinch my nipples, one hardened nub after the other, squeeze and tweak till I can't take it anymore. His presence is palpable, as if he's here with me, touching me, sending shivers down my spine. Even after four years, the memory is fresh, as though it happened yesterday.

I rub my swollen clit in sweet circular motions sending shivers of pleasure down my spine. I imagine Drake telling me I'm spectacular over and over like he did that night. And my stomach coils, pleasure gathers and tightens in my abdomen.

“Mmm, oh God.”

My breathing comes out in sharp bursts, and my body quakes. I slap a hand over my mouth to muffle my cry from my climax.

As I lie there, spent and contemplative in my tangled sheets, I make a silent promise to myself. This cannot happen again. I can't lose focus on my goal. My plan is simple, get my degree and get out.

CHAPTER EIGHT

DRAKE



BEEP BEEP!
I reach over the table to turn off the alarm, exhausted from not getting sleep for the third night in a row. I sit up on the bed with a groan and run my hands down my face.

She was here again last night in my dreams— I have an aching morning wood to show for it. I can't stop thinking about seeing her in class. I painfully make my way to the bathroom to catch a cold shower.

This routine is becoming ridiculous.

Even though I can usually shut my thoughts and urges down, it's getting harder these days, especially after she just popped up in my class.

The cold water pelts my skin as I sit for a few minutes, but my cock's still painfully hard. I go with plan B.

Pressing the extra steam function of my marble bath, I conjure thoughts of Ava getting on her knees, between my legs and taking my dick in her mouth. I lather my hands, offering a couple of full, slow strokes, squeezing my shaft with just enough pressure while sliding along my length. I imagine Ava's lips and her mouth taking me all the way...popping on and off till I let go, coming down her throat.

Fuck.

I hang in the shower, washing away the remanence of my pleasure and let the steam work its magic a bit longer. By the time I step out, I'm refreshed, focused and ready to kickstart the day.

I make my way to Zoe's room and press the blinds open. She looks like a princess sleeping beneath the drapes of her circular canopy bed.

"Good morning, princess—time to wake up," I say softly, rubbing her back.

She stirs, opening her eyes to look at me.

"Daddy? What time is it?" She says with a yawn.

"It's time for school. Come on, let's get ready," I say as I motion for her to get up. She shakes her head and mouths, "I don't wanna go to school today— I wanna stay with you." she grabs her Princess Fiona plushy and looks up at me with her big, beautiful eyes. Zoe is usually dragging me to school.

Why the sudden change?

“I’m just sleepy,” she sighs. And my alarm bells relax. My baby girl is just tired.

“Must be all the tennis practice,” I say out loud. “Alright, let’s make a deal. If you go to school today, you get extra chocolate tonight.”

She squints at me and sticks out her pinky. I don’t need to read her lips to know what she’s saying, “I pinky promise,” I say as we lock our fingers.

A grin makes its way to her face, and I chuckle. “Alright, Princess, go get ready. I’ll see you downstairs for breakfast.”

I turn on the coffee maker and get the pan out of the cabinet.

Images of Ava dance in and out of my head as I cook. I can’t stop thinking about when she looked me dead in the eye and said her name. But she doesn’t seem right—she’s different from that girl four years ago. I mean, she’s still as beautiful as ever, that hasn’t changed, but the beach babe I remember was so joyful, full of life and carefree.

This woman?

Her eyes are fierce, a whole different story... it’s tough to believe she’s the same wild island beauty.

I usually keep my cool and can figure out what to do, but in a situation like this, I’m left wondering what the hell’s the right move. I can’t just walk up and talk to her. If I did, what would I say,

You never left my mind...I can’t stop thinking about that night with you.

That's ridiculous. How about,

I'd give anything to taste those lips again, to run my hands through your hair. When I saw you, I imagined running my tongue down your neck and kissing the soft places that make you moan....

“Daddy? What's burning?”

Zoe's voice jolts me because she hardly speaks when we're together. Let alone raise her voice. I look up at her and notice the burnt bacon in the pan.

“Shit!”

“Daaad. Put your money in the jar.”

I need to get my head straight. I turn off the stove, place the pan in the sink, turn and say. “How does cereal sound?”

After dropping off my baby girl at school, I drive to campus and head straight to my office. I usually start the day by going through my emails, but I can feel a headache coming. It's going to be an extra cup of coffee kind of morning.

You need to focus, Drake, focus, man.

To distract myself, I start grading. And halfway through, there's a knock on the door.

Thinking it's my coffee order, I call for the person on the other side to come in without looking up. I can practically taste the dark brew.

“Good morning, Professor.” That unmistakable soft voice.

That voice.

I look up from the papers to the door where the voice came from. She's dressed in a red sweater and a black skirt that makes my hand itch with the way her hips fill it out.

Ava Miller.

I glance at her up and down. Even with the change of hair, she's still utterly gorgeous. As she stands before me, my mind races with a list of reasons she might be here. To talk about the past? To blackmail me? Threaten me? Or to rekindle whatever we had?

"Professor Armstrong?" Her voice draws me out of my thoughts.

"Miss Miller, how may I help you?"

"You were assigned my supervisor—I sent you an email last night."

Of all the things I imagined I could do, bringing her to my office was not on the list. Her supervisor? But how could I not have known? I've been so out of it these past few days I'm not that surprised I missed an email.

"I apologize, Miss Ava. But I don't think that's a great idea."

"What's not a good idea, sir?" she asks. For a second, my gaze snaps up to her. This is the first time hearing her calling me sir and the things it does to me. This is exactly why we can't work together if something as little as a title sounds sexy coming from her lips.

I take off my glasses and pinch the bridge of my nose, trying to relieve my budding headache. "I don't think we can work

together, and I don't think I need to state why," I say calmly.

"I don't think I know why you'd say that, sir," she says, looking irritated with where this conversation is going. "The Reason, Miss Miller. The school has a policy on *certain* relationships between professors and students—"

"I don't think the law operates in retrospect. That was a long time ago— we didn't know each other, and we had no idea we'd ever run into each other again. I just really want to get on with this project and get this semester done with."

I take a deep breath, trying to change the direction of the conversation. "I *can* recommend you to another professor?" I look at her for a response. But she just stares blankly at me. Maybe you should sleep on it, at least *take it* into consideration." At that, her cheeks flush, and the room grows hotter, causing me to reconsider this discussion in the first place. I quickly come to my senses. "Well, Miss Miller, I believe that's all. I'll be getting back to work now."

"I'm sorry, but I'm not going anywhere."

I look up to see the fire in her eyes. She might not be the woman on the beach from years ago, but one thing's the same—she still knows how to get her way. If not more.

"Miss Miller—"

"No. Call me Ava—I don't think you understand." Shaking her head, I watch the gears of her brain work as though she's thought about all I said and dismissed it.

She needs to see reason to be on the same page with me, but that's not going to happen. One thing I know about stubborn women like this is that they only listen to themselves. And if she's going to see reason, it has to come from her.

She launches into another tirade, "Professor Armstrong. I'm over whatever you think happened..."

I remain silent and stride across the room toward her as she rambles on.

I see the heat rising in her eyes with every step I take as she takes me in— She backs up as I walk toward her. I trap her against the wall, and her breath picks up. I lean in to take in her scent— sweet, like cotton candy. Holding her stare—I've dreamt of these eyes for so long.

"You're over it...Hmm?" I whisper in her ear. Are you saying you haven't dreamt about that night once in four years? You're saying that you haven't thought what it would be like to have me in you again? You've never touched yourself to the memories from that night?" She exhales shakily. But her face remains calm. "Tell me being this close doesn't make you think about what it'd be like to just act on our impulses and touch each other like that night."

As I talk, imagining my words too, I lean in, taking her lips in mine.

She stays frozen in the corner while I walk back to my desk.

"And this is why we can't work together, Miss *Ava*." I sit on the edge, trying to hide my raging hard-on.

For a second, neither of us talks or moves. The hot silence fills the room. I know she feels this too, even after four years—there's no denying this thing between us.

“OK.” Her voice comes out small. She turns towards the door, and I think she finally gets it. But when she reaches for the handle, she stops and turns around.

“You know what Mr. Armstrong....” Ava sashays towards me, her hips more defined with every movement. She keeps eye contact till she's in front of me and points to my chest. I tighten as though she's going to touch me, but she doesn't — her finger slowly descends, tracing without touching. Then, as though we weren't close enough already, she leans in, whispering in my ear. “You know what I think? I think you're afraid of yourself. You're so hung up on that night that you're scared of losing control again.” Her hand moves lower, so close to touching the stiffness in my pants.

Oh, so close.

When she speaks again, her voice tickles my ear, sending chills straight to my cock. “I just want you to know that you're stuck with me regardless.”

When her finger reaches my abdomen, she slowly looks down at the unmistakable outline of my bulge.

This woman.

“I'll send you an email—see you on Monday, Sir.” She turns and saunters away while I toy with the idea of bending her over right here to teach her a good lesson.

When she reaches the door, she calls out. “Have a great day, Professor Armstrong.” She slams the door on her way out. But those words, *‘You’re stuck with me.’*

ring louder.

CHAPTER NINE

AVA



“**D**AMMIT! I’M GOING TO be late for class!” My first thought when I jolt awake.

I slept late because I spent all night going back and forth about the conversation Professor Armstrong and I had. I can’t believe he messed with my head like that. I tossed all night, replaying that scene in his office. He could have had me anyway he wanted yesterday. ...I mean...with the fire he lit in me, I would’ve got on my knees in a hot minute. I shake, clearing the images in my head.

“Ava! Focus!”

I hop out of bed, skip breakfast and hurry across campus, praying that I make it in time for class.

“The Theory of Free Will...” Professor Armstrong is saying just as I sneak into the lecture hall, hoping to go unnoticed.

“Now, the concept of free will postulates that an individual can

make choices for oneself about how they act, make speculations, and have viewpoints in different facets of life. Although, some don't believe in free will. They believe in determinism, which postulates that all events, including human actions, are influenced by previous causes.”

He stands at the podium and continues, “The question of the day, however, is whether free will is a farce. Do we *really* have *free will*, or are we made to think we have free will? Do you believe your choice is really your choice? So, are your choices undetermined by preceding events or what some would call fate or not? If an event has occurred in the past, don't you think the said event is likely to occur again? What do you think?”

“I don't think it has anything to do with it,” I mumble to myself.

“What was that, Miss Ava?” Professor Armstrong says. I snap my head toward the front of the class. I don't think I said that out loud. Did he read my lips or my thoughts?

“I'd like to hear what you think, so please go ahead... share your thoughts with the rest of the class.”

He blinks expectantly, and I clear my throat, trying to think of an answer. So much for going unnoticed. Could he be trying to get me back for yesterday? Is this his way of showing who's really in control?

“I said that our past choices or actions do not influence our present decision.”

“That’s interesting, Miss Ava. Do you have a reason why you believe this? Maybe an example to back up your answer?”

I grit my teeth...If this is payback, he clearly has the upper hand here. “I just think that because something happened in the past doesn’t mean it’ll happen again. We’re humans and we make our own choices, regardless of what’s happening or what’s influencing it. Ultimately, our choice remains our choice, and that’s free will.”

“Thank you for the contribution.?” I sigh in relief, thinking it’s over, when his voice rings out again. “So, do you have an example to support your answer?”

OK, he’s definitely screwing with me, and I’m not having it. I already told him I don’t care about our history; I just want to keep my head down, get my degree and start my new life. But I can’t if he does things like refusing to be my supervisor and calling me out in class.

“Miss Ava?”

He calls again. I look him dead in the eye and spit. “For example, just because I had sex with a guy doesn’t mean I would want to have sex with him in the future.”

The class ripples with laughter and whispers.

I raise a challenging brow at him.

There, Professor Armstrong, I hope you’re happy now.

When the class quiets down, he continues. “So, you’re saying if you enjoyed the... experience, have nothing holding you

back, and are put in the same situation, you wouldn't consider a repeat?"

The class suddenly becomes hotter. I was expecting him to end the discourse there and not add on.

"I think regardless, free will is free will. There is a choice not to want a repeat just because... there doesn't have to be a reason," I retort, holding his gaze.

The hall goes quiet for a few seconds—then, a student begins to cough—And chuckles erupt from the hall. He looks away from me, breaking our little back and forth.

"Thank you, Miss Ava. That'll be all, he says as he turns back to the PowerPoint presentation on the screen.

Professor Armstrong goes back to lecturing, and I'm lost in my thoughts. I don't know what to make of the exchange, his chosen topic, or his reaction when I stated my example.

"...and that brings us to the end of our lecture for today. Now. For your take-home. I need you all to write about *free will* from your respective viewpoints. You can write it however you want, but show passion or your stance. Be sure it gets to me by the end of the week. And with that, I hope you all enjoy your day, class dismissed." The class breaks up, and I didn't realize how distracted I was till it did. I watch Professor Armstrong put his laptop into his bag and leave the class.

with the speed of lightning, I pick up my notes and dash out the door. I've had a long day, and it feels like this is just the beginning.



A week later, I made my way to Professor Armstrong's office to submit my assignment. I've been preparing myself mentally all weekend for today; I don't want a repeat of what happened the last time I was here. Aiming for a sophisticated, relaxed look, I'm wearing my hair in a high ponytail, with a sleeveless button top with the first four buttons open, giving off just enough cleavage paired with my pleated flair mini skirt. I suck in a deep breath and knock on his office door.

"Come in." His gruff voice commands from the other side.

"Good morning, Professor Armstrong. I'm here to submit my assignment," I say as I enter the office.

If he asked me why I hand-wrote it or why I'm submitting it personally, I'll say *passion* for the subject. But I'm not sure that's entirely true.

He rises from his seat and walks towards me; this is not how I was expecting this to go. I force myself to remain calm as he stretches his hand out for the paper.

"Can I have it?" He asks, and I hand it over to him and watch him read every line.

He looks up from the paper and sighs.

"Miss Ava, we can't have a repeat of this again. I mean, you already said the same thing in class, almost making a mockery of my lecture."

"Only because you called me out," I retort.

“I’m the professor—I can call on anyone in my classroom for their opinion.”

We’re both breathing heavily at this point and somewhere during our argument, we moved towards each other. I see the fire in his eyes as they meet my boobs, and he notes how close we’ve gotten. I’m painfully aware of how hard my nipples are poking through my shirt. I glance at the paper in his hand to distract myself and back up.

“Now, you gave it as an assignment, and I’ve penned down the thoughts that align with me. I even handwrote it so you see the passion.” “Just because I slept with a man doesn’t mean I’ll sleep with him again.” He reads out from my paper. “Did you need to put that example down?”

“It’s a valid example.”

“No, it’s not. And if I oblige you and keep up with that example, you may not want a repeat of the experience, but what about your body? What if your body wants it so bad you can’t say no?”

“I can control my body and control what I want.” I bite back.

“Oh really? Is that what you think.”

“Yes, sir.” I grit out.

“So, you don’t want this?” His body’s pressed against mine—just like that night on the beach when I landed on top of him. Our lips so close they’re almost touching.... If I stuck out my chest, my nipples would graze him. He leans in closer and whispers, “Your body doesn’t want this?”

For a second, I clench up, holding still so my traitorous tits don't rub on him. His breathing on my lips, neck, and chest makes me want his hands there. I close my eyes to stop myself from thinking like this.

“Look at me, Ava.”

I look into his gray orbs, and I'm hit with a depth of desire—I can almost see what's going on in his head as images of different ways he can bend me over his desk...sinking into me — leaving me to take what he has to give. My heart is beating so fast I wonder if he can hear it.

“Look at me and tell me that if I kissed you right now, your body won't respond. Tell me you don't want this as much as I do, and I'll back off. Tell me to stop, Ava.” With every word, he presses his body closer, leaning in till he's barely a hair's breadth away.

I don't answer because I want the opposite of that—I want to feel those lips on mine again—I want them all over my body. I want him to do things to me that I've never known...and I know I shouldn't be thinking this.

I lick my lips, and that does it. I don't know who moves first, but we're on each other, our tongues clashing and moving rhythmically as my body hums to life. His lips are so soft; they taste sweet, like I'm finally having something I've denied myself but wanted for so long.

Even though I know we shouldn't be doing this, we're too far gone. He kisses me in powerful strokes that wake butterflies in

my belly and increases the wetness between my legs. The only thought running through my head.

How can something be wrong if it feels so right?

CHAPTER TEN

DRAKE



SHE'S SO SWEET.

I kiss her neck, and she runs her fingers through my hair, trailing to the nape of my neck. I Reach for her breast rubbing, caressing and squeezing as she lets out a moan that goes straight to my already straining, painful cock that's begging to be released.

Her tits feel amazing.

"I want you, professor," she whispers against my ear. And that does it. Her tiny voice shatters whatever control I have left. I take her lips in mine, *claiming, clashing, tasting*. I want her in every way, to taste every part of her. My hands roam every inch of her delectable body, tracing every curve, dip, and swell. My lips leave hers to kiss her neck while my tongue trails down her body—I want more...I need more. She moans as I nibble on her plush, firm skin.

“Oh, fuck! Yes.” She gasps.

God, she sounds hypnotic.

I trail back up and take her lips, swallowing her sweet sounds. She writhes against me, pulling me closer. I grind into her so she can feel just how much I want her— how much she drives me crazy. She looks at me with wide eyes, eyes that speak of just how much she wants me, too. I’m sure if I put my hands in between her legs, she’ll be wetter than ever. My vision distorts, and my surroundings fade in and out. “Drake!” She yells. But it doesn’t sound like her voice. It sounds like...

Beep! Beep! Beep!

I’m instantly yanked away, far from Ava and the sweet feeling of her body against mine. My mind’s pulled even further when my eyes open, and I realize where I am.

What the fuck.

I wake up with a start from my dream cum fantasy and run my hands through my hair.

“Not again,” I groan. I’ve been thinking up different scenes with Ava even more since that day.

I knew crossing the line with her was going to fuck me up...

I got to keep my head in the game.

...but I couldn’t stop myself— then or now. I also didn’t know how bad or how much more I’d crave and want her. I mean, here I am, waking up with my cock standing painfully proud, like a teenager and not a damn forty-four-year-old.

With another groan, I drag myself out of bed and head to the shower. Turning the control to the cold setting, I stay still under the cool spray, hoping it'll calm my raging hard-on.

I run my hands across my chest and shoulders, soaping myself—I think about what I should be doing. I need to think of ways to avoid Ava, both physically and mentally. But when I close my eyes, she's all I see. I run my hands through my hair and try not to think about bending her delectable ass over my table, teaching her a lesson like I've imagined.

I shouldn't be imagining her on her knees between my legs, pleasing me.

I shouldn't think of her calling me professor, begging me to take her.

I shouldn't be thinking of her hips or how good it feels to sink inside her.

I shouldn't be thinking of those sweet sounds when I'm bouncing off the back of her ass, hitting it just right over and over.

Fuck, I need to stop working myself up!

I look down to see my cock still standing as proud as ever, and I know that it's a lost cause. Not even the coldest of showers will help me today. I reach over and give it an easy stroke. And, like a bolt of electricity, the image of Ava in my office, licking her lips, as I stare into her luscious tits, looking at me, just close enough to touch but not quite, shoots into my head. I know I shouldn't, but I'm done fighting my urges. I give

myself another easy stroke and close my eyes, finally letting the fantasy consume me.

Replaying the scene in the office, and this time around, when she almost touches my dick, I grab her hand in mine and hold it behind her as I bend her over, sinking myself deep inside her wet pussy. The memory of her soft mewls echo in my mind as I plunge deeper, fisting her hands tighter, so she can't move, taking what I have to give like a good girl. She moans in ecstasy as I fuck her.

Lost in fantasy, I stroke myself harder, faster, my harsh breathing echoing off the walls of my marble bathroom. An illicit groan comes from the back of my throat as I come into my hand. My heart is a drum in my chest, and my breathing takes a moment to calm down. My head clears, and I watch the water wash the evidence of my fantasy down the drain. This is fucking ridiculous. I obviously need to get laid because there's no other explanation for all this horney professor bit. The only way to nip this thing in the bud is to put distance between whatever this thing is. And with that thought, I dry myself and get ready to start my day.

As soon as I get to campus, I head for the dean's office. The dean, Professor Walter, is an acquaintance of mine. He's known my father for years but is a good man. I tell his secretary I'm here, and after a short wait, she says, "Dean Walter will see you now."

"Morning, Professor Walter," I say while we shake hands.

“Armstrong, my boy, good to see you. How is it going?” I take the seat opposite him. “How’ve you been? They haven’t kicked you out, yet I see...” He laughs, his mouth covered by his full white beard. “Well, these old bones haven’t failed me yet, and until they do, they’d have to kick me out. He chuckles. Anyway, what can I do for you, Drake?”

“I wanted to talk about the students assigned to me as supervisees...”

“Ah, yes. I selected a few top students from the dean’s list to be assigned to you because, as an honorary professor, you have real-world expertise. And it’s my belief you can help harness their passion to produce the next best class of graduates this university has seen.” There goes any hope of keeping my distance from Ava. I pinch the bridge of my nose to tamp down on my headache and smile,

“Oh, great, thank you. I appreciate it—I do my best.” So, what was it you were going to say about one of your supervisees? Are you having a hard time getting along with them? If so, per our usual course, we’d have both professor and student fill out a small report just to know the specifics and or what exactly went down; once that’s complete, we can get that student reassigned, that’s all.” I think about Ava filling out a report or explaining to the dean why I think we can’t work together, and I shake my head. This is not going as planned.

“No, it’s all good. I just wanted to thank you for the assignment. I enjoy working with them.” I say, adjusting the collar of my shirt.

“Well, that’s good to know,” he says, smiling. “If there’s anything at all, just let me know.”

“Oh, I mean no, there’s nothing else.” I rise from my seat, “Thank you for your time, Professor Walter.”

He grabs my hand and winks. “You should be expecting an email from me soon. It’s the annual symposium, and I’d like you to join this year. I think you’d be interested in the theme.”

On a typical day, I might have been able to summon an enthusiastic response. But right now, I just say, “Right. I’ll wait on that email. Thanks, Walter.”

“Anytime, son.”

Back in my office, I try not to think of what a waste of time my visit this morning was. Instead, I focus on the paperwork in front of me.

There’s a knock at the door; I’m not expecting anyone in my office today. They knock again, louder.

“Come in.”

“Good morning, Professor Armstrong,” Ava says as she enters my office.

“Miss Ava, how may I help you?”

“Ava, Sir... just Ava, is fine ... I never got your email about the project I’ll be working on. You were so bent on referring me to another Professor, yet you haven’t done that either.” I massage my temple as I feel a headache rising again.

“Please, just send me an email about the topic you’ve chosen and what you’ve written so far.” Her eyebrows shoot up. I’m guessing she was expecting me to refuse, and that’s why she showed up at my office instead of just sending an email.

“Professor, you were pretty adamant about what happened between us, making it so we can’t work together?”

I sigh. “I went to the dean about it, but he insisted before re-assigning you to another supervisor that he had to hear both parties’ recounts first.” Her eyes narrow, and her brows shoot up.

“So you tried to get rid of me... I thought you weren’t hung up on what happened between us?” A small smile appears on her face.

“Ava-”

She shakes her head,

Gliding to my side of the desk while trailing her hand along the mahogany surface, she leaned in at eye level. “I thought you were concerned that I’d be the one who’s *hung up*.”

I clear my throat. “I don’t think that matters right now.”

Her sly smile grows wider. “Oh, it doesn’t?” She licks her lips and leans further. My heartbeat increases, and my eyes zero in on the action. Images from the dream I had this morning run through my mind, and I feel the little ounce of control I have left slipping.

What is it about this woman?

I clear my throat. “And why does it matter?”

“It matters, Professor, because ...” With every word, she bends lower till I can see a hint of her full, plump breasts.

“I think you’re projecting, Sir, because you want this so bad, and you’re scared of what will happen when you don’t have the reins you so desperately hold on to. Just admit it. You’re not trying to protect me—you’re doing all this because you don’t trust yourself.” I swallow when I realize she has me spot on. When we first crossed paths in my office, I tried to appear unfazed, and honestly, I was. I even attempted to make it look like she was the one on edge, but right now, the tables have turned.

And I can't have that.

I lean close to her neck, breathing in her scent as I whisper in her ear, “I might be affected, Ava, but tell me you don’t feel this, too.” I can’t see her face, but her breathing is shallow. Her body freezes, and there it is, I have my answer.

I whisper in her ear, “It’s a two-way street, this push and pull between us. Tell me I’m wrong to want to put some distance between us because all I want to do when I’m close to you is claim those lips, taste your pussy and show you just how much I want you.” Her mouth falls open, and a small gasp slips out.

“So don’t do that, Ava. If you truly think I’m the one who’s hung up and projecting and you don’t feel this too, tell me to stop, push me away, walk out, anything. But don’t come at me for wanting you so much. I’m standing here with a fucking hard-on, and all I want to do is sink into you.”

A moan slips past her lips, and it shreds the last ounce of control I have. We're on each other instantly, and I claim her lips like I've dreamed about so often, savoring her taste. I cup her cheek and wrap my other hand around her waist, holding her close. I nip her sweet lips softly and gently.

I can't get enough of her; I can't believe she's finally in my arms. My hands roam every inch of her body while my lips taste the softness of her neck, licking and kissing as her soft sounds fill my space. Burying my face in her tits, she runs her fingers through my hair, causing My hard, straining cock to flinch, begging to break free from the confines of my slacks. I slide my hands along her thighs under her skirt, reaching for her panties. I tease her through her cotton fabric while still sucking on her breast. She's so warm and moist. I want to taste her, all of her.

In a swift movement, I lift her and place her on my table. With her skirt bunched up at her waist, I spread her legs open before me. Her panties soaked through from desire, my cock jerks, and I fall to my knees, between her thighs, her sweet nectar all for me.

God, she smells heavenly.

In a swift movement, I rip her panties off and slide my tongue along her wet lips while sucking and tonguing her opening.

"Ahh!" she gasps. And I get to work, licking, sucking, kissing her clit while she writhes against me, moaning softly. She buries her hands in my hair and grinds against my mouth.

"Mmm, professor."

The back of my mind is nagged by the thoughts that we shouldn't be doing, especially not in my office. But we're too far gone, consumed by a need that refuses to be ignored anymore. I couldn't stop, even if I tried. Hell, this building could collapse around me, but this nut is going to bust. I increase my pace, loving her soft sounds and how she grinds against me... "Sir," she calls out again, driving me crazy, and I unleash my tongue, rhythmically slapping against her clit while my fingers work her opening. She throws her head back, and a loud moan slips out of her. Ava clamps a hand over her mouth to quiet her squeals and grinds against me harder. Her body freezes, and I increase the onslaught, licking every drop of her juice like a starving man— till I feel her shaking and quivering as she explodes, squirting her release. With evidence of her pleasure running down my face, she comes down from her high looks at me, her eyes hazy, her words coming out in pants.

"What did you just do?"

CHAPTER ELEVEN

AVA



“**E**ARTH TO AVA!” DAPHNE snaps her fingers in front of me, and I snap my attention to her and the pieces of clothing she’s holding before me.

“Now, I was saying the red set or the black set? I’m trying to add one more to my collection,” she says. I look at the two sets of lingerie she’s holding up. I’d already seen her try them on, and I know what she should pick. But I put on a show acting like I’m considering the options in front of me. After a minute, I look up and quip. “Hmmm, take the red one.”

“Not the black one?”

“I say red. It looks amazing against your skin.”

“Aw, ’cause I thought the black looked a bit cute.”

“Um. The black one looks great, too. So, if you really want it, you can take it.” She holds up both against her skin and then looks back at me.

“So that means you don’t like the red one?” That’s when I raise a brow. “OK, Daphne, let’s take the red one.”

“OK, if you say so. I was kinda hoping for the black one, by the way.”

OK, what’s going on? “You know what? We’ll take both.” Daphne is the smartest person I know, which is why it’s amusing to see her so indecisive. I turn to her with a raised brow. “What is his name?”

“Who’s name?”

“Daphne Elizabeth Summers. Don’t play dumb with me, what’s his name?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Her cheeks redden, and she busies herself with fiddling with the lingerie. I know they’re cute, but not that cute.

“Daphne-”

“Hey, it’s you, Ava.” A voice cuts in, and we both turn towards the preppy sound. A girl with a big grin approaches us. Behind her is another familiar face. The owner of the preppy voice introduces herself. “I’m Ana, your classmate. And you know Monica?” she says, pointing to the girl behind her, standing a few feet away. That’s where I know the girl behind me, but why is she looking at me weirdly? Ana keeps speaking while Monica just stays a few feet away and sort of glares at me. “Oh, I just remembered that day in class with Professor Armstrong, that was cool, by the way. The man can be such an

asshole and needs to lighten up. Not many people can hold their own like you did.”

I don't know how to respond to that, so I just give her a little smile. “Oh, I didn't mean to do any of that.” I might as well not even bother because she keeps speaking. “I can't wait for his other classes. It seems like this semester's gonna be fun.” She grabs Monica's hand, and they walk away. I don't have time to figure out the look Ana threw me just before they left because Daphne turns to me, her eyes the size of saucers. “You challenged him in front of the whole class?”

“That's not what happened per se.” Now it's my turn for my cheeks to blush, and I busy myself with the lacy material of the lingerie she's holding.

Daphne's lips stretch, and she takes a step closer, her fingers spread out as she counts down. “Five, four... “

“Daphne, wait!”

“You know what's coming...three, two...”

I think about bursting into a giggle fit in the middle of the mall and cave in.

“OK! OK! Fine. Just don't tickle me.” She drops her hands, plops next to me, and says slyly. “So, I see ignoring him and pretending like your past didn't happen didn't work, so what now.”

I smirk...*nothing about Professor Armstrong can be ignored.*

“The thing is, even though I tried ignoring, I can't stop thinking about him. I mean, some days he's a grumpy pain in

the ass, but that doesn't stop me from wanting to rip his shirt off and-

“And jump his bones,” Daphne finishes. I remember the day in his office when I orgasmed, asking him that question and ran out of his office without waiting for a response.

“Oh, you have that look on your face. Omg, come on, spill. Something happened already, what is it?” I sigh and tell her what happened at his office. And when I finish, I end it with another sigh.

Daphne grins. “OMG, that's awesome! Anyone could've busted in at any time, so fucking hot! Shit, I would've melted like lava all over him.”

Ava...hahaha... now you can finally have him rub that infamous tongue all over you.”

I quench her excitement with a reality check. She's not lying—I can't stay away, “But messing up a second time, Daph? I'm still paying from when I screwed up four years ago, I can't afford that right now. I mean, he's hot, there's no denying, but he's my fucking professor... my professor. It's a recipe for disaster.” Daphne puts a hand on my shoulder and lets out a sigh before she speaks, “Come on, babe, you can't keep beating yourself up for what happened in the past.”

“I ruined my family's law practice. I'll never live that down—It was reckless. And now my father can't even look me in the eye or say as much as two sentences to me. I mean, who wouldn't be bitter from a scandal like that?” Daphne rubs my back. “Ava, that was years ago, you trusted someone you

shouldn't have, and he turned out to be an asshole. "He told Daniel Strong about your family's secrets, and they used it to take down your dad's firm. No one could've seen that coming.

"Hm, you're right about that."

"You just turned twenty-one—you were doing what was natural, trusting a friend."

"I know... It's just – this is my do-over. I can't screw it up."

"You're already making up for it by becoming a lawyer and fixing this whole mess. So, give yourself a break, uh?"

I just nod in response. Trying to lighten up the mood, Daphne rises to her feet and raises both lingerie again. "So, red or black."

"Red."

"OK, red it is."

We pay for our outfits and say our goodbyes. Just before we get into our separate cabs, Daphne calls out. "I'll see you at the Inn. OK?" I grin. "OK...see you there, by babe!" After shopping, I head home to do what I always do. What's kept me on the dean's list for years...I study. Is this even a life? I sift through my course load, trying to check each of my classes ahead... It's all I've known for three and a half years.

What am I doing?

The plan: get my life together and correct my wrongs. But he's my professor.

Damn, this is all too much. Regardless of my moments of weakness, I can't afford to mess up again.

I have to try to move past it and avoid him at all costs. My phone dings. Wow... speak of the devil, it's him.

Subject: Review and Suggested Improvements for Your Project

Dear Ava

I hope this email finds you well.

First, I commend your effort and the overall structure of your project. It is evident that you have put thought into your work, and your ideas are well-presented. However, the topic could use a bit of work. I encourage you to take into consideration the following recommendations:

While your current project topic is a great one, it could be better. Also, I propose exploring additional reading materials related to your project, as this will not only deepen your understanding but also provide you with valuable insights and references to support your arguments.

I believe that by revisiting your project topic with these suggestions in mind, you will be able to enhance its overall quality and academic rigor. Remember, learning is a continuous process, and this feedback is meant to guide and support your growth as a student.

Please feel free to reach out to me if you have more questions or require further clarification. I am here to assist you in any way I can.

Best regards,

Armstrong Drake

Professor in the Faculty of Law, University of Miami

drakearm145@edu.com

I read between the lines of the email. I know the real reason he won't approve my topic. It's because it's on free will, and he didn't like the way I presented in class. I shake my head as I reread the mail, and my body heats up with rage. Can he do this? How this man manages to get under my skin every time is beyond me. My laptop dings with another email from the same sender. And I open it as soon as it comes in.

Subject: Planning of Annual Colloquium.

A quick glance at the mail, and I know that the mail is appointing me as a planner for the annual colloquium event.

For a second, I rub my temples. It feels like we're back to having back-and-forth. This man makes me dizzy. First, he doesn't want to be my superior, and when he does, he rejects my project topic. Then, minutes after doing that, he says we should work together.

I crack my fingers and get ready to type a lengthy mail of my own. If he thinks he can do and undo, he has another thing coming. "Dear Professor Armstrong...."

CHAPTER TWELVE

DRAKE



“**Y**OU SAID NO?”

I ask as soon as I step into my office. I turn around to look at Ava behind me. When I saw her email, I didn’t respond. I just asked her to see me after class. Now we’re here.

“Yes, sir, I said no to your email.” I sigh and pinch my nose, shaking my head. What the hell is it with this girl? One minute, Ava is on my desk writhing and making the most delicious sounds in my ear—the next, she’s acting and saying things that make it seem all she wants is to get on my nerves.

“Ava, it’s not just a casual request for help. As your supervisor, I’m recommending you lead the planning for this. You’ll learn a lot.”

“Well, what if I don’t want to? With all due respect, sir, can’t you just assign someone else to be your happy to volunteer?”

“I don’t think you can just say no like that, Ava.”

“The same way supervisors can’t exactly throw out your project topic because they feel like it. But it just happened, so there’s that.”

So that’s what this is about.

I step closer so she can see the sincerity in my eyes. “Ava, it’s my job as project supervisor to review topics, and that’s what I did. Look, I didn’t say no to your topic just because I could or felt like it. I said no because I know you have excellent potential.”

I think I’m getting through to her.

“And I can’t help but notice that you chose that topic to *spite* me. At least that’s what it looks like.” With every word, I see her relax her defensive stance. She folds her hands, “Well, regardless, I have an event that day, and I can’t miss it. So, it’s still a *no*, sorry sir.” At this point, I can’t help but roll my eyes because it’s like she’s still trying to get under my skin.

“You have an event on Friday the 28th? at 10:00 am?”

“It’s actually at 4:00 pm,” she mumbles.

“Well, there you have it. You can attend that event, finish around noon, and then make it to yours.” Exhausted from all the back-and-forth, I sigh. “You know what? At this point, we need a truce. I promise that nothing I do as your professor or supervisor is malicious or related to whatever’s *happened* between us. And you’ve got to promise not to spite me, which is how it feels lately. OK?” Her defensive look fades—I know the constant bickering must be wearing her out, too.

“Come on, let’s shake on it.” Clearing her throat, she takes a small step closer but doesn’t take my hand yet. “OK, I agree to the truce. But I have a condition.” I nod, and she continues. “While working, we both need to keep our hands to ourselves.” It makes sense to me that if we keep giving in to our urges, we’re risking everything. We shake on it. Her hand is soft and warm in mine, just like I know the rest of her is. To stop my runaway thoughts, “Drake,” I say out loud.

“I’m sorry?” she replies with visible confusion on her face.

“Call me Drake. Since we are going to be working closely for the next few weeks, you can call me by my first name, especially when it’s just us.”

“OK, Drake.” She says, her lips stretching into a sly smile. I wonder what’s going on in that head of hers while my eyes take in her hair, perfect lips, and beautiful skin, longer than necessary. She clears her throat, pulls her hand from mine, and snaps my eyes back to hers. I take a step back and walk behind my desk. If we’re going to be working closely together, I’m going to need more than a *truce* to stay away.



Two weeks go by, and Ava and I are going through the event checklist. Everything’s almost set up, and she’s giving me a report from her notepad. She obviously likes to write. When I asked for this assignment a few weeks ago, she wrote it out by hand. Now, even though her laptop is open in front of her, she’s still using a small notepad. As she keeps me updated on

all the necessary details, her soft voice fills my office. “So, about the guest list, everyone invited has RSVP’d,” she reports.

“Great. Food and location?”

“Yup. The program, order of events, and venue are all set.” I nod and glance at the report of guest speakers in front of me.

And Ava adds, “Wow... I’m impressed all those hot-shots lawyers in one place.”

“I’m glad you’re impressed,” I reply with a slightly bitter tone, and she picks up on it.

“Guessing you’re not? Do you have something against hot-shot lawyers?”

Clearing my throat, I answer, “No. I understand you’re aspiring to be a lawyer, so you’re still captivated by the glamour of the profession.”

By people like my father.

“Well, to be honest, I’m not a fan of them either,” she whispers, locking her gaze with mine, and I stare into her beautiful hazel eyes. A silent understanding passes between us. A bond over secrets we can’t discuss. Why is she even in this program if she doesn’t like high-profile lawyers?

“Why are you studying law?” Her gaze goes distant before returning, “My family,” she finally responds.

“What about you? Why are you a professor?” I think about my past and respond simply, “My family.” She smiles softly, and I

do the same—neither of us has to say anything, and yet I feel like I know all I need to understand that there's more to Ava Miller than meets the eye. I guess we both have demons in our closet. She clears her throat and goes to work, writing on her notepad.

“So, you like the old pen and paper, huh?”

“Yeah, I took up journaling two years ago.” her eyes glaze over. “I was in a bad place and needed something to do. So, journaling it was.”

“Hmm.” I nod. “I guess I can see the value in that.”

“Well, I think we've got everything ready for the program... Drake.”

“Sounds good. Aren't you glad you're not going to miss it after putting in all this work?”

“Well, Yeah, I guess, but what I'm most happy about is I can still make it to the Inn after I'm done.”

“What's happening there that you can't miss?” She smiles to herself. “It's just a place that means a lot to me and a couple of other friends.” She looks at her wrist and sits up. “Wow, look at that! we're the only *adults* who are willingly working past 7:00 pm on a Friday.” I look at my watch and joke, “Time flies when you're having fun—let's call it a day. I don't want to interfere with your *plans*,” I tease.

“I don't have *plans*,” she replies in the same tone.

“You should. You're young. You should go out dancing or something.”

She smiles, knowing that's what she said the first night we met.

“I don't need to dance— I need to eat. I haven't had anything today aside from breakfast, and you know what they say—a hungry woman is an angry woman. And If I don't eat soon, I'll be a 'hangry woman.’”

“I could order something.”

“No, I think going out would do me some good. Plus, I'm craving something very specific from a particular restaurant.”
She packs up her laptop, and I do the same.

“Well, I owe you...I did keep you here all day.” I stand and pick up my briefcase.

“No, you don't have to. I'll be fine.”

“No, come on, really. Allow me the honor.”

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

AVA



*WHY DO HIS LIPS look so good?
Why is his smile so beautiful?*

Why can't I stop looking at him?

Drake and I wound up at one of my go-to spots, a cute little place. It's nothing extravagant, but I love the cozy cafe vibe, and it's hardly ever packed. Tonight, it's just a regular crowd. Our food's laid out in front of us, and for the first few minutes, we're both chowing down. I can't help sneaking peeks at him as I eat.

"Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you!"

Someone bursts into a song behind us, and waiters come in with a cake, balloons and flowers, heading to someone seated behind us. It's impossible not to look back at the scene. Just as the waiter reaches the woman they're singing for, the man with her makes use of the opportunity to get on one knee and

open a tiny box containing a ring. I watch excitedly as she squeals and says yes. When the hullabaloo dies down, Drake smiles at me, and I smile back. I voice the thought in my head. *Maybe this was not the best choice of restaurant for a casual dinner. If someone ran into us, they might think something more is going on between us.* His brows knot as he drops his cutlery and says, his tone somber.

“And here I thought there was something more going on between us? I was just about to propose, too.” My eyebrows furrow because his face is sad; it’s hard to know how to respond to that. He cuts in, a teasing smile on his face. “Relax. I’m joking.”

“Well, don’t quit your day job. That’s a one out of ten, mister. See me in my office for such poor performance.”

“Ouh sounds like someone might be getting punished.” His tone is teasing, but his words are not. They send memories of my time in his office. I’ve lost my appetite for food, but I’m hungry for something else.

He nods at my food. “Is that alright?”

“Yes.” My voice comes out soft.

“Good.”

I manage to make it through dinner without any more sexual innuendo. We make our way out, and I start to order an Uber.

“What are you doing?”

“Uh, leaving?”

“C’mon... I’ll give you a ride.”

Because I know better than to argue with Drake, I don’t even try; I just hope to get home fast so I can stop thinking about this man and how his lips feel. Without a word, I make my way to his car. He opens the door for me, and I slide into the passenger’s seat of his sleek ride. I knew he was into fast cars, but I didn’t anticipate this beautiful cream interior. Bugatti. The dashboard is a symphony of digital displays and polished surfaces, with ambient lighting casting a subtle glow over every detail. I don’t ask questions—I just buckle up, staring straight ahead. He takes the driver’s seat, and just like when we were on our way to the restaurant, I go all quiet, acutely aware of his presence beside me. There’s something about him that’s so commanding and effortlessly sexy that it messes with my ability to think straight... especially in this cramped space with him.

I tell him my address, and we kick-off.

“Are you OK?” His voice pulls my attention from his hands on the steering wheel to his face. My heart flips as my gaze roams over his gray eyes, trimmed beard, and dark salt-and-pepper hair.

He’s such a beautiful man.

He raises an eyebrow, and I realize I haven’t replied, “I-I’m fine.” I lick my lips, and I notice his eyes zero in on me, flickering, darkening, filled with dark promises of what’s to come. We stop at the light, and our eyes lock, and in that moment, I think I stop breathing altogether. His eyes edgy

mysteriousness draws me in, and I don't know what to do with my racing heart. I wonder what's going on in his mind. If it's as affected as I am right now. "I bet if I touched you right now, I could make you come before the traffic light turns green."

Involuntarily, my thighs clench together. To distract myself from the graphic images in my head, I look out the window to count down the traffic light. When I count down five seconds, I look back at him. "You can't just say things like that. Remember the truce."

"We agreed to try not to touch, and I didn't touch you. But that doesn't mean I'm not thinking about it." The light turns green—he turns to the road and keeps driving like he never said any of that. When he stops in front of my house, I'm ready to bolt or throw myself on him. I decide on the first option and reach for the door handle.

"Wait, Ava." His hand almost touches my thigh, but it doesn't. I stop and look at him. "I just want to say thanks for tonight, thanks for the effort in making this program a success. I appreciate you."

My mouth suddenly feels stuck, but my chest feels warm from his praise. So, I just nod.

"Goodnight, Drake." He nods, and I reach for the door again. This time, nothing stops me. I walk to the door and fumble with my keys because, for whatever reason, I'm a bit shaky.

"Ava, wait!" My heart lurches at his voice, and I turn around to see him holding out my notepad.

“You left this in the car.” He walks up to me and hands it over.

“Oh, thank you,” I take it from him and put it in my bag. I try to look anywhere but at him. We linger there for a beat, caught in this familiar yet tricky dance along the fine line between right and wrong. It’d be effortless to invite him inside, to live in that gray area. I glance at his lips, and then we lock eyes.

“Drake,” I whisper. “I’m not sure where I’m going with this.”

“Ava,” he whispers...Me either.”

The tension’s undeniable, but neither of us wants to be the one to shatter the truce.

“Goodnight again,” I say, and he nods.

Just as he’s about to leave again, my heart takes a nosedive. I step into my place and turn back to shut the door when I hear cursing in front of me.

“You know what? Fuck this,” he says, and then he sweeps me into a world-rocking kiss. The sheer intensity of it catches me off guard, and I instinctively step back, pressed against the hallway wall.

His tongue teases my mouth open. Just as I close my eyes, lost in the sensation of his lips on mine, he pulls away, leaving me longing. He takes a step back and mumbles, “Sorry about that, I... couldn’t resist.” I couldn’t give a damn about that dumb truce right now, or anything else for that matter. Right now, it’s all about the way he makes me feel and how badly I want him. So, I lean in and kiss him back with just as much passion, letting him know just how much I want him. We’re both on

each other in an instant. Tangled in each other's arms, I take a few steps back into the apartment, and he moves with me. Now, inside, our movements are frenzied. He kisses up and down my neck to my chest.

"I've been thinking about this all night," he whispers darkly against my ear. He has no idea— my body is burning up like an inferno. The distance between us reduced even more, and I forgot how to breathe. A strong emotion rushes through my veins. It's desire. *I want him so badly right now.* His tongue unleashes in my mouth, exploring mine in a sensual dance that makes my pussy clench and my panties wetter. He pulls me even impossibly closer by the waist so that only our clothes separate us. Right now, all I feel is him. I can taste him, touch him, feel him, but I want more.

"Drake..." I moan, my hands trailing to his crotch. I rub against his rock-hard bulge, and a small groan slips out of him.

"Don't do that, or I'm going to have to take you hard and fast," he whispers against the delicate skin of my neck. I didn't think I could get wetter.

I'm hot, so hot for him.

In a split second, my top is gone, followed by my bra. I let out a small sigh when I feel his hands on my breast. He kneads, massages, then squeezes my breasts lightly, then harder. Pleasure, pain, and desire all crash inside me, turning me into a needy mess. Our mouths find each other again in a wet, sloppy kiss that promises something more, something deeper. He kisses down my neck to my breast driving me wild. My

moans get louder in pleasure as his warm, wet mouth bites, licks, and sucks my hardened nipples. He steps away, leaving me wanting more. I whimper at the loss of contact and look up at him to see him looking at me with a dark and intense look.

“Get on your knees,” he says, he commands his voice rumbling through me. My stomach clenches, and a thrill of excitement runs through me. Never would I have thought that receiving an order in the bedroom would be such a turn-on. But he’s making me so wet... I could melt.

I lick my lips and look into his edgy, dark eyes. I have never wanted to please someone more than I do right now. I Keep my eyes on him, sinking to the floor, and open his zipper. Pulling his pants to the floor, I place teasing wet kisses on his bulge through his boxers, loving how he grows even harder against my lips.

I pull them down and watch as his thick cock springs free.

“Ava,” he sighs in the sexiest way anyone has ever said my name.

I lick up and down his length, coating him in wetness before slowly taking him in my mouth. Relaxing my gag reflex, I take him again, deeper this time. Slowly, teasingly. Then, in a sudden movement, I take all of him till he hits the back of my throat.

“Fuck,” he groans as I increase my pace, bobbing my head on his length. He lifts me so I’m no longer on my knees but pulled snugly into his chest.

His mouth claims mine in a rough, unyielding kiss as he walks me to the couch. I lay on my back while he settled between my legs. The feeling of him so close to my wetness is almost too much; I grind and writhe wet pussy against his thigh, hitting my clit perfectly.

“Drake,” I whisper. My voice thick with lust.

“Yes baby, call my name,” he says, kissing down my neck, stomach, and abdomen. In hurried movements, my jeans and panties are off, and I’m stripped naked in front of him.

He pulls me on top of him and works his length into me, filling me completely. A loud moan escapes me.

“Oh, fuck.”

Drake squelches in and out of me, our bodies slick with desire. With every thrust, the pleasure I feel intensifies, my stomach coiling deliciously till I can’t contain it anymore.

Drake plunges into me even deeper, and suddenly, I’m shaking and quaking, my breathing coming out in short bursts as I explode into tiny shards of pleasure.

He fucks me through my orgasm, extending the feeling till I’m incapacitated again, riding out another release that tears through me like an avalanche.

When I catch my breath, Drake places a soft kiss on me, sucking my lower lip before flipping me over.

“That was so hot. Now, I’m going to make you do that all night long.”

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

DRAKE



AFTER THAT NIGHT AT her apartment, Ava and I don't see each other till the day of the seminar.

I'm talking to George, one of the guys from my days at my practice. When Ava approaches, she is dressed in a simple black gown that shows off her curves and heels. Her hair moves with her every movement, giving me flashes of my fingers running through it.

"And who is this?" George asks, looking way more interested than I'm comfortable with. I have to put on my poker face to hide my irritation with this asshole.

"George, meet Ava, my supervisee. Ava, this is George, former coworker," I grit out. He looks at her and smiles before stretching out his hand. "Hmmm.... So that means you're almost done with law school. I Trust you started an internship?" I pick up on the fact that he hasn't let her hand go.

Ava just smiles, a blush spreading on her cheeks. “I was just going to start applying.”

“Well, you know how it is for these things. The earlier, the better,” he chimes. He’s completely eye fucking her right in front of me, and for a moment, I can’t help but wonder if the rumors about him sleeping with junior associates for promotions are legit. But then, who am I to pass judgment? I mean, I’m not supposed to be with Ava, but here I am, fuming because some other guy is keeping a grip on her hand for way too long.

“Thanks, George. And it’s nice to meet you.”

I clear my throat, and Ava looks at their hands and finally withdraws. George seems oblivious and reaches into his blazer pocket. “Here’s my card, in case you’re ready for that internship.”

“I’ll be sure to give you that call.” She smiles again. He winks at her, and I’ve finally had enough of this shit.

“Alright,” I say, and they both turn to me. “The program is starting.”

The first half goes great. While we’re on break, I catch sight of Ava speaking with George again. Seeing them together makes my blood boil, so I take a walk instead of socializing. A few feet away from the hall, I hear footsteps following me.

“Um. Where are you going?” I look back to the familiar voice, turn away and keep walking. “Don’t you have a program to oversee?”

“Don’t you have guests to host? Drake, will you just stop for a second?” I do as she says and turn to her. “You shouldn’t be away from the hall. You’ll be missed.”

“There’s a whole team to oversee if anything goes wrong. Wait... what is this about?” She takes a step closer. “Drake?” Someone walks past us, and she takes a step back, maintaining a respectable distance. “Come on, someone might see us, let’s go somewhere private.” I take her hand, pull her into an empty classroom, and slam the door shut.

No more waiting.

I pull her in and lock lips, tasting her upper lip, her lower lip—then the corners of her mouth again and again until she moans.

“Be quiet.” Trailing my lips down the curve of her cheek I run the tip of my tongue over her ear. Hungry for her, I suck her earlobe into my mouth. Another moan escapes her.

Ava... “I said be quiet.”

In a heartbeat, the kiss turns rough. I fist my hand in her hair, force her head back, and kiss the exposed skin of her throat, nipping the sensitive spot just beneath her ear. Trailing little bites down the satin skin of her throat, I slide my hand along her soft thigh and under her skirt. She’s wet and not wearing any panties, which makes me rock hard.

“So, you’ve been walking around like this all night?” A wave of possessiveness hits me in the chest.

She nods a little, and I thrust a finger into her, excited to find she’s wet. My eyes widen, and her mouth opens, a silent gasp

as I thrust in and out of her pussy, Increasing the pace as my fingers thrust in and out of her wetness, while watching her face twist in ecstasy.

“Why did you come here with no panties? Were you hoping I’d notice? That I’d touch you like this?”

“Hmm, yeah.... Oh fuck!”

She reaches for me, but I move out of her reach. “Don’t touch me, I command, just hold still, just like that...that’s it, that’s a good girl.”

Another finger goes to her clit, rubbing in perfect circles while my finger curled in just the right angle thrusting inside her, by the way she moans, I know she loves this –the thrill of getting caught, the rush of danger. Being commanded to take it like the good girl she is.

She makes me so hard.

“Oh god,” she moans once I find it a start sucking and nibbling her lips, tilting her head to take my tongue even deeper, consuming her.

“More?” I whisper in a ragged breath, with a small smile playing on my lips.

“Drake,” is the only breathless reply she gives me before I undo my zipper and plunge into her. I lift my hands under her ass, her back against the wall, while I plunge into her. Swallowing her soft moans with every stroke, I feel her tightening around me. Her hold around my neck gets tighter,

and that's how I know she's at the edge. I slam her down my cock as I sink deep into her.

“Drake!” She cries out into my neck, muffling the sound into the collar of my blazer. I hold her while she pulses around me, quaking her release. After she comes, I place her down. Pull down her gown and watch her face relax. She reaches for me, but I don't let her. “We don't have time for that. Plus, I want you to know that this is a promise that next time, I'm not taking it easy.”

“Go on...you have a program to attend.”

“Yes... Professor, she winks.” And walks out while I adjust my zipper and tie. After a few minutes, I calm down and walk out of the class to head to the men's room, but there, standing outside the door, staring up at me, stopping me dead in my tracks, is that girl Monica. She gasps.

“ Oh, Professor Drake?”

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

AVA



“**Y**OU DID WHAT?”

I let the tension sink in a little by not saying anything as her hand went over her slightly parted lips. After a few seconds of tormenting silence for Daphne, I smile a little.

“You know I live for your tales?”

“But why are you telling me this when you know I can’t talk about it?”

“Because I know you’ll pressure me to spill, and I can’t exactly be talking about having sex with my professor at an orphanage, can I?”

“Are you sure no one saw you?”

“Well, there was that student that came by, but I doubt she saw anything. Remember, we saw her at the mall with Ana... that girl Monica.”

“Oh yeah?” I shrug. “Something about the way she looked at him bothered me. It was a brief second, but I caught it. Sort of like a jealous girlfriend. It’s hard to explain how I know... we can chalk it up to...” “Woman’s intuition,” Daphne completes. “Yup, sounds about right. I heard she has a crush on him. Everyone knows.” Daphne rolls her eyes. “Oh. So, she’s *that* type of girl.”

I laugh. That’s the thing between Daphne and me. Most of what passes between us is unspoken. We arrive at the Inn, where we agreed to volunteer. The place is closed for the weekend, so our group decided to host a children’s art show.

“Anyway, it’s a good thing she didn’t see anything. Girls like her are usually snitches.” I bring up something more important because I’m sick of talking about Monica. It’s been like an uncomfortable nudge in my chest. “And girls like you keep mystery men away from their best friends.” Her eyes flicker with a look I can’t read.

“And girls like you are turned on by domination.” Daphne and I are now in the supply office.

“Daphne,” I gasp and look around. “Really? Be quiet.” I pick up the box of colored pencils from the floor.

“And between us and the kids we’re supposed to watch, there’s nothing but a thin wall. And Kids have sharp ears.”

“And kids who misbehave will be punished,” she says, wiggling her eyebrows. I roll my eyes, growing flush and say,

“Do you think it’s weird that I love it when he commands me?”

“You’re way past weird my friend.” Gathering what we need out of the supply room at the back of the Inn, we head to the main entrance.

“Weird is having *sex* with a man you just met and calling it the best sex of your life. Weird is thinking about that *sex* with him nonstop for four years, then recreating that moment in your professor’s office who just happens to be the same hunky guy...now that’s weird.”

“Really, Daphne, how many times are you going to say the word *sex*? Do you want the whole Inn to know that I’m having sex?” I ask, even though she lowered her voice to a whisper.

“With the way your face flushes anytime I say *sex*, I won’t have to tell anyone.” She smiles. “The point is, I’ve known you forever. This, whatever it is you have with your professor that, can’t be compared to anyone you’ve had before. That’s what’s weird, just saying.” She’s right. Things with Drake are...*different*. Especially how my blood burns when we make simple eye contact, and how my body reacts to his most basic touch, all I can think of is being around him, consumed by every part of him.

Then I hear his voice. His deep laugh sends chills down my spine. My head snaps, and when I don’t see anything, I turn to Daphne.

“You hear that too, right?” my heart’s racing. “Please tell me I’m not going crazy.” She nods her head, looking surprised,

too. Her eyes are wide, locked over my shoulder, and when I turn back, it's Drake. He's laughing and saying something to the kids he's walking with. A couple of the little girls in the group giggle, looking at him like he's some kind of magical being.

I can relate to that.

Then, as if he senses my gaze, he looks up. "Ava?"

Even though Daphne is standing beside me, looking as beautiful as always, his eyes don't stray from me once.

"What... what're you doing here?" I ask.

A second passes. Then two. Three, and Daphne finally takes the cue. "I'm going to leave you two. Nice to meet you."

"Drake, by the way."

He nods to Daphne and turns to me. "You kept mentioning how the Inn was important to you, and when I googled it, this place came up. I figured contributing was the least I could do."

I don't know how to reply to that, so I just nod. We spent the day painting, drawing funny faces and singing, and at one point, we were even dancing with the kids. Watching Drake come to life with them, giving them piggyback rides and donkey rides, and even playing hide and seek was so surprising. It seems so out of character, but it's very sweet.

At the end of the day, Drake, Daphne and I leave the Inn.

With how 'grumpy' he is at work, it's like seeing a completely different person, giving me a glimpse of another side of him.

“It’s been a long day. You ladies want to go out for drinks?” Drake says. When my eyes meet him, I get the feeling that we won’t just be getting drinks. I hear Daphne clear her throat beside me, and I know that she may have correctly interpreted the whole situation. Biting the side of my lips, I turn to her, about to ask for permission to go, but as usual, my best friend is way ahead of me.

“Um, I have a previous engagement I can’t get out of. But you guys go and have fun!”

She takes the paintings from my hand and smiles at Drake. “Don’t go too hard.” She says, and I choke with widened eyes.

“On the drinks,” she finishes with a smirk.

Drake casually shoves his hands in his pocket, nods, and chuckles. “Nothing she can’t handle. Don’t worry, I’ll keep her safe.”

I don’t know the kind of friendship these two formed in just a few hours, but it can’t be good for me if they team up.

“OK, Daphne, I’ll call you, have a good night.”

Blushing on my behalf, Daphne smiles and wiggles her brows. “She’s all yours.” And with that, she zooms off, leaving Drake and me alone in the parking lot.

Holy crap, this car.

This isn’t the first time I’ve driven in it, but the last time it was late, the top wasn’t down, and I couldn’t really make out the details. I settle into the seats, embraced in a cocoon of comfort. My gaze dances over the meticulous stitching, and

the scent of expensive leather fills the air. Honestly, It feels more like I'm climbing into a luxury spaceship than a car. Trailing my hand along the creamy, soft interior reminds me of clouds. We cruise through the streets of Miami in his sleek black Bugatti convertible.

It's hot.

The salty sea air tousles my hair, making me laugh as I try to tame it.

"Enjoying the ride, Ava?"

"Um yeah," I smile, wide-eyed. "I'm Impressed... It's not every day I get chauffeured around in a car this Amazing."

"It's even more amazing with you in it." Drake grins. "Get used to it. I want you to feel special," he says, his gaze sincere.

"I'm happy you came, Ava— I really like spending time with you." The rumble of his tone reverberates through me.

"Of course," I offer, unable to think of what else to say, "I'm happy I did too." Honestly, I can't put my emotions into words right now. It's truly a surreal experience.

"So, where are we going?" I ask, trying to keep my composure.

"Well, I was thinking I'd take you to either The Koi Lux, that new Japanese fusion bar downtown or the Avisa Yacht Club overlooking the Marina—it's a nice spot, I know the owner."

"Ooh, sounds swanky..." I interject, "Take me, I'm all yours." I gasp... My face flushes with heat, totally embarrassed at the

way that came out. The truth is I've been working so hard with school that my carefree nature is begging to break free.

"But since it's just the two of us," he says, "I'm thinking I'd like to bring you somewhere a bit more quaint...just us." He winks, placing his hand on my knee, and my lower belly flips with flutters.

"That sounds nice, *Professor*," I tease.

Here I am, sitting in one of the most expensive cars, being swooned by the most beautiful man I've ever laid eyes on, and he wants me.

The ocean zips by, and I marvel at the luxury homes surrounding me. As we approach Star Island, the anticipation builds. Crossing over the bridge, we pass the ivy-covered archway that reads Welcome to Star Island, where happily ever after is your new reality. It's like I'm in a dream. Because that's exactly how I feel at this very moment. Drake catches my grin and chuckles, his eyes twinkling.

"You're in for a treat," he says, a playful glint in his eyes. "This spot is a little slice of paradise."

Pulling up to A stunning bungalow, I can't believe my eyes. It's like something out of a movie – luxurious and nestled in the beauty of the island. Drake catches my enamored expression and holds the car door open for me.

"Welcome to my little haven," he says with a grin. Little do I know it's about to become even more magical.

"Wow! This is *gorgeous* — just us?"

“Just us.”

Drake looks at me and lifts me onto the Greek-inspired banister on the deck. We stare into each other's gaze as the ocean crashes around us. Drake leans in and whispers darkly in my ear, “Want to know what I've been thinking about all day?” Those words crash through me, and a whiney moan escapes my lips.

Unable to contain myself, I bury my face into his neck, reveling in a cascade of chills along my spine, breathing him in, intoxicated by the mild mix of sweet cedar and sweat, forcing my bud to thump wildly. Trailing kisses up his neck till our tongues crash in a passionate dance of lust, my body aches for more. Drake lifts me, carrying me through the French doors, placing me down as I melt into the cool sheets of the plush, circular bed. I'm ready to give myself to him, to his scent, to feel his body against mine. Our clothes are off in a whirlwind of movements.

“This Ava, I want this.” He buries his words into my ears as he works his finger in circles over my clit. “I've been thinking about tasting your sweet little pussy all day Kitten.” “Now I'm going to make you come again and again with my tongue.”

Trailing kisses down my front till he's lapping and sucking my wanting center as he thumbs my swollen nub. I squirm, “Mmmm...yes, Drake.” Unable to take it any longer, I lace my fingers, grabbing his hair and beg, “I need you inside me.” And, as if he can't take it any longer, he climbs between my

thighs, teasing my clit with his throbbing head, then plunges his thick cock into my puffy saliva drenched folds.

“Fuck!” He groans. I suck in my breath as he widens my center pumping painfully and pleasurable, with each thrust one hot, wet, bare inch at a time while hitting my clit just right. And in minutes, my whole body is convulsing from a delicious orgasm. He fucks me through my waves of ecstasy, then flips me doggie style, grabbing my ass, jerking me roughly on his cock. He grunts, holding me still against his thickness, undulating as he comes deep inside me.

“Ahhh... Drake, yes...you feel so good.”

He rolls his body alongside mine, panting heavily while holding me in his strong arms and says, “Damn, you feel like magic *Kitten*.” I snuzzle, melting into his chest as I recount the pleasure-filled moments.

Why does being with him feel so good?

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

DRAKE



I 'M NOT SURE WHAT came over me.

The second I woke up and saw Ava staring down at me, something inside me leaped. I couldn't stop myself from smiling; I couldn't stop myself from reaching for her, and then, I said what I said. It was almost as if I wasn't in control, but it wasn't some robotic move either. My brain was screaming at me to stop, but my heart was just brimming with emotion. Especially after catching that look in her eyes. First hope, then desire, and a hint of uncertainty.

I know. I can't keep doing this.

Even if Ava's beautiful, smart, sexy, and smells like heaven, with perfect breasts that fit right in my hand, paired with pink puckered nipples that feel good in my mouth, with beautiful legs that wrap around my waist and Even if Ava is a nice young lady, she's still my student, and the sex, no matter how

mind-blowing, has to stop. And even if there's a ton of other reasons we should put an end to this. I've got a talent for messing up good things, and the fact that she's my student alone should be reason enough. I need to talk to her. As I reach for my phone, it rings.

Dean Walter.

My heart skips, and for a second, I remember Monica's face when Ava opened the door the other day. Even though we both managed to play it cool, Monica still looked suspicious and asked if anything was going on. With a deep breath, I slide the green dancing button across the screen and slowly put the phone to my ear.

"Good afternoon, Drake." I can immediately tell that there's something off about his voice. Walter has always been a cheerful guy. He was easygoing and had taken a liking to me. I met him through my dad at a business meeting, and he has always been excited to talk to me. Right now, however, he doesn't sound like a man who is excited about anything.

"Good afternoon, Sir."

"A disturbing report has just gotten to my ears about a professor and a student."

"A professor and a student?" I ask calmly.

"If you're free now, I'd appreciate it if you can spare me a moment of your time. It's a sensitive matter, and I don't want to discuss it over the phone."

“Alright. I’ll be there in five.” Like the ocean and like I’ve spent years of my life mastering, I tuck whatever frenzy and panic I should be feeling in a corner at the back of my mind, and I take a deep breath. After clearing up my table, I make my way to the Dean’s office. A mumble of “Come in” follows my light knock, and I step into the air-conditioned office. Walter looks up as I step in, and his attempt at a smile turns into a grimace as his lips fold into a thin line.

“Hello, Drake. Please take a seat.” I nod and settle in the chair he’s pointing at.

“I believe you know Monica,” he starts immediately. “Monica Bellare. She’s one of your students.”

And also the girl who was behind the door.

“Yes sir, I do.” He sighs and runs his hands across his snow-white beard before crossing them in front of him.

“I have to say, I’m distressed about this news, and because of the close relationship I share with his father, I’m not sure how to handle the situation.” With my face betraying nothing, I lean forward. “What exactly is the situation, sir?” His eyes meet mine, laced with distress and disappointment.

“A few days ago, he was caught in a compromising position in his office with a student.” I wouldn’t exactly call it a compromising position, but the fact that Monica was a few seconds away from seeing my dick -if not for my fast thinking, makes me rethink my whole *compromising* situation.

“To be honest, the news got to me last week, and I’ve been waiting and hoping he would bring it to me himself. Confess and show some kind of remorse. Anything at all. But it doesn’t seem like that’s going to happen.”

“So, you’ve decided to summon him and ask him about it?”

“I want to give him one more chance to come clean.” I study Walter for a while, and even if my first instinct is to come clean and protect Ava in any way I can, I decide to call his bluff. “Is that why I’m here?”

He nods. “I know that you and Professor Morales have a good relationship. If you can convince him to come clean, it’ll help his case in the long run.”

“Professor Morales?”

Morales and I went to law school together. Our fathers are friends with the Dean. He’s pretty reserved and knows the importance of boundaries, that’s why he and I got along. So, even if I could technically be categorized as one of his *friends*, I’d also be the last person to know if he’s having an affair with a student. I explain simply, “I don’t know if I’m the best person to talk to him about something like this, but I’ll see what I can do.” He nods. “I understand. Sorry for putting you in this difficult position.”

“You mentioned Monica. Is she the witness or the other party?”

“I’m not at liberty to say. Either way, her privacy is to be protected.” I nod understandably. I’m honestly not even that

curious about her part in this story. The close call we had reminds me of Ava and I's relationship. I could have easily been the *Professor Morales* of this story. If anything like this comes out about us, Ava's protection comes first. No matter what. *I won't be a coward again.*

"Actually, sir, there's also something I've been meaning to talk to you about. I don't know if now is the right time ." Walter smiles, "Is there really such a thing as the right time son? You know there's absolutely nothing you can't bring to me."

"And I'm grateful for that, sir. I'm considering returning to my law practice." His eyes widen. "You're leaving?"

"I'm considering it." If things ever come to light about my sexcapade with Ava, it'll do her a lot of good if there's already news on the ground that I'm leaving. I've sworn to myself not to allow anybody else to suffer for my actions.

"Is there something going on you want to talk about?" I shake my head with a convincing smile, one that I've mastered. A flash of naked Ava cuts across my mind, and I know for sure that I need to do this.

"No. It's just something I've been-"

"My statement is cut short by the vibration of my phone in my breast pocket. Walter nods and gestures that it's OK for me to take the call, so I do, frowning slightly at the unexpected number that's calling.

At the name, my hands suddenly feel cold. The caller ID reads – Daniel Armstrong. Why would he be calling me?"

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

AVA



“CAN YOU BELIEVE HE was sleeping with a student?”

“What?! Nooo?!”

“Girl...yes, when Dean found out, shit hit the fan in his office.”

The library floor is almost empty except for the two girls a few seats away and me. I shift uncomfortably in my seat, inching closer to them. It’s obvious they’re trying hard but failing to whisper.

“C’mon, how do you know?” says the ditzy one with the big boobs.

“I have my sources,” the other girl says, flipping her hair back with a satisfied smirk as she leans in closer, continuing to whisper poorly, “Professor Armstrong was...” I’m at the edge of my seat, but I can’t hear her finish because my attempts to

squeeze closer cause my notepad to slip, falling with a sharp clap. The girls stop and stare. My cheeks flush, my heart beating out of control, and I can't hear myself think. I bend to pick it up and notice the other girl turn to whisper something else. I don't catch what she's saying, but as soon as they both look at me, chills run down my spine.

I can't take it anymore. I need to get out of here. I scoop up my things, pack up my bag, and speed walk out. I don't look back. My heart's pounding against my chest and my palms clammy. I head straight to the only place I could think of—Drake's office. I know, maybe it's not the most brilliant idea to bolt over there, especially with this kind of news flying around. But I can't think straight, and I don't know where else to go. All I know is I need to see him. My thoughts are swirling in a sea of worry. Have Drake and I been obvious?

Did anyone see us?

My heart thumps, and my breathing spins out of control. I'm a mess of nerves. I mean, we're both consenting adults. But sleeping with *your* professor.

What have you done Ava Miller?

If anybody finds out, he'll lose his position. I knock on his office door hesitantly, paranoid about being seen, and a muffled "come in" replies. I walk in, leaving the door open behind me to curb any further suspicion. Drake's seated behind his mahogany desk. And for a second, neither of us says anything. His gray eyes bore into mine. My breath hitches—he looks amazing. But I don't move, I'm paralyzed in the

doorway, not knowing how to express what I'm feeling. And as if he senses my inner turmoil, he stands, closes the distance between us, reaches behind me and clicks the door locked. He leans in, "Hey."

The smell of his cedar-scented cologne fills me with want. My instincts are to reach for him, but after the news I'd heard this afternoon, I know I'm playing with fire.

"Hey," I say back, unsure if he can tell what I'm thinking.

"Are you OK?" His eyes search mine, creasing in worry.

"A professor was caught sleeping with a student," I squeak out, but I know he doesn't need to hear the whole story to know what I'm talking about. Saying it out loud makes it real, like it could've happened to anyone...even us. Drake nods. "Yeah...I heard—Professor Morales is leaving quietly—he'll be turning in his resignation this week." I'm instantly flooded with relief, followed by a resurgence of anxiety. I wasn't expecting to hear that, and even though I know he said Professor Morales, I don't feel any better. My body's uptight, still feeling like the scandals about us.

"How do you think he was caught?" I whisper.

"Somebody saw them and reported it." I swallow, "No." Drake and I have tried pretty hard to be discreet, but honestly, I don't know... anything can happen to anyone. Plus...I saw Monica heading to the classroom that day after I left, so she couldn't have seen it.

"Do you think... someone might have seen us?"

“No, *I don't*. But I think it's wise to be on our best behavior, at least till this rumor dies down.” I nod. “Of course, yeah...that makes sense—It's the smart thing to do in this situation.” I look up at his bulging biceps filling his crisp white shirt, heat rolls through my body. I look away and feel his breath on my face, my lips, my chin. He's so close but so far away.

“I guess I should stop coming here too.” I say, trying to put distance between us, you can't be too careful you know.” He nods. “That's probably the best thing.”

“And... we should stop seeing each other outside of class too, maybe stick to emails for now?” A look flashes in his eyes, but he covers it up quickly and nods again. I look anywhere but him. Why does the thought of not seeing him hurt more than it should? And like a breakup, my heart feels like it's ripping through my chest.

“And when we're in class, maybe I should avoid speaking altogether so no one gets suspicious.” When I say that, I look away so he can't see the pain welled up in my eyes. We're not exactly an item, so why does it feel like I'm losing a big part of me? Even though he's taking it in stride, I can tell he's affected too.

“Ava...”

“I need to go.” I turn around, trying to save myself from saying anything I might regret. He grabs hold of my hand. “Wait, Ava.” I pause but don't turn because the back of my throat burns, and I'm scared. If I see the hurt in his eyes, it'll be my undoing. “Look at me.” His voice is gentle but firm,

and I have no other option but to turn around. One look, and my resistance chips. I don't want to have to say goodbye. I'm not exactly sure what I'm feeling. I just know it cuts like a knife. I look in his direction but not in his eyes.

"Ava..." He tips my chin to look up at him, and when my eyes finally stray to his, something breaks me.

"I want to kiss you," he murmurs before leaning in to place his lips on mine. It's soft and feels like goodbye. But what starts out sweet and tentative quickly turns rough and insistent—both of us say with our lips what we can't voice out.

I want you.

I care for you.

And I don't want to stop.

We drink each other in, not caring to come up for air. His lips slide against mine, and once again, we're dancing between the gray lines of what's right and wrong.

"I don't know if I can stay away from you," he whispers as he kisses down my neck.

"Me too," I kiss him back, reaching for his tongue with mine.

"I need to have you one last time." He pants between kisses while unzipping my jeans as he rubs deliciously against my nub.

"Damn, baby... I can't stop... you're making me crazy."

Those words crash into my stomach, making me even hotter. I want him so bad. I unbuckle his belt and lower his zipper,

reaching in to touch him. I drop to my knees, pulling down his pants with me. I bat my eyes, grinning at him as I give him a few easy strokes, sliding my tongue against my lips at the sight of his straining erect cock. I roll my tongue in a circular motion while coating him in saliva. Licking along the base till I reach the precum on his tip. Drake looks down at me with the darkest look on his face that fuels a fire inside me. I take him in my mouth, loving how he slides to the back of my throat.

“Fuck,” he whispers harshly. Spurred by his reaction, I bob my head faster up and down his shaft. The squelching sounds as he slides in and out of my mouth excite me. His face contorts as he narrows his focus on me while his hand fists my hair. I release him with a pop and go down to his balls, sucking and licking with my hands working up and down his length.

“Ava, fuck!” In a second, I’m no longer kneeling but pushed up against the door. My pants are pulled down, my lace underwear yanked roughly to the side. Just as he’s about to enter me, I freeze.

“Did you hear that?” I whisper. He freezes and listens for a bit. A few voices sound out close to the door where we’re pressed, half-naked.

“We should stop,” he says, still panting hard. His cock straining, sliding and teasing my moist lips. I move slightly against him, causing friction, teasing the head of his cock into my folds. “Yes, we should,” I agree. But neither of us stop the small teasing movement between each other. He’s almost in, but barely, then suddenly withdraws, and I’m left deprived. I

can see the strain on his face as he helps me get dressed, buttoning up my top. He places his head beside mine and whispers darkly. “If you go out now, I can wait 30 minutes and meet you in your apartment.” A shiver runs down my spine at the thought, “How am I going to stay away from someone who turns my blood to lava with a single touch?”

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

DRAKE



AVA FEELS LIKE HEAVEN.
Being inside her is all the therapy I need. And now I can't imagine living without her—the thought puts a cold pit in my stomach. The minutes tick by, and I lay here watching the rise and fall of her breathing as she sleeps. My eyes fixed, observing her beautiful face, I take in this moment as if she's mine. Ava sighs and begins to stir. It's 9:00 pm. I'm glad Zoe's with my mother. So, I just have to make sure no one sees me leave here on my way out.

“Mmm,” Ava sighs again, her eyes flutter. She's even more beautiful when she sleeps. Her eyes are still shut, but I can tell from her breathing that she's waking up.

How long can this last? I put that thought out of my mind and wrap my arms around her, placing a kiss on her shoulder. She moans and pushes her ass into me.

“Hey kitten, are you awake?” Her eyes flutter, and a small smile appears on her face. But she maintains her sleeping act. Ava pushes her ass against me again, and I instantly harden, ready to sink myself inside her.

Unable to resist, I kiss her soft shoulder and growl, “Someone’s being a bad girl.” I suck and bite her neck, and goosebumps appear all over her. She pushes against me again. It’s clear what she wants. But I want her to say it. I need to make her beg for it.

Kissing along Ava’s ear, I mouth my way to her breasts. She moans softly, and I think about all the ways I could make her come if she were restrained. I slide from the bed, grab two silk straps and work gently at her feet.

When I’m sure the binds are secure, I settle in between her spread thighs. I’m rock hard knowing she can’t move, thinking about her body squirming in ecstasy as I devour every inch of her—my mind full of all the ways I’m going to fuck her. The way she licks her lips, with her eyes slit open, I can tell she’s curious to see where this is going.

She whimpers at my first lick on her clit. She’s plush, warm, and wet. Licking again, her legs tremble. My hand slips between her folds, sliding along her wetness, I circle her nub and watch her shiver. Then I begin my onslaught, sucking, licking, and swirling till she can’t contain her moans. When she jerks, her legs are restrained, so she has no other option than to stay there and take what I give.

“Fuck,” she whispers.

I smirk and keep up with the movement of my tongue against her wet center till she's quaking and shaking through her release.

“You still have one more, baby.”

I tease her, kissing down her thighs before kissing back up to clamp down on her clit again. I can feel her breathing come out in short bursts, her stomach tightening as she convulses through another orgasm. When she comes down, she looks up at me, her eyes hazy, and breaks her silence.

“Drake, I want you to fuck me.”

A few hours and several orgasms later, Ava falls asleep for real this time—breathing softly beside me. It's time for me to get home, so I pick up my clothes and dress in the dark. I don't wake her, making it easier for us to avoid saying goodbye. Instead, I slide out of the door as quietly as possible.

I make it out of the apartment to my car and text my mother to see if she needs anything for Zoe's school tomorrow. She writes back to say my sweet pea is doing fine and doesn't need anything. Having my mother's help with Zoe takes a massive weight off my shoulders. Sure, I could have the nanny take her... but there's nothing like family.

I press on the ignition and freeze. What the fuck?! This is straight out of a horror movie. Monica is standing in the dark, a few feet away, looking right at me. Her head perks up, and she walks towards my car with an odd expression on her face.

Should I just drive away, or should I stay and acknowledge the fact that she's seen me?

"Professor Armstrong?" She calls out.

Shit.

Well...that makes the decision for me. I stay and look in her direction.

"Hi, I thought that was your car."

Maybe driving a luxury vehicle as a professor isn't the best thing to do if you don't want to get spotted. She looks around as though wondering what I'm here for. "Hi, Monica." I feign a smile.

Does she know Ava lives here? If she does, she's not showing it. "I have to get going now, Goodnight."

She raises her hand in a small wave. But before she says anything, I zoom out of there. As I drive home, my mind is reeling. Monica was definitely the student who saw Professor Morales. And if she's seen me with Ava twice in compromising situations...it doesn't take a genius to know what's going on.

Before any of this shit hits the fan, I'd rather leave before it comes to light so Ava doesn't have to face the gossip that comes with these kinds of situations.

When I get home, I shower, settle into bed and try to sleep, but my mind is still restless. So, I grab my laptop and try to put the restless energy to good use. But it's not working. Instead, I

open a blank document and type out words I've been thinking about.

I start with the heading; "*Letter of resignation.*"

Wrapping things up, I've got a better grip on the situation and feel satisfied enough to catch some Z's. The next morning, it's business as usual. I march into the office and take my place behind the desk. But I can't concentrate because of the nagging feeling in my mind that has been there since I saw Monica last night. Plus, traces of Ava are everywhere. We've fucked on this desk, at the door, and at random places in this office. If Monica has seen us, then it's only a matter of time. I need to do the right thing.

Walter's old-school, so it's only right to slide that letter onto his desk instead of shooting it over in an email. I owe him that for offering me this position and being a good friend. So I print the letter I typed yesterday. I fold up the piece of paper and slip it into an envelope, all while a tornado of thoughts swirls in my head.

Am I really ready to dive back into the law game? I walked away from that a few years back, and it wasn't for just one reason. I'd been working with my father before I decided to start my own practice. But shortly after, I lost Sarah, Zoe's mother, and that was wrecking me. Every day that I went back to the office, I felt like I was going to turn into my father, it was an undeniable eventuality. This offer of professorship was the break I needed from anything that linked me to him and my past life.

Now, break times over. Thankfully, I've gained clarity and have a new perspective on life, so it's been time well spent. I study law because I love it, not because of my father's influence. And regardless of who he is, I'm a great lawyer because it's what I love to do.

I pick up a few textbooks that are important to me. Looking around, I realize I'd never really personalized this place because I didn't think I'd stay here for so long. Time has a way of proving you wrong, but I've grown a lot. I'm not sure what this thing is with Ava. But I'm glad that maybe this was just the nudge I needed to get back to my practice. I pick up my stuff and the letter and head to the Dean's office. Just as I close the door to my office behind me, my phone vibrates and I look down at it, frowning at the strange number.

"Hello?"

"Mr. Armstrong?"

"Yes. And who is this?"

"I'm calling from Bay-med Elementary School."

The second the name of the school hits my ears, all the danger signals in my body go off. I don't think I've ever felt stinging panic quite like this before.

"Is Zoe OK?" I'm frantic.

"That's why we're calling. We need to see you. Zoe is being suspended."

My heart freezes in my chest. "What?"

CHAPTER NINETEEN

AVA



BEFORE MY FATHER'S LAW firm scandal, he and I were thick as thieves. My only concern was not being able to measure up to him. So, in my attempt to dodge failure, and afraid of disappointing him by not living up to his expectations, I did what any twenty-year-old would do.

I acted out.

I was rebellious, and I didn't give a crap what anyone thought. As a result, I made some really bad choices. I met this guy, Chris, at least that's who he claimed to be. I can't say for sure if any of it was legit. But what I do know is he was a wolf in sheep's clothing, and he ruined my relationships with everyone that was important to me. He even managed to drive a wedge between Daphne and me. She felt like I betrayed her, and I guess, in a way, I did. But back then, I was so damn into him, I couldn't care less about who I had to lose.

We were joined at the hip, did everything together - partying, shopping, you name it. So naturally, I trusted him with my life. I told Chris everything about my father's law firm, deals my father made, business friends, you know, he knew it all. I didn't see anything wrong with sharing, Chris was my man... and he wanted to be a lawyer, so telling him seemed natural. Not to mention, in my stupid brain, I imagined us married and running the family firm together, a powerhouse couple...I was so naive.

My father had been working a high-profile Nikkon case. The opposing counsel was Daniel of Castle of Law. *'Daniel Strong'* named by the media for how ruthless he is. He's old school, and rumor has it that there's nothing he wouldn't do for a win.

Nothing.

My father was on track to win, he could feel it, and he'd told me all about it. I'd told Chris specifically what loophole in the law my father was going to use. And a few days later, my father lost the case. The loss was monumental, then the media got ahold of it, and it was an added notch on Daniel Strong's belt.

Then, a few weeks later, one of our employees was suspected of fraud. The timing couldn't have been worse. My father was trying to deal with everything quietly and let the guy go. I let Chris in on it, and by the next day, the whole story was blown up in the papers. Fraud is a serious charge— and any employee is acting on the law firm's behalf. Clients pulled

their accounts. The law firm lost integrity, and everything went downhill from there.

I never saw Chris after that day until Daphne found out he works at Daniel Strong's firm. I told my parents everything, confessed that I suspected him and what my part in the whole scandal was. They didn't say a word, didn't point fingers, but I could see it in their eyes - they were disappointed in me.

"Honey...you have to go." My mother's voice snaps me out of my reverie.

I blink twice, and my surroundings come into focus. *I hate these events*. In my opinion, I don't think I should get much of a say when they want me to do anything these days—I just feel like I owe them.

"OK, I'll be there," I say. "But I'm sure I'll hate every minute of it," I mutter under my breath.

A few hours later, I'm whining to Daphne while shopping for outfits for the event.

"You might not hate it, you know," she croons as she waves another dress in front of me.

This is like the sixth one she's shown me. I guess I should put her out of her misery and choose one.

"But I haven't mixed with this kind of crowd since before the scandal happened. I don't know... I just feel uneasy, you know."

"And what will happen when you graduate? You'll definitely need to be a regular at these schmoozy events, so get used to it

girl. Plus, I think you know why your mother would like to go.”

I nod because she’s right. And even though my father’s firm isn’t booming and won’t be getting any awards, it’ll be good to show up and represent the practice.

“So, what do you think about this one?” Daphne raises another gown in front of her.

“It’s OK.”

“No, it’s not. It’s a drab... and screams last year’s fashion. If you’re trying to make an impression, you need to put in the effort, look the part, girl.”

“Right.” I resist the urge to sigh and plop down on the changing stall.

She sits beside me and pokes a hand at my side. “I bet you’d be more excited if you were going out with Drake.”

“Drake and I are just-”

“Right, you’re just fucking, and he came to an orphanage to volunteer with you.”

I sigh. “Well, whatever it is, it’s about to be over. The University’s on high alert. It’s clamping down on their fraternization policy since one of the professors was caught... you know...fraternizing.”

Daphne’s eyes grow wide, “Damn, bitch, I leave you for two days and you’ve got a new pet, you’re pregnant, and you’ve changed your name. what else did I miss?” Daphne laughs

“Hahaha... Well, to be fair, you’ve been busy too. I don’t know who you’ve been seeing but I know the way you’ve been acting all kinds of sweet on someone... “But I digress,” rolling my eyes playfully.” She blushes and looks away. “You caught me, it happened last week.”

She shares her story, and I bring her up to date with Drake and me. “Right now, we’re just keeping it low-key. But it feels like it’s over.”

“Oh, honey, I’m sorry, wanna talk about it?” She asks. But I shake my head, I don’t need to think about Drake right now.

“I don’t know what to say, But if you need anything, Ava, *anything*... I’m here.”

Moments later, she’s waving another piece in front of me. I imagine the look on Drake’s face if he ever saw me in that, and though it’ll never happen, the thought is enough. “It’s perfect.”

Fast forward a few hours, and I’m standing at the entrance of the hall, rocking a killer blowout, mascara, and a swipe of lipstick, ready to get this thing started. It’s a beautiful night, with a giant full moon hanging in the sky. The crowd buzzes with excitement. I’m watching a lot of notable people go into the hall, and for a second, I’m ready to get the hell out of here, wondering if my mother would notice.

Of course, she would.

I’m so lost people watching, I don’t see the face headed towards me till he’s right in front of me. “George?”

“Hello beautiful.” He takes my hand, and just when I expect him to shake, he dips his head and places a kiss on the back of my palm. I’m surprised and can’t help the nervous giggle that slips out of me.

“Oh wow, that was...” My eyes zone in on my hand in his. He’s an attractive man but has nothing on Drake.

“I never did get that call,” he comments, and I remember his business card that I’d dropped on my desk and forgotten about.

I’m about to reply when a gorgeous, familiar figure behind him steals my breath away. I raise a brow, puzzled, as Drake steps out of a sleek black limo.

“So, I was going to say...” George continues talking to me, and his words begin to sound like a murmur. I try to look engaged. But the façade falls when Drake looks around.

The air is sucked from my lungs, my temperature spikes and my mouth goes dry.

Dressed in a gray suit from head to toe, he looks like he just stepped out of a magazine. His face, stoic as his eyes scanned the crowd. But when they land on me, they take on a stormy hue, sending shivers down my spine. Our eye contact is interrupted by an elderly woman approaching him. She’s holding a little girl who runs over to Drake. The little girl signs something with her hands, and he nods and kisses her.

Maybe she’s his niece? I’m still watching the scene when a man approaches the trio, his hand sneaks around the woman and he stretches out his hand to Drake.

It's him.

Daniel' Strong. The man who ruined my family.

CHAPTER TWENTY

DRAKE



TONIGHT IS A WHO'S who kind of event. I stroll in, playing it cool. The tailored suit wraps around me like a second skin, concealing the chaos I'm keeping under wraps. The room buzzes with voices and the clinking of glasses, but nothing can distract me from the thoughts racing through my head. My gaze sweeps the room, searching for familiar faces. I have specific people in mind. My mom and my little angel, Zoe.

After the call from her school, I called my mother, who had assured me my daughter was alright. A girl had made fun of her for being deaf, and my daughter was going to pour hot cocoa on the other girl when the teacher noticed and stepped in.

While searching the room, my gaze freezes, and there stands Ava, her auburn locks tumble over her shoulders and that dazzling smile working its magic as she chats it up with a guy

I instantly recognize as George. My heart does a twist, a whole mix of feels churning up inside. What is she doing here? And *why* does she look so intimate with him? Are they together? *Is Ava on a fucking date with George?*

I don't have time to think about that right now. I see my mother, beautiful and composed as ever, standing with Zoe, holding tightly onto her hand. Zoe has her head down, and she's fiddling with her feet. Her hands clenched beside her, and the thought of those tiny little fists hitting someone breaks me. I get through tonight the best way I know how, tucking my turmoil to the deepest part of me and approach them. I offer a polite kiss on my mother's cheek, my lips curving into a small smile, and reach for my little girl.

"Hey, Mom, you look lovely... how are you?" I say, trying to seem warm. I must have pulled it off because she replies brightly.

"Oh, Drake, love, everything is wonderful. Zoe begged to be here, and you know me, I had to oblige. Even if it is just to do the red carpet— but I'm sure she's ready to head home now. Did you have fun dear?"

"Uh-huh," Zoe says with a nod.

It was slight and barely there, but I noticed the change in Mom's voice when she referred to Zoe. I also get the message she's doing anything Zoe wants just to make her happy.

Zoe meets my gaze. "Hey Dad," Zoe signs. It's the first time she looks up at me all night. Her beautiful eyes are heavy, speaking volumes of the troubles on her young shoulders. "Hi,

sweetheart.” I kiss her on her forehead and give her a good squeeze, “how are you, honey?” Standing behind my mother, my father postures, but I ignore his presence completely. Instead, I focus on what’s important, my little angel. I smile, showing her it’s ok, I want to let her know that whatever happens, I’m always on her side. “Let’s get you home.” I scoop her up, not caring if it’s ‘public worthy’ for this kind of scene, and snuzzle her to my chest. Then I turn towards the car and drop her off with the nanny waiting patiently inside.

“Sweetheart, we’ll talk about what happened when I get home — but it’s gonna be ok... ok?”

“Ok.” She pecks my cheek and climbs in the car.

Knowing that my dumpling’s safe, I turn around and rejoin the event. I told myself not to, but I can’t help it. My gaze shifts to Ava and George, and they’re in their own little world, locked in conversation, making eye contact —with laughter sparking between them. Damn, it hits me like a ton of bricks, jealousy surging through my veins. I know I don’t have a claim on her, but we do have a history, and I can’t stand to watch another man entertain her.

Ava looks up towards me, and for a short-lived moment, our eyes lock. Her eyes flicker for a second before her smile fades, looking like she’s just seen a ghost. I take a step up the stairs leading to the entrance to see her eyes grow wide, colder with every step. A knot twists in my chest, and a nagging sense of something being off, pulls at me.

It stings like hell seeing her with George, but what's really getting to me is how she's actively avoiding me. And why is she looking at me like that? Am I overthinking this? Not able to withstand her intense glare any longer, I stride toward them, every step brimming with agitation.

"Ava, George, looks like you two are having a good time," I remark, my voice steady, though my clenched fists betray my inner turmoil.

Her shoulders stiffen; she doesn't even try to smile. She didn't expect me to come. For a second, George just looks between us, confusion on his face, before stretching his hand to me. I take the hand but keep my eyes on Ava.

She takes a deep breath before she speaks, "George was just telling me about the crazy experiences he's had with clients at his law firm. I won't ever be bored if I end up interning there," she says, her gaze avoiding mine. George, ever the astute observer, attempts to ease the tension with a friendly nod. "Yeah. Just the same old stories, you know." I narrow my eyes slightly as I search her face, the hurt now undeniable. There's something she's keeping from me. Something that gnaws at me, and I don't want to waste time with small talk, so I get straight to the point. "Ava, we need to talk." My voice is firm. I don't exactly like George right now, but I'm grateful he can take a hint. He nods. "I'll catch up with you guys, there's a few people I need to talk to," and steps away.

I move towards her, and she takes a step back, her body language defensive. Our eyes lock, and the agony in her gaze

is unmistakable. She looks towards the door where Zoe just exited and then back to me.

“Who was that?”

“She nods behind me, but I don’t need to look back. I think I know who she’s referring to. That’s my mother and daughter, and my—“ I stop myself before I say my father because it’s pretty obvious who he is if that’s my mother. Her face blanches, and I wonder what’s wrong. The only reason I can think of is.... is that what this is about? My daughter? That I didn’t tell her about Zoe? Is that why she’s looking at me like I’ve committed a war crime? She mutters, “I can’t believe this. I can’t do this right now.” “Wait, I was going to tell you about it?” I would have told her about Zoe eventually if we’d had more time together. We just never defined what we had, and now I’m not even sure where we stand.

“Of course, you were.” Her words are like venom, and for a second, I don’t understand why.

“Ava—“

“Don’t take a step closer to me right now. Don’t touch me.” She pulls her hand away.

“What is going on?” Before I can react, she’s gone. My neck heats up, and the room closes in around me—the lingering irritation casts a shadow over my night. I don’t see her for the rest of the night. And by the time I get home, I’m contemplating whether to send her a text. But thinking about the look on her face, I know this isn’t a conversation to be had over the phone.

I need to see Ava in person.

The next day, I walk through the ivy-covered archway of the University with my resignation letter tucked away in my briefcase, determined to do this. What happened last night gnaws at me, but I have to get this out of the way first. Teaching here was a *second chance*, a way to make amends for past mistakes. But now, I have to let it go. I still don't know if it's possible to move on from what happened with Sarah. All I know now is that with or without Ava, she's gone. And the only way for me to gain an ounce of redemption is to continue to be the best father to Zoe I can be. I knock on the door, and a stern voice calls, "Come in." Dean Walter looks up, his piercing eyes give me a knowing look. A thin smile forms on his lips.

"I was really hoping you wouldn't go through with this, Drake. You're here for the resignation, aren't you?"

"Unfortunately so, sir. It's been a long time coming."

He leans back in his chair, studying me intently. Then leans forward defeatedly. "Very well, son. Since we can't be going around in circles, and I trust your judgment," he pulls out some papers from beneath a pile of books. "I'll need you to fill out the resignation form." I nod and retrieve the paperwork from my briefcase. My mind races with thoughts of Ava. I can't let our sexual relationship jeopardize her future. However, with my resignation, it should no longer be an issue. Just as I'm about to sign my name at the bottom, Dean Walter interrupts me.

“That reminds me. Did you tell Ava Miller about your resignation?” I glance up, my curiosity piqued. “I don’t think I’ve told anyone. Why?” He leans forward, folding his hands on his desk. “Well, she asked to be reassigned to a new project supervisor.” My heart skips a beat. Ava’s quitting me? I set my pen down, unable to hide my concern. “Did she give a reason why?”

“It seems you’re not the only one who states personal reasons when making their decisions. I’m not privy to the details,” he shrugs, “but I wanted to inform you since you were overseeing her work.”

What the hell is going on with Ava?

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

AVA



ONE MOMENT, I'M FINE, scanning the crowd and notice Drake, and as if my night couldn't get any more bizarre, seconds later, he's with my family's arch nemesis, and I'm left shaken to the core, unraveling emotions I thought were buried years ago.

Daniel Armstrong, standing amidst the sophisticated gathering as if he belongs in this world of power and privilege. Daniel Strong, the man who's haunted my dreams and fueled my relentless pursuit of redemption, is here. It's as if fate is toying with me in a twisted tapestry of connections.

But the turmoil in my chest is nothing compared to the feeling of realizing the truth. My heart races and my breath catches in my throat as I make the connection. Daniel Armstrong is Drake's father—the man whose actions brought down my family's law firm, the man who shattered our lives, is standing just feet away. As the puzzle pieces fall painfully into place,

the clarity is too much to bear. I stand, a silent observer of the event, my gaze fixed on Daniel Armstrong. How could he be so nonchalant, so detached from all the destruction he's caused?

Shock and disbelief hit me like a tidal wave like the ground under my feet shifted, and I'm struggling to find my balance.

"Hello, beautiful." A voice says behind me, just in time. The interruption brings me back to reality, I pull myself together. George smiles, his blue eyes bring a momentary sense of relief. I mutter a response.

"Hello, George." I fail at sounding OK, and his eyebrows crease in worry.

"Are you OK?"

"I am. It's just being in these crowds, not my cup of tea, you know.

"Tell me about it," he replies, launching into conversation. I don't know if he's trying to distract me or if he really can't see that I'm falling apart. Disgusted, I catch eyes with Drake, his gaze intensifying as he cuts through the crowd. Strolling up the stairs, he says, "Ava, George, looks like you two are having a good time." My body stiffens, and I cringe, ignoring his greeting. George walks away, obviously uncomfortable. Drake stares at me, confused, and even though I wasn't ready to hear him say it, there was a part of me that already knew Daniel Armstrong, aka Daniel Strong, is Drake's father. I can't believe the man who's ruined my family is related to the man

standing right in front of me. Drake's face creases, but I look away and say.

"I can't believe this."

"Wait, I was going to tell you about it."

I'm filled with hurt, betrayal and pain so deep it bubbles to the surface. How can he stand there and say he was going to tell me?

"Of course you were," I spit out. Bitterness, anger, and rage consume me. Tears blur my vision, and I turn to walk away. Desperate to hide my emotions, I take a deep, shaky breath, turn and walk briskly through the crowd without stopping—trying to get as far from him as I can. My heart's throbbing with a pain I've never felt before, and I can't help but second-guess every damn choice I've ever made. *I can't breathe.* Desperation kicks me into high gear, and I push through the swanky venue, past all the chatty guests, until I hit the sweet release of the parking lot.

Without much grip on consciousness, I dial Daphne's number. "Hey hey heyyyyyy," she starts.

"Come...come get me," I say. My breaths come in rapid, shallow bursts, and my vision blurs with tears.

"I'm five minutes away," she replies rapidly.

Five minutes.

I stand there waiting for what seems to be the longest moment of my life, and then my girl appears like a lifeline amidst the

chaos. Daphne rushes over, concern etched on her face as she takes in my distressed state.

“Ava, what’s wrong? You’re shaking,” she says in a soothing tone. I cling to her, my fingers trembling as I try to find my voice. “Daphne, I... I saw him. Daniel Armstrong is here, at this party.”

“What?”... her eyes widen because she gets the significance.

“Ava...girl, slow down — take a deep breath...relax, or you’re gonna have a panic attack.” Following her guidance, I try to regain control over my racing heart. She starts driving and puts down the windows. The cool air fills my lungs, gradually steadying my breathing. Once the panic subsides, I finally find the words to explain. “Daphne, Daniel Armstrong... he’s Drake’s father. Her expression shifts from concern to disbelief. “Are you sure, Ava?”

I nod, my voice trembling. “I saw them together. Drake and his father. And it all clicked. The Armstrongs, the law firm scandal, everything.” Daphne’s eyes narrow, “Oh my God... Ava, I’m so sorry. What are you going to do?”

“I don’t know. I can’t think about that right now,” I say, gazing out the window. *How can I be with someone whose family’s responsible for my family’s downfall?*

“Ava...how did you miss that? Aren’t their last names the same?”

“You know what, Daph, I don’t know...I didn’t put two and two together. I mean, I knew his last name was Strong because

of the news, but I didn't know his relationship to Drake. I never looked further into it.

“Holy shit, I'm sorry, but this is a crazy fucking story.

“Seriously.”

“Let's get you home, OK?” I shake my head. “No, Daphne, I think I need a drink.”

She nods without a word, and even though I know she may want to protest, she doesn't. She drives to our favorite spot. And we find a dimly lit corner, the soft hum of conversation and clinking glasses filling the air. Daphne orders a couple of cocktails, and I watch as the amber liquid swirls in my glass. The world outside feels distant, like a foggy dream I can't quite grasp.

The first sip burns as it goes down, but I welcome the sensation. It's a distraction, something to divert my thoughts from the painful truth. Daphne tries to keep my attention, but my mind is overwhelmed by a tsunami of emotions.

As the night goes on, the drinks flow more freely. Numbness creeps in, softening the sharp edges of my distress. The laughter and chatter around us become a blur in the background. Daphne keeps a close watch on me, clearly concerned. It's way past midnight when the alcohol hits. Hard. My emotions, normally kept in check, now spill over. I reach for my phone, the screen swimming before my eyes as I compose a message to Drake.

“What are you doing?” I hear Daphne ask.

“I hate u,” I type, my fingers clumsy on the screen. The words are a cruel reflection of my pain, the anger I can’t contain any longer. Daphne watches, shocked, and before she reaches for me, I hit send, my heart pounding with instant regret as the message disappears into the digital ether. Tears well up in my eyes, with a mixture of sadness, anger, and alcohol-induced despair. “He won’t understand,” she says, trying to console me.

“I don’t care,” I mumble in response, my voice slurred. “I can’t... I can’t deal with this anymore.”

“OK, baby. It’s time to go home.”

With Daphne’s help, I stumble out of the bar, my vision swimming as we step into the car. I realize all she’s had all night is a bottle of water as she watched me wallow in self-pity. The night air is cool against my flushed skin as I lean against her for support. The weight of my emotions presses down on me, and I can’t help but wonder how everything unraveled so quickly.

When we get back to my apartment, I’m a complete mess. Daphne helps me to my bed, and I crumple into a puddle of sadness. My phone buzzes with a reply from Drake, but I’m not in any state to read it, let alone respond.

Daphne stands over me like a guardian angel, her comforting words muffled by my drunken state. I drift off to sleep with the burden of my intoxicated choices weighing heavily on my heart, uncertain of what the morning will bring.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

DRAKE



STEPPING INTO THE SCHOOL, I'm preoccupied, trying to determine what makes me feel worse. Ava's text two nights ago or the reason for Zoe's school meeting today.

I can't believe my daughter's getting bullied. I can't believe she was involved in a fight, and now I have to face the parents responsible for the little shit troublemaker.

Inside the principal's office, my jaw clenches, and my patience wears thin. A man and a woman are seated at the table, with the principal at the head. Their expressions remain stoic, not offering enough remorse to ease my anger. I notice Zoe, her eyes downcast, guilt hanging around her like a cloud. The other girl sits next to her, head held high.

"Mr. Armstrong, welcome," the principal greets. "Please, have a seat."

I respond with a nod and take the chair across from the parents. The principal begins the meeting going over the incident involving Zoe and the other student. My frustration builds, and I just get more pissed thinking about this whole situation.

“You need to tell your daughter that it’s not OK to make fun of other people,” I say, which is the longest statement I’ve made since the meeting started.

Mr. and Mrs. Mitchell, the parents of the other girl, exchange looks, and then Mr. Mitchell offers an apology that rings hollow.

“Katie is usually very sweet. I’m sure she wouldn’t have done that without being provoked. But we will talk to her and make sure it doesn’t happen again.”

Anger rises in the pit of my stomach. “Your daughter’s bullying is unfounded and inexcusable.”

I’m trying to be as calm as I can, but my patience is already at its limit, and when Mr. Mitchell attempts to downplay his daughter’s actions, something snaps in me.

“This isn’t something to be taken lightly,” I interject, my voice taut with anger. “My daughter was bullied. That’s what it is. It’s not just about apologies; your daughter has to understand that emotional abuse is just as bad as a physical assault. And you need to be ashamed for not teaching your kid that not everyone is the same, so she doesn’t make fun of people.”

Mrs. Mitchell, who had earlier attempted to placate me with a soft-spoken apology, has changed her strategy to a more aggressive one. “And your daughter has to understand that retaliating by attempting to burn someone with a hot drink is inexcusable.”

The anger I’ve been suppressing since last night simmers at the surface, threatening to boil over.

“Under no circumstance would I allow this to repeat itself. Even if it means advocating for disciplinary action for both girls,” I snap, my tone sharp and unforgiving. “Was Katie also suspended?”

The tension in the room escalates, my outburst setting the tone for a heated exchange. I can see the principal struggling to maintain control as tempers flare.

“Can we all please just calm down?” She says, but I’m already on my feet.

I can feel my frustration mounting. In the end, that meeting did squat except crank up the tension and leave a pile of unresolved grudges.

I take a deep breath, referring to everyone. “I think we should reschedule this meeting. I don’t think I’m in the right state of mind to have this conversation.” I add a few apologies and head out with Zoe. I drop her off in class with a kiss on her cheek and a reassuring look into her eyes.

Leaving the school, I’m torn between Zoe’s well-being and the damn chaos in my own life. I step outside into the harsh

sunlight and can't help but think, everything is spiraling out of control.



Although the university is the last place I want to be right now, I have to pick up the remnants of my time as an honorary professor. The fiasco of yesterday's meeting still echoing in my head, my nerves rubbed raw from the confrontation with those people and, of course, the other obvious situation.

Entering the building, the echoes of my footsteps seem to mock me. The halls are empty, a stark contrast to the energy they held the last time I was here. One of the law professors is having a book launch, and I'm sure that's where everybody is.

I manage to slip out of the faculty room without being noticed, thankful I don't have to deal with any questions about my resignation. Almost out of the building, I spot her...Ava, standing at the end of the hallway. I can't figure out how she's feeling. My heart pounds in my chest, and my feet take me to her without a second thought.

"Ava," I murmur, my voice heavy with longing, as I reach out for her.

But she recoils, shrinking away from my touch. The hurt in her eyes strikes me like a dagger to the heart.

"Hello, Mr. Armstrong."

She spits my last name with so much bitterness that my eyes widen. Is she trying to put distance between us? To put on a

façade because we're in school or to remind me that I'm a father?

I attempt to bridge the gap, to understand, but the words that escape my mouth are laced with frustration. "Is it really that bad that I didn't tell you I had a daughter?"

Her eyes briefly register confusion, and then slowly, they ignite with anger as she interrupts me. "Is that what you think this is about? The fact that you're a single father?" She seethes.

I nod, my assumptions weighing heavily on my shoulders. Now, I'm really confused. "I thought you were angry because of Zoe. You've been acting this way since you saw us together that night."

Ava's laughter is bitter, a harsh reminder of my ignorance. "Mr. Armstrong, you have no idea, do you?"

She levels a penetrating gaze at me before delivering heavy words. "To save us both this drama. Why don't you Google your last name and mine in the same search to see what I'm talking about?"

The words hang in the air, a challenge I can't ignore. Calmly, I pull her into a lecture room and close the door behind us. The last time I did something like this, she was shaking in orgasm, her fingers buried in my hair, and her legs wrapped around my waist. The contrast between the two situations is palpable.

I typed her family's name into the search engine. The results that populate the screen are a damning revelation.

I'm hardly shocked by the extent of the scandal, but I can't fucking believe it has to do with Ava. I mean, honestly, what are the chances another one of Daniel Strong's shit storms spills over onto someone else I care about. The pain and betrayal etched in Ava's eyes are suddenly crystal clear.

Before I can process the magnitude of it all, Ava turns on her heel and walks away, leaving the door open and her footsteps echoing down the empty hallway. The truth has unraveled right in front of me, exposing my father and the dark secrets of my family while I'm left standing there, grappling with the reality of our tangled lives.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

AVA



MY LIFE'S A WHIRLWIND of emotions I can't escape. Drake's father's actions have cast a long shadow over my existence, one that now affects my relationship with Drake. I didn't expect to see him this soon, not after revealing the painful truth about my family's scandal and his family's twisted involvement in it.

So when I step out of my classroom a week later and I find him standing there, I'm taken aback. He's dressed casually in blue jeans and a white shirt, two buttons undone. I hate myself briefly that I still find him as attractive and breathtaking as I always have. Of course, a few students glance at him, but he keeps his eyes on me, and I hate that it makes my stomach flutter. I should hate this man.

Why?

It's his father who hurt my family, not him. But I shake away the voice of reason in my head. If his father did it, it's as good as if he did it too. I walk faster, attempting to walk past him. A few of the students greet him, and I plan to use the distraction to pass by. However, the second I walk past him, he reaches out to me.

"Can we talk, Ava?" he asks, his voice laced with a vulnerability I've never seen in him.

My heart aches at the sight of him, the memories of our stolen moments together flooding back. But I can't let myself be swayed so easily. "I don't think there's anything to talk about, Mr. Armstrong."

He cringes at the name but doesn't let go of my hand. He takes a step closer, his presence commanding yet gentle. "Let's find a quiet place to talk, please."

Not because I'm still affected by him, but because I don't want to draw too much attention to myself, I nod and pull my hand away. "The legal aid clinic should be unoccupied right now," I say, and we head there.

I order my heart to be still as he closes the door behind us. I'm not going to be affected by his presence or the fact that we're alone here. I'm going to stay on track. Hang on to my anger and not allow my heart to be swayed.

He stands by the door. "I owe you an apology. First of all, for assuming the worst about your feelings toward Zoe. I never should've jumped to conclusions."

His words touch a raw nerve, the pain of that night still fresh in my memory. “OK?”

His shoulders slump, a weary sigh escaping his lips. “And then about my dad,” he adds, “Ava, you have every right to be angry. I’m the last person to tell you not to be. My father is...a complicated man. He doesn’t mind hurting people to get what he wants, and I know that.”

Although I’m trying not to empathize with him, I can’t ignore the pain in his eyes. It looks like that of a victim.

“My father’s actions have hurt a lot of people. Including my family. Me, Zoe, and Sarah, Zoe’s mother...”

He trails off, his words a vague allusion to a tragic past. It’s a side of him I’ve never seen before, and it leaves me torn between empathy and anger.

“Why are you here, Drake?” I demand, my voice trembling with emotion.

He takes a step closer, closing the gap between us. “Because I’m selfish. Because I don’t want us to be like this because of a man that hurt us both. Because I want to be here for you. Because I want to find a way to heal your breaking heart. I can’t bear the thought of us being apart, Ava. It’s too much.”

I want to push him away, to guard my heart from the turmoil he brings into my life, but his closeness weakens me. Drake leans in, his lips brushing against mine in a soft, tentative kiss.

It’s as if a dam bursts within me, unleashing a torrent of emotions I can no longer contain. The anger, the hurt, the

longing—all of it crashes over me in a wave of desire and vulnerability. I respond to his kiss with a hunger that surprises us both, our lips locked in a desperate embrace.

When we finally pull away, our breaths ragged, he looks at me with a sincerity that pierces my defenses. “Ava, I want to try and fix what’s been broken.”

Tears glisten in my eyes as I consider his plea. “I don’t know, Drake. I need time to think.”

He nods, his gaze unwavering. “Take all the time you need. But please know that I’m willing to do whatever it takes to make things right.”

Just as I turn to walk out, I say what has been on my mind for a while. “I can’t believe you thought I was upset you had a daughter.” I think about the glimpse of the little girl I saw at the dinner event, and a pang of hurt shoots through me. “She seems sweet... It would’ve been nice to meet her at some point.”

Drake’s eyes brighten up slightly. “How about next week? She’s a bundle of joy, I’m sure you’ll love her.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

DRAKE



WHAT AM I DOING?

Although the last conversation with Ava felt like it ended in a stalemate, there was one thing we agreed on regardless of what happens. So here I am, standing under a tree at a park so she can meet my angel.

Honestly, the whole thing makes me nervous. It's been just the two of us for so long.

And I don't introduce Zoe to just anyone. I've never really considered anyone in my life outside of my family important enough to meet her. So, this meeting might not look like it, but it's a big deal to me.

When Ava arrives, she's glowing, looking delicious, with her plump breasts spilling over the top of her orange and white polka-dotted halter dress.

I point her out to Zoe as she approaches us, and she looks up at Ava, her head tilted. “Yeah, I like you.”

Ava’s eyebrows shoot up, and I’m sure mine do too.

What is Zoe talking about?

“I read your lips when you were coming. You said, ‘Hope she likes me’.”

Ava smiles and bends so she’s at eye level with Zoe. “So, you read my lips? If you did, you’d also hear that I said I hope she likes Princess Fiona.”

Zoe’s eyes light up immediately. “That’s my favorite princess!” she says, lisping from the space of her missing tooth.

Ava lets out an intentionally dramatic breath, and her face turns serious again. “One more important question. Pizza or burgers?”

“That’s an easy one,” Zoe rolls her eyes, a smile on her face.

Ava’s face stretches too, and they say, “Pizza!” at the same time.

“Yay!” Ava does a little dance and Zoe giggles. “Nice to meet you. Ava”

Zoe stretches out a hand for a shake. “I’m Zoe. Want to catch butterflies with me?”

“Uhm,” Ava says with her hand on her chin. Then she bends and whispers something in Zoe’s ears that causes her eyes to widen. Zoe’s eyes sparkle with excitement.

“Really?” Zoe asks.

That’s when I step in. “What are you two up to?” My voice carries faux suspicion, I can’t help the smile stretching across my face. I didn’t realize how much I needed them to get along until I see the mutual look of mischief on their faces.

Ava’s smile stretches. “I may have a few ideas on how we can spend the day.”

By a few ideas, Ava meant her and Zoe gang up to defeat me in every game —tug of war, catch, and their planned sneak attacks, tackling me to the ground. And every time they win, I’ve got to pay them five bucks.

Now, I’m 60 dollars in the hole and I’ve been assigned the duty of getting the girls ice cream with their winnings. With their ice creams in hand, I catch a bit of what Ava is telling Zoe.

“So, Remember, Zoe,” Ava says, crouching down to meet her gaze, “bullies want to see you upset. The best way to deal with them is to stay confident and show them that their words don’t bother you.”

Zoe nods enthusiastically, as a testament to the bond she’s forming with Ava.

“I get it, Ava. Use my words, not my fists.”

Ava smiles warmly. “That’s it. And if you ever need someone to talk to or help with anything, you can always come to me, OK?”

Zoe's eyes light up, and she throws her arms around Ava. "OK. And thanks for helping me defeat Dad."

Ava hugs Zoe back. I stand there, happy for the bond two important people in my life have started, and for a moment, part of me wants to know what took me so long.

Zoe suddenly pipes up. "I have a princess Fiona doll. You'll love her. Do you want to see her? She's at home so you gotta come with us. Pleeeeaase."

Before Ava responds, Zoe turns to me and asks, "Dad, can Ava come home with us please?"

Ava looks up at me, and I can't say no to both of them. We hop in the car and head home. As we enter the house, Zoe eagerly leads Ava to her room to show off her prized toy collection.

I linger in the hallway, watching them together while Zoe plays with her Barbies and stuffed animals. As the afternoon turns to evening, I have Claudia prepare a simple dinner for the three of us before she heads home. When it's time for Zoe to go to bed, she makes Ava tell her a story about Princess Fiona before she falls asleep.

"Wow! That's next-level *Super Nanny* skills you've got there." I say as Ava steps out of Zoe's room.

She closes the door quietly behind her. "Shh...She basically passed out. I think I went too hard on the games." Ava giggles

"You went too *hard* on me too," I reply in a husky tone, and what was supposed to be a playful response comes off as a

sexual innuendo—making it hard for me to mask the hunger coursing through me.

The room ignites like a match to gasoline.

Ava and I haven't touched each other for weeks —that's the longest we've been apart. It's getting harder to ignore.

The rising and falling of her chest increases, and her lips part slightly. I can tell I'm not the only one who feels it, and with all the playing and touching, it's heightened to its tipping point. Now as we look at each other, basking in this moment, my cock begs to be fed. Tonight, I'm no longer her professor, and she's not my student. There's nothing stopping us from tearing into each other, but we're paralyzed, neither of us moves at the realization that our families are enemies.

We shouldn't want each other, but we do. And right now, we're just Ava and Drake.

“Thanks for letting me meet Zoe and for letting me into your amazing home. It's gorgeous.” Her voice is soft and sweet.

“Thank you... she's had a lot of fun.”

The distance between us is almost nonexistent. I'm breathing her air, surrounded by her intoxicating scent, feeling her warmth.

She exhales shakily.

“Is it wrong if I say, regardless of everything, I still want you?”

I look into her eyes to see the desire that's mirrored in mine. "I want you, Ava. I want to be inside you right now."

And that's all it takes for us to cross the line. She reaches for me at the same time I grab the back of her neck and pull her to me, our lips colliding. We're a mess of greedy, desperate touches— my hands are in her hair, around her throat, then it goes down her delectable ass, gripping, squeezing, and pulling, enjoying the sounds she makes at the back of her throat.

While our mouths clash, I lift her, bridal style, lead her to my room, and lock the door behind us.

Inside the room, the kiss intensifies, a mess of warm, wet tongues and lips. She sucks my tongue, and it goes straight to my cock. In minutes, our clothes are off, and I'm ready to sink myself into her.

She's naked on her knees, waiting for me with ready eyes. For a minute, I take her in, from her perky breast topped by pink nipples, down her beautiful stomach and beautiful mound - willing, ready, and wet for me.

"My good, perfect girl." I walk behind her, still taking her in. "You look so sexy right now."

I help her up, bend her over the edge of the bed, slide down the back of her ass and bury my tongue squelching and slipping and lapping in and out her plush pussy from behind, preparing her to be pounded.

“Does that feel good kitten? Do you like it when I eat your pussy like this?” Her body vibrates, and her pussy quivers. “Ahh yes, Drake soo good.” Plunging my tongue in and out of her opening, Ava pants and moans. myself inside her.

We both moan as I glide into her warm wetness.

“Take my cock in your mouth Ava.” On command, Ava’s beautiful backside is erect, she shakes her auburn locks, gathering them in a top bun, flaunting her deliciously soft round curves as she turns to face me. She slides to her knees, looking up at me teasingly.

“You want to fuck my mouth, professor,” she says, lettings out a soft mewl as she slides saliva up and down my straining cock. She widens her mouth, taking me all the way in as she sucks, popping her lip on and off my head as she strokes my length. My balls tighten.

“Ugh, damn, Ava, I’m rock hard for you baby. Take it all, honey.” Ava speeds up, forcing my dick till I hit the back of her throat, and quickens her pace, and I’m ready to come down her throat.... I’m right there as I fist her hair, controlling her paces as she cups and fondles my balls. Just before I let go, I pull Ava up onto my bed.

Her beautiful, wanting pussy is on full display. I work my straining cock inside her, fucking her wet, widened walls till she lets out a breathy squeal causing my balls to shrivel like raisins. Her pussy grabs my head just right, like an accordion at an Italian festival. I slide my thickness in and out of her. I gasp, jerking back, doing everything I can to hold on.

My breath ragged, and sweat streaming down my chest. I plow into her plump pussy pressing my pubic bone against her clit, as I rock her into submission. Ava's body convulses under me, her pussy grabbing back with every undulation as I crash in ecstasy, coming long and hard, filling every inch of her with my pent-up desires. I crash on her tits, loving how they feel pressed against my chest as our breathing stabilized. Ava rubs along my back as she purrs under me. I let out a breathy groan as the scent of her sweet essence and sex fills the air.

“You make me complete, kitten.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

AVA



MY EYES SHOOT OPEN, and it's pitch black. Panic surges through me for a minute as I can't tell where I am. But I instantly relax when familiar arms snake around me. Drake pulls me from behind against the warmth of his chest, his legs wrapped around mine. I wiggle my ass, snuggling into him, and whisper, "I think I should get going before Zoe wakes up."

"Is that the only reason you're trying to sneak out of my bed?" He mumbles into my shoulder.

"Drake, I don't know if—"

"Stay." That's all he needs to say, my body instinctively obeys, relaxing into his embrace.

For a moment, we both lie there, basking in the silence and the feeling of just being with each other. We're as close as possible, and it feels just right. I close my eyes, savoring his

presence, his breathing warm against my back, his arm around my waist, and his skin against mine. I wonder if it feels right for him. I wonder if this means as much for him as it does for me. I wonder—

“What’s going on in that mind of yours?” He grumbles teasingly.

I can’t help but crack a guilty smile, even though he can’t see it. I lick my lips, debating if I should tell him what I’m thinking about and risk messing up the moment. I let out a breath and finally air my curiosity.

“Where’s Zoe’s mom?”

He breathes out hard. And I know I hit a spot in him.

“It was an arranged marriage,” he starts softly and then pauses. In that delicate moment, I hold my breath, waiting for him to continue.

“It was just the way it was.” The bitterness in his voice is palpable. “Both of us were unhappy, but it was beyond us. Our families arranged it years before. I tried to make it work, but at the time, I was young, stupid and didn’t have the balls to buck against him. There was too much at stake, business-wise, and if I were to be completely honest, my greed is what kept me in it. Marrying the two families ensured our billionaire status as a couple. But it never felt right. We waited twelve years before we finally had Zoe. I thought it would make her happy. But instead, Sarah was even more troubled. I thought it was the kind that comes after having a baby. I didn’t know there was

more to it. She was going through so much, and I had no idea.”

I finally turn around to look at his eyes. He holds me, our bodies pressing into each other, and keeps speaking.

“I couldn’t get out of my head enough to notice until she was too far gone. I found out later she’d been struggling and managing depression for years, but after Zoe, she relapsed, and psychosis took over— she was never the same. They said it was related to the hormonal fluctuations, and I guess it was just all too much – never feeling understood, A miserable marriage, and having a baby to care for. She kept it all from me, so I didn’t know it was as bad as it was till it was too late.”

He lets out a deep sigh. It’s obvious this part of his life weighs heavily on him.

I slide my hand across his chest, rubbing the pain from his heart.

“Years went by,” he swallows. “But she needed more than therapy, and neither family would agree to the necessary inpatient treatment out of... fucking embarrassment.” He closes his eyes and takes in a deep breath, exhaling his frustration over me.

“So, my father contacted his family physician friend in an attempt to keep it all hidden from the public. The Doctor prescribed her a medication, and Sarah had a fatal reaction to it.

Tears well up, and my mouth falls open, “Oh my God, no, I’m so sorry.”

“After she ...after she was gone, I had to relearn how to parent, being both Mom and Dad to our baby girl. That’s why I stepped away from working in my practice and started at the university, so I could raise my daughter myself with as little help as possible. I guess it was my way of repenting for not doing everything I could to save her.

And I just couldn’t keep working like my father. It was like I was becoming more and more like him every day, and it disgusted me.”

“Drake.” I shake my head.

“I’ve been trying to escape from the past for so long, and wonder if things would have been different if—“

I cup his face with both hands, staring into his stormy gray eyes, hoping to bring him out of his head. I know how it feels to feel responsible for something life-changing, but nothing compares to something as heavy as this.

“Drake, you’re not the same man you were all those years ago. I know it, and I’m sure you know it too.” He lets out a deep breath.

“To be honest, I don’t know about that. I feel like I was just going through the motions until you fell into my life.”

My body warms from his words, but I don’t say anything, and he doesn’t expect me to. He places a kiss on my forehead, pulling me in tighter.

I take a deep breath, thinking about the weight he's been carrying, shocked by how he opened up, baring it at all. Closing my eyes, I bask in the feeling of being held and supported, and As I lay there content, an indescribable peace washes over me. I don't notice drifting back to sleep.

The distant clinking of pots and pans seeps into my consciousness, tugging me gently from my dreams.

I blink my eyes open slowly, adjusting to the soft light filtering through the windows.

The delicious aroma of food wafting through the air becomes more distinct. I sit up, stretching lazily—swing my legs over the edge of the bed and pad my way down the hall.

Drakes in the kitchen, looking sexy as ever, messed-up hair, in a white tank top and sweats, expertly navigating the space like a seasoned chef. My heart skips as I stare at his chest trailing to his rippled abs... my god. My body flushes again as I try not to notice the way his bulge bounces freely in his sweats.

“Hey, Sleeping Beauty, you're up,” he greets, flashing a warm smile as he flips a pancake.

“And you're making breakfast.”

“More like brunch.” He chuckles before coming over to kiss me. I melt into his essence.

“Brunch?”

“It's 1:00 pm. Zoe's off at school. You see, you didn't need to sneak out.” He winks, and I can't help but crack a smile.

“Mmm...smells delish.”

He leads me to a chair on the island, and I settle in, shaking my head in disbelief. “I don’t usually sleep this late. I’m not sure what happened.”

“Well, You’ve never been late for class, so that’s enough testimony for me.”

“Really.” I chide.

“What... I’m just saying.”

“Saying what, you don’t believe me.”

“No, I believe you.” his baritone laugh fills the room. ... And it hits me like a ton of bricks – I feel something amazing for this man. I can’t explain it all because I don’t think I’m ready to admit it to myself. He lays out the food on the sprawling marble countertop and joins me for our late breakfast. Seeing that smile still on his face, I decide not to address it. I won’t risk ruining what we have right now.

“So, have you met my replacement? Is he half as good as me?”

At that moment, I wonder what it’ll be like to say what’s on my mind, to just blurt out the words in my heart and my feelings for him. Instead, I shake my head and opt to answer his questions about our new professor, Professor Martin. He listens like I’m telling him about the most important thing in the world.

While I talk, his gray eyes bore into me. I realize I won’t be able to run away from the truth for much longer.

I’m in love with Drake Armstrong.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

DRAKE



THE MOMENT I STRIDE into my office, the rich scent of leather and the lingering echoes of success embrace me. My assistant, Emily, approaches me with a warm smile. “Good morning, Mr. Armstrong. Everything’s all set for today’s schedule.”

It’s been years since I’ve been here full-time. “Thank you, Emily, any matters that need my immediate attention?”

She glances at her notes, efficient as always. “We have a meeting with the Thompsons scheduled for later this morning.”

I also happen to know the Thompsons are VIP clients because I recognize the name.

I nod, replying coolly. “What time is the meeting?”

“In two hours, sir.”

“Sounds good...Is there anything else?”

“No, Sir.”

“Thanks, Emily. That’ll be all.”

Pressing the digital blinds, I refamiliarize myself with the space as they hum to life, revealing the city’s landscape below.

Trailing my hand, I dance

my fingers over the sleek, black table that runs along the center of the room.

Settling into my chair, I take in the opulence around me, a testament and a reminder that, despite the challenges I’ve incurred, I’m where I belong.

It’s good to be back.

The day unfolds in a whirlwind of legal consultations, negotiations, and drafting contracts. It feels good to be back, to immerse myself in the world I’ve loved for so long but never felt deserving of.

But as busy as the days have been, at every free moment, my mind drifts to Ava, and right now, I’m thinking of how it feels to have her in my life, to hold her in my arms. Knowing that if I had to make the choice right now, I’d let it all go if it meant I could hold her forever.

Emily pops in, pulling me out of my daze. Her eyes gleam with admiration as she says. “The Thompsons were able to settle the matter out of court.”

A sense of accomplishment washes over me, another reminder of why I chose this path, and despite the challenges, I'm back where I belong."

"Thank you, Emily. Please convey my thanks to the team as well."

She nods and exits.

The rest of the day passes in a blur, and soon, I'm in front of the low-fenced building of my daughter's school.

Zoe bolts out with a radiant smile, her eyes light with enthusiasm as she spots me. She gives me a great big hug before she hops into the car. I can tell from her every step that she's bubbling with excitement. Something good must have happened today, and I know I don't have to ask before she tells me.

"Hi, Dad!" she exclaims as I start the car.

"Hey there, pumpkin," I reply, trying to match her energy.

"How was your day?"

"It was great! Guess what?"

"What?"

"I spoke to Katie today."

The name Katie sends bells off in my head. "Katie? The girl who made fun of you?"

I frown, ready to defend my princess. I thought we decided the girls would be separated.

“I met her on the playground,” she says. Answering my confusion about how they met up. “She tried to bother me again today, but I handled it just like Ava told me. I stayed strong, and she backed off. And then I told her that if she’s nice to me, I’ll let her be my friend.”

Pride swells in me as I listen to her explain. I’d told my daughter to avoid the girl. But it seems that Ava’s guidance has an even better effect, and it feels good to hear that Zoe stood up for herself. “I didn’t let her words bother me because I am awesome!”

“You are... that’s fantastic, Zoe! I’m so proud of you, honey, and I know Ava will be too if she hears how brave you were.”

“Yeah! I can’t wait to tell Ava.” Zoe says, and then her voice shifts from excited to curious. “Dad? is Ava your best friend?”

It’s a simple question, but it sets my thoughts into a whirlwind. I know that Zoe is smart enough not to be deceived by a dismissive answer, so I choose my words carefully.

“Well, Ava is one of the very few people that I can talk to and be comfortable around. She listens to me and cares for me.”

“Just like she did with me,” Zoe chimes.

“Exactly.”

“So, she’s an... extra special friend?”

“Yes, sweetie. An extra, special friend,” I echo back.

However, all throughout the day, and even late at night when lying in bed, the silence of my home envelops me, Zoe’s

innocent question echoes in my mind.

What is Ava to me?

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

AVA



“**Y**OU’VE GOT THIS, AVA; you can do this.”

I stare at my books as the pressure of final exams looms over me. I try to convince myself one more time I can, indeed, do this. A soft knock on the door distracts me from my thoughts. A delivery man is holding out a little box, a cake and a bouquet of flowers. He announces, “Delivery for Ava.”

Curious, I sign for them. After closing the door, I take a minute to examine the box before opening it to reveal a beautiful diamond tennis bracelet with a card that reads:

“You’ve got this kitten. Ava, when I was your professor, I wasn’t at liberty to say, but now that I’m not, I can confidently tell you that you’re the smartest student I’ve taught. I have one hundred percent trust that you’ve got this. Knock those exams out of the park. - Drake.”

Holy shit... It's gorgeous. My heart flutters and heat engulfs my body. I don't know about you, but this is some gift for a professor to give to his student. Why would Drake give me such an expensive gift? Warmth spreads through my chest, a mixture of surprise and disbelief fills me. I place the cake down, and feeling an insurgence of happiness, I do a little dance, overwhelmed with excitement, I have to move the energy through me. I read the note over and over again and allow myself to be filled with the warm feeling that's spreading throughout my entirety.

I take out my phone with shaky hands and begin to type a thank you message to him. Maybe I could find time between studying so we can see each other, maybe at least talk...

The phone in my hand suddenly rings, startling me as the word 'Mom' appears on the screen. The timing is odd, and a flurry of emotions shoots through me...An eerie combination of shame, anxiety, fear, and guilt. I shouldn't be thinking about Drake; I shouldn't be fraternizing with the son of a man who ruined my family, especially not when the exams that may make or mar my life lie ahead. The phone is still ringing, and I take a deep breath before I pick it up.

"Hi, Mom."

"Hi, Sweetheart. I just wanted to wish you the best of luck on your exams. I know you'll do great." What should be an encouragement suddenly sounds like a forewarning.

"Thanks," I reply awkwardly. Talking to my mom is never awkward, even after the scandal, she was the one to make me

feel like we could still talk like friends. But today, things feel... tight.

“How’s everything going with you? Any updates on your internship or... anything else else you might want to share?”

The question lingers in the air, and I think of Drake and my feelings for him. But I stop short when I imagine how she’ll react to that.

“Nothing, everything’s going smooth in my personal life – school, internships, they’re all going well. Why?”

“Good, oh nothing... I just wanted to be sure,” she says. Then she clears her throat, and I know she’s about to say something serious. “You know, I was wondering if you know Daniel Strong’s real name is Daniel Armstrong.”

My heart slams violently against my rib cage. “Um, yeah, I know that.”

“And did you know his son is Drake Armstrong?”

If we were in person, she would immediately know that I was hiding something. My breathing accelerates, and the shaking in my hand increases. I place my phone on the table gently so I won’t drop it, then place the call on loudspeaker.

“Also, he’s over a decade older than you. Isn’t he?”

I swallow and try to make my tone light. “Yeah, mom. I know.” A nervous chuckle slips out of me. “Why are you asking me all this?” Even though she tries to keep her words airy like mine, I know they’re anything but.

“I saw you two interacting at the event, and I thought I’d mention it, that’s all.”

“You do know anyone having to do with Daniel Strong is this family’s enemy, right? Honey, please don’t be so chummy with him. It’s a bad look.”

I don’t know who uses the word enemy in this day and age, but I feel sick, like a heavy stone just settled in the pit of my stomach. Tears sting my eyes, and I close them shut.

Neither of us says anything on the call for a while before my mother clears her throat. “I just called to wish you good luck in your finals. I believe in you, Ava, your dad and I love you. He sends his regards.”

After the call, I find somewhere to sit because I suddenly feel drained of energy. The stone in my stomach is getting bigger until I feel like I physically can’t move.

It’s like the universe is trying to shove a cruel reminder that Drake and I could never be a thing in the real world.

As if my challenges weren’t enough, first, he was my professor, so we couldn’t be seen together. And just when he quit as my professor, I find out his father wrecked my family, not to mention, as my mother pointed out, he’s more than a decade older than me.

I lie on my side, thinking about everything. I don’t know I’m asleep until I jerk awake hours later. My stomach is still in knots, but the pain is even more intense now.

I place a hand on my abdomen, trying to make sense of the blinding pain and rush to the bathroom to empty the contents of my stomach.

When I'm done, I sit on the floor and try to catch my breath.

I wash my face in the sink, and I'm about to leave the bathroom when something catches my attention. My period calendar, I'm late.

My heart beats violently in my chest, and my breath hitches. No, it must have been something I ate. As I stare at the calendar, I gasp wide-eyed, then a giggle slips out of me, unexpected and unhinged, until I start laughing hysterically out loud, shaking my head at the idea.

No... I laugh.

What kind of crazy shit is this.

After staring at my period calendar for what seemed to be hours, I head to my study area and pick up my books, trying to keep it together instead of thinking up wild scenarios. But the thought won't leave my head.

There's no way.

Just to be sure, I jerk up from the bed, rush to Wal-Mart, and pick up a test. I know I can't be pregnant, but I just need to be sure. So, with the test in my hand, I head back to the toilet, pee on it and a few minutes later.

No way.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

DRAKE



I FEEL LIKE A superhero on a path of redemption, a man on a mission. Nervously, I drum my fingers against the steering wheel. After over an hour, I summon the courage to open the car door and step out.

As I walk through the graveyard, the sun hangs low in the sky, and the air is heavy with the scent of flowers and memories. This is long overdue; I need to do this for Zoe, Ava, and myself.

I find her grave adorned with fresh flowers, the name on the tombstone, “Sarah Kent,” she never took my name. With a deep breath, I say what’s been in my heart for a while. “Sarah, I’m sorry that our marriage caused you pain and that I wasn’t there when you needed me the most. For not seeing that you needed someone. I’ve carried the guilt for far too long. But right now, I feel much better, more alive.” I think about Ava.

“I feel like I can breathe again and that I deserve to be happy. I don’t want to let my past destroy that. I can’t.”

The words feel sincere, and they hang in the air as a strange sense of closure settles over me. I also thank her for birthing Zoe, a beautiful, confident, and smart little girl. “I promise to protect her.”

As I whisper my goodbyes and rise to my feet, I feel better, lighter, as if I’ve shed a heavy weight of guilt. I know where to go next; I have one more thing to do to get over my past.

With my mission in mind, I drive to the heart of Miami and enter the all-glass building where my father’s practice operates. I head straight to his office, ignoring the luxury around me. My father, a titan in the legal world, lounges in his high-backed chair, draped in success like a velvet robe. My admiration for him has long faded.

His grin widens like a Cheshire cat, “The last time you left here, I thought you’d never return.”

“I thought so too,” I reply, placing a brown file on the table between us.

He looks at the file with skepticism and asks, “What is it?”

“I’m giving up my shares in your company and terminating any further dealings.”

His brows furrow, eyes narrowing in disbelief. “You’re rejecting this legacy.”

“Because I know what this legacy stands on, and I don’t want to be part of it. I’m not claiming to be a perfect man or a saint,

but the things you've done to get here are just wrong.”

He leans forward, his face hardening. “You think it's that simple, Drake? This is the world we live in. You can't be a success without making hard choices.”

“I'm not looking the other way anymore. And I've caught a glimpse of what your so-called hard choices entail, Dad. It's ugly and unfair. My wife lost her life because of it.”

As I stood there facing my father, the room filled with an uncomfortable silence. His stern expression revealed a hint of regret, but he spoke with gruff confidence, “Drake, I gotta say, I'm genuinely sorry. We loved Sarah, but you know, having her committed... it just wouldn't have looked good for the family.”

I clenched my jaw, the memory of her suffering burning within me. “I don't give a damn, Dad. Sarah needed professional help, not just pills shoved at her.”

He leaned forward, the room practically vibrating with tension. “Drake, you know how it is, we have a responsibility... a reputation to uphold, we do what it takes, and we reach the top.”

Is he fucking saying what I think he's saying?

And more determined than ever, I look him straight in the eye and tell him.

“I'm done with all of it... your reputation, your responsibilities. I'm going my own way, where integrity means something.”

My father leans closer, his voice low and demanding. “You might not like it, but you don’t really have a choice here, Drake. You’re taking over this company.”

I locked my gaze with his, my tone firm. “No. I’m not.”

The tension is so thick a suffocating silence blankets the room. I square off against my father, his angry gaze drills into mine, probing and calculating.

He shoots me a cold and cynical smile. It might have scared the younger me, but now, I maintain eye contact, letting him know he doesn’t scare me.

“You know I’ve been keeping tabs on you.”

“What?”

“You’re my investment, and I always protect what’s mine. Anyway, I see you’ve been spending time with the Miller’s daughter. Is that what this is? You’re giving up your birthright for a roll in the hay? C’mon son, you can do better than that.”

My fists clench involuntarily, but I remind myself not to lose my cool.

His laughter is bitter, laced with arrogance. “You’re still so naive,”

“I’d rather be naive than become another version of you. Goodbye, Dad.”

Without waiting for his response, I turn and walk away, the heavy oak door shutting behind me with finality.

I'm about to step into my car when I get an email from the man I just walked out on. It's titled "Ava Miller." Seeing her name in the subject line makes my heart skip a beat. What the hell does my old man have on her?

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

AVA



*T*ODAY IS THE DAY,

I stare at my reflection in the blue and yellow gown. I'm in the bathroom after walking the stage, in my graduation cap and gown, trying to be present in the moment.

My heart is aching, I should be out there with my family, but I don't have it in me to put on a smile.

Washing my hands at the sink, all I can think about are those two pink lines.

When someone else comes into the bathroom, it takes me a minute before I recognize her—Monica, the girl from the mall, the student who snitched on Professor Morales.

“Congratulations.” She smiles at me, and I smile and tell her the same back.

I'm drying my hands when she says. "I hope it works out for you—you know."

I cock my head, not knowing what she's talking about. She continues. "I didn't want to say anything because we were still in school, but I've noticed you and Professor Armstrong. I was in a relationship with a professor once too. It didn't work out, but I'm rooting for you ...I hope yours does."

My face goes white. I stand there stunned for a minute as my brain processes what she just said. So, Monica was the student involved, not the one who reported.

As I walk out of the bathroom, her words echo in my mind: *I hope it works out for you.*

Instinctively, my hand goes to my stomach and the piece of Drake that I have growing inside me. After five tests, a week of denial, and three panic attacks later, I'm only just accepting the fact that I'm pregnant.

Guilt pricks at my chest, and my eyes sting. I think about going back to meet my family, knowing that I'm not just pregnant, but growing in me is a mixture of two rival bloodlines. I know it sounds dramatic, but it's the most accurate description I can think of.

It's also a beautiful life, the offspring of a man I love.

A man my family hates.

I tear up even more and wipe my eyes. I've been crying so easily these days. Maybe it's the hormones.

Or maybe crying is the only control I have over my situation.

Before I think too much of it, I grab my phone to send him a text, when it vibrates with a text from Daphne. “*Should I send out a search party?*” the text reads.

I smile softly and text my reply. “I don’t feel well, but I’ll be at my graduation dinner tonight.”

Her reply comes almost immediately: “*I can’t wait!*”

I leave the bathroom and head straight to my apartment. Just as I climb the stairs, in front of my door stands Drake.

My heart skips a beat. And even though he’s no longer my professor, I look around like a criminal about to be caught.

“Congratulations.” He has a big grin on and an even bigger bouquet in his hand, which causes me to blush. I still haven’t thanked him properly for the beautiful bracelet I’m wearing.

The second my eyes meet his, I can tell he looks different.

It takes me a second to place what it is. He seems happier, freer, less irritated, less like the grumpy professor I met all those years ago. His smile is light and easy, and his shoulders are relaxed like a weight has been lifted off them.

“I’m proud of you, Ava. You did it.” He smiles, handing me a box. I can’t guess what’s inside, but it’s too big to be another bracelet.

I return his smile and take the box from him. “It’s a cake?” You’re gonna make me fat,” I tease and motion for him to come inside.

He laughs and takes my hand, leading me to the living room. “I just want it to be our thing, you know. I’ll get you a cake for every milestone you cross. That way, you’ll know that I’m always celebrating you.”

When he says ‘*our*,’ my heart skips, and my head spins like a pinwheel. Will he still love me the same when I tell him I’m carrying his baby? Is that something he’s open to? I mean, he is already a dad, but will he want me...

Will he want us?

I look at the cake to distract myself, “There’s also the risk of getting fat, you know.” I feign a smile.

“Fat no... Come on, you’re beautiful no matter what, where’s that positivity I’m used to.”

“Sorry, It was a bad attempt at making a joke.”

He cocks his head. “Are you OK?”

Those gray eyes look like they see through me.

For a second, I almost tell him everything – *I love you so much, I’m just so scared to be without you. And by the way, I’m Pregnant with your baby.*

I can’t imagine that’ll go over well, so I decide to tell a half-truth. I sigh. “I’m just stressed about a lot of things, you know. Life after graduation and what might come with it. It just feels like after every challenge, there’s a bigger one to overcome, and I’m wondering when it ends. Or if it ever ends.”

He pulls me in for a hug, running his hand gently from my hair to my back. His arms feel so good around me, and I allow myself to melt in the comfort of his embrace.

“I know, it’s overwhelming. But I’m here for you. I never want you to feel alone. I’m on your side every step of the way, and I’ll hold you like this whenever things get hard.”

I freeze, paralyzed by his words, and inhale deeply.

Is Drake confessing his love? My heart is a bass drum in my chest right now.

His chest rumbles as he says, “Ava, there’s something I need to tell you.” I look up at his eyes. “When things started between us, and I couldn’t stand to be without you, I tried to convince myself it was physical, but you and I both know that’s an insult to what we have. My need for you is more than just physical. I want...”

I panic and place a hand on him to stop him. “Drake.”

“Wait, Ava, please. I need to let you know just how much I care for you. I’m at my happiest when you’re with me. You make sense in a way nothing else does, you’re the only thing I constantly think about.”

Tears prick my eyes, and I want to look away, but I’m trapped in pools of gray. He continues speaking. “I see you, Ava. I see how much you do and care for your family. Let me take care of you, let me be for you...”

Here it is, he’s going to say it. I can’t let him say it, not when I can’t say it back, not when I’m lying by not telling him his

baby's growing in me, not when it's impossible to be with him the way he wants. I can't let him say it because how do you hide from someone who sees in your soul?

“Ava, I—“

Before he completes his sentence, I pull myself out of the hold his eyes have on me and place my lips on his. I kiss him harder than I've ever done, saying with my lips what I feel in my heart.

I love you. I want you.

He responds immediately, his hand wrapping around my waist and pulling me closer. He sucks gently on my lower lip, keeping the kiss slow and sensual in a way that makes my head feel light.

Our bodies suddenly recognize the fact that we're with each other. The moment his skin touches mine, it feels inflamed.

Desire, hot and intense, slams inside me like never before. My panties dampen, my breathing quickens, and I can't get enough of his touch.

I slide my hands under his clothes to feel more of him while our lips clash. His tongue crashing into me. I love this man as I drink him in through our kiss.

I love every inch of him as I caress his body.

I want him. We're both now standing here naked, entangled in a heated kiss. He reaches between my legs, slipping his thick finger inside me while smearing icing on my breasts with the other. Drake licks and sucks it off slowly, creating a flood

between my thighs. Sliding his fingers over my throbbing clit, feels so good. “Please, I want to feel your big cock stretching my walls.” At those words, Drake has me against the counter and pounds blissfully into me with my cake-covered nipples in his mouth. He thrusts, grabbing me roughly as he joins me, drawing me into a second orgasm. I wrap my arms tightly around him, snuzzling my face into his neck.

I'm in love with this man, but I can't have him.

CHAPTER THIRTY

DRAKE



I 'M HAPPY.

It's the first time in years I can honestly say I'm not lugging around heavy baggage. Sitting here with these fuzzy feelings in my chest has me convinced that only good is heading my way. All I can think about is one thing these days.

...

Ava.

I've been craving her, and I have fully accepted that I deeply care about her. And last night, I didn't get to tell her because there was just too much going on, but I'm pretty damn sure she's got the same feelings as me...I can just sense it. Now, I just got to let it out, and it's been nagging at me. Snapping me back to reality, I notice Zoe standing ready to be picked up.

"Hey, Dad," she grins.

“How was your day, bug?” She nods, and the wind messes up her hair. I reach out to tuck it behind her ear and crouch to meet her gaze.

“Well, give me the scoop... how was it?”

“First, I want a hug.”

I pull her into a big bear hug. It’s not your run-of-the-mill hug, though. Her little arms hang around my neck for longer than her usual three seconds. “Why the marathon hug?” a big grin plastered across my face. She just shrugs and quickly switches the topic by shoving a piece of paper in my face. “What’s that?” Her eyes light up, and she unfolds the paper to reveal a vibrant drawing. “I made this for Ava,” Zoe giggles, pointing at the artwork. It’s a woman standing under a tree in a polka-dot dress. “Our art teacher told us to sketch someone we look up to. I wanted to draw you, but I’m always drawing you. So, I picked Ava.” I playfully pout, and as my knees begin to protest from all that squatting, I stand. “So, Ava’s your new best friend? Hmm.”

“Oh, come on, Dad,” Zoe pouts, fully buying into my act. “I’ll sketch you next time.”

“I was just kidding, sweetie,” I laugh. “I’m sure Ava will love it.”

“Hey, you owe me a full twirl for faking,” she demands, stretching her arms out. I chuckle at her little trap and get ready to scoop her up when Ava’s text interrupts our moment.

“Can I swing by tonight?” I think this could be my golden opportunity to tell her how I feel. “Sure thing, I’d like that.” Zoe has something to show you,” I shoot off in response. A bit of time passes before she texts back. “Can I come over after she’s asleep? We need to talk.”

We need to talk.

Never in history have those three words ever led to a good thing. But ever since I opened up to her that morning, everything’s been great between us, so I’m guessing it’s all good. And I’ve got something important to get off my chest, too.

“Sounds good,” I text back. “She should be in bed by nine.” A couple of hours after I tuck Zoe in, there’s a knock on the door. When I let Ava in, something’s off. Her face is upset, and my heart plummets as soon as I lay eyes on her. I don’t need a crystal ball to tell me tonight isn’t going down as planned.

“What’s wrong, Ava?” I ask, concern oozing from my voice. She takes a deep breath, wrestling with her words. “Drake, even though this is the hardest thing I’ve ever had to do, it has to be face-to-face. We have to stop this.” Honestly, I can’t decide what’s more of a shock, her words or her delivery. I literally take a step back and need a second to gather myself.

How did we get here? One minute, I’m having her in the most delicious way, and now she’s colder than an arctic breeze.

“Ava, why?” I stammer out.

“You know why, Drake. We can’t make this fly in the real world. My family will never forgive what your father did to us.”

“I get it ... and they might need some extra time, Ava— but we’ll find a way. We can fight back or keep things quiet. Whatever you want to do.” “As I belt out my words, she shakes her head with shut eyes like my voice is cutting into her.

“You can’t let your family have the final say in your happiness forever, Ava.” But I already know this is asking for the moon. She uprooted her whole life just to make up for mistakes in her past—It’s obvious she’s not going to do anything that will hurt them.

And apparently, I’m nothing but hurt.

She looks at me, her eyes brimming with longing and pain. “I wish it were that simple, but the real world doesn’t work that way. I can’t put my family on the line. Not again.” Every word feels like a nail being driven over and over into my heart. I take a step toward her, but she takes one back.

“Ava, hang on.” I’m racking my brain for what to say. I figured tonight would be about us, a night where I confess my love to her. But her voice, weary... heavy... silences my thoughts. Her eyes are shouting what she’s not saying — she’s made up her mind, and nothing I say will change it.

“Give Zoe a kiss for me,” she says and turns, heading for the door. As she walks away, it’s like that nail in my heart drills

even deeper until it pokes right through to the other side. The only thing left is a raw, empty mess.

How the hell did things spiral so out of control so fast?

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

AVA



I *NEED TO GET my shit together.*

It's my first thought as I step into my new office, the scent of fresh leather, books, and polished wood enveloping me.

It's...my first day as a lawyer at my family's firm, a position I've promised to earn purely on merit. I start organizing files to distract myself because all I can see in my head is that look of pain on Drake's face.

He looked so hurt when I told him we couldn't continue— it almost broke me. If I hadn't left when I did, I wouldn't have had the strength to walk out of that house.

But it needed to be done. There is no place for Drake and me in the real world. We've always had reason to sneak around, but now shit just got real, and it's not fair to either of us, and it's not fair to the baby, either.

Instinctively, my hand goes to my stomach, but a knock sounds on the door— and I instantly drop it, and my father walks in. He’s sporting a proud smile on his face. This man has never been filled with smiles, even less after the scandal, so it’s strange to see.

“Congratulations on your first day, Ava— I’m so proud of you, honey!”

I manage a grateful smile but can’t shake the stuck feeling in my chest. “Thanks, Dad. I hope I can live up to the family name.” I chide. He cocks his head, studying my expression, and because I’m scared that he’d see through me, I turn away.

I think he’s gone, but his voice jolts me and makes me turn my head to him. “I want you to understand something. I’ve always been proud of you, regardless the career path you chose. I want you to do something you’re passionate about, and I don’t expect you to make up for my mistakes.”

“But I always felt the weight of it all, Dad. I felt like I had to do something to redeem myself. I always felt that maybe then, you’d be able to talk to me again. To look me in the eyes.”

His eyebrows crease in a frown. “Ava, do you think the reason I withdrew from you was because of the scandal?”

“Well... my part in it,”

He sighs and then gives me the saddest smile I’ve seen. “You’re my daughter, Ava. The things that got leaked about the fraud and corruption were not some lie or fabrication. They

happened, and that's why it was such a huge blow to this family. I was too embarrassed to face you."

The realization of my father's shame washes over me. The pressure and criticism I felt were all in my mind. It's not that my dad won't look at me or talk to me—it's my own crippling guilt that stopped me from doing the same to him. *I* was the one who didn't speak to him or look at him.

"Thank you, Dad. You don't know how much I needed to hear this right now, And I'm sorry for all the pain I might have caused you."

Although a huge weight has been lifted from my heart, it still feels like my world is crumbling.

My first day goes well, and the days after that. And soon, it's the end of my first week, and my family is throwing me a graduation dinner. The atmosphere in the restaurant is lively, the clinking of cutlery and murmurs of diners filling the air.

I'm surrounded by my family, celebrating my accomplishments, and overall, it's a beautiful evening. But honestly, I can't help feeling like I'm a bit of a fraud. I mean, why do I get to be happy when, deep down, I'm not sure I really deserve it? As we eat, the compliments and praise keep coming. With every compliment, it feels like the secret in my belly is weighing heavier on me.

"...she got so many awards, best-graduating student in her class. Even if she didn't come to the company, law firms

would be busting down the doors to hire her.”

Nothing like that feeling of imposter syndrome

It’s like they’re talking about someone else and not me. I’m not the perfect daughter they think I am. I might have united my family in a way and redeemed myself of those mistakes, but everything is *not* OK, not when I have a secret that’s literally growing inside me, getting bigger every day. How can they not notice?

I’ve done it again.

I’ve fucked up royally in a way they’d never understand. As they chatter on, I feel my throat constricting. I’m not the perfect daughter—I’ve screwed up again. The noose around my neck tightens till I’m pushed to my breaking point.

“I’m pregnant,” I blurt out.”

As soon as I say that, a sense of relief fills me. But that’s short-lived because all the faces in the room are on me.

“I...” everyone’s eyes are wide, waiting for me to continue. But the words catch in my throat, and it feels like the room is spinning around me.

Unable to hold it together, I hastily stand and excuse myself from the table, tears blurring my vision as I flee from the restaurant.

No one comes after me as I head to my car and drive off. But I’m crying so much I have to pull over to calm down.

While I attempt to stop my tears, my phone vibrates—a text from Daphne reads, “Have you seen the news!!!!!”

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

DRAKE



SINCE THAT NIGHT WITH Ava, I don't know how I've managed to still show up but I do. Today is one of those days.

I'm in my office dealing with paperwork for a pro-bono case. I'm on autopilot,

"Sir, have you seen the news?" Emily bursts into my office, her face is a mask of wild excitement.

"I haven't seen much of anything."

"The story is everywhere. On every paper, every news outline, social media. Everywhere. See!"

DANIEL STRONG LAW FIRM UNDER INVESTIGATION FOR FRAUD.

The bitter irony of the situation isn't lost on me. An anonymous tip about fraud has led to his downfall, almost a

replica of what happened to Ava's father's firm because of what he did.

My mind immediately goes to Ava. I call her twice, when I get no response, I call another number.

"What do you want?" he snarls as soon as he picks up.

"I wanted to make sure you were OK," I reply coolly despite the aggression in his tone.

"I don't need your pity, Drake. Did you do this?" He asks after a few seconds.

"I didn't," I answer flatly. I'm not even surprised that he suspects me. According to my father, anybody can be an enemy. I choose my words carefully, wanting to convey my sincerity. "I didn't want this for you, Dad. And you'll be fine as long as the tip is wrong right?"

"If you're here to preach to me son, save it. Don't call me again." With that, the dial tone ends.

Thinking about Ava and the way she keeps pushing me to voicemail. I guess she really is done with me.

The gaping hole in my chest hurts, As I resume work on autopilot. My mind is still filled with thoughts of Ava. The memory of her smile, and the warmth of her touch, are imprinted in my mind.

I miss her.

I look again at my files, adding footnotes where necessary and tagging precedent cases.

I miss her lips.

I sort the evidence sent by the claimant into files and begin to draft a brief for the case. After that, I tell Emily to set up a meeting with the claimant to see if he's ready to settle outside court.

I miss her smile, her body, her smell.

The day fades into evening, and I decide to take a break. I sit by the floor to ceiling windows watching the city lights flicker to life. The ache for Ava intensifies, and I realize I need closure. I can't fully wrap my head around the reason for her decision. Fine, our families have had their differences, but something seems to be missing. What did she mean by the role she played?

I grab my phone and type a few words of text but I end up erasing them. After a repeated cycle of typing and erasing, I abandon the idea and scroll through my phone absentmindedly.

I'm scrolling through my mail when I stumble on the file sent by Daniel Armstrong with the subject titled; **AVA MILLER.**

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

AVA



DANIEL STRONG'S FIRM IS under investigation. My parents know I'm pregnant, and Drake won't stop calling me.

How did I get here?

By here, I'm not sure if I mean this stage of my life or this restaurant where I am with my parents. I fumble with my outfit— a flare summer dress that does well to hide any evidence of my pregnancy and look up at my parents seated across me. I don't know what pushed them to call me and suggest lunch, my sudden announcement or the news about Daniel's firm. At first, no one says anything, and I push around my pasta with my fork. These days, I don't understand my appetite. Sometimes, even the sight of food makes me sick. Other times, I feel like I could eat a horse.

“I know you think pregnancy is a big deal, but these days it’s not.” My mother breaks the silence with that, and my father chimes in. “Yeah, sweetie. Your mother is right,” he murmurs in agreement. My mother continues speaking. “You know what? I think this is a good thing. And I know just what we should do.”

I shoot a puzzled look from my mom to my dad. Without waiting for me to voice my confusion, Mom grabs her glass and beams, “Let’s have a toast.” My father raises his glass and gestures that I do so, too. I hesitate, eyeing my glass of water before reaching for it. My mind is racing. My parents are trying to be supportive, but I still don’t feel right. Not when I know there is more that they don’t know about. The one thing that could change everything.

“We’re proud of you, Ava,” my dad says softly with a smile, “And regardless of anything, we’ll always be here for you; we love you.” We clink glasses, and while my parents take swigs of their drinks, I place my cup back on the table. This is what I want, right? For my parents to be proud of me and to fix my mistakes. So why do I feel like an imposter? A fluke? A fake? I’m still in my head, so I don’t hear a comment my mother makes, but it makes her laugh out loud, and my dad smirks beside her. My mother has always been the easier going between the two. She’s most likely trying to diffuse the situation with a joke. As the laughter and chatter continues, I find myself struggling to be present. My hand instinctively touches my belly, a reminder of the life growing inside me. Guilt gnaws at me like an ulcer eating into my intestines. Just

like at the dinner the other day, I feel like I'm going to explode.

I know I won't be able to keep up the charade for long. Even though all I've ever wanted was for my parents to forgive me for my mistake and for things to go back to how they used to be before the scandal, I can't just sit here lying to them, pretending.

"Um, they don't want to know about the father?" I don't realize I'm speaking till my parents turn to look at me.

"That's irrelevant, who cares about the father? Honey, if you don't want to tell us, that's fine. We're here whenever you're ready. Besides, we're family, and that makes the baby our family, your father and I—"

"It's Drake Armstrong," I blurt out before she makes a statement she won't be able to take responsibility for later.

"Daniel Armstrong's son —is the father of my baby."

A stunned silence hangs in the air, and I see their expressions shift from confusion to shock and disbelief. My father's expression says it all.

"Daniel Armstrong's son?" His voice is stern and somber.

"So, you two... I was right. Oh, what in God's name are you trying to do to us, Ava? Are you absolutely positive— I mean...?" My mom splutters. An apology lies at the tip of my tongue. I want to tell them it was a mistake and I never meant for this to happen, but I can't. No matter how shocked and disappointed they look now, I can't bring myself to consider

the life growing in my stomach as a mistake. I'm suddenly hit with a wave of nausea. I don't know if it's the food or all that's happening around me. I bolt to my feet.

"Excuse me." I race blindly in the direction of the bathroom to empty the contents of my stomach. I splash some water on my face and look in the mirror. My eyes are red, my palms are shaking, and I take a deep breath. Finally, I don't have to hide anymore, not my baby or who the father is, like it's some dirty secret. But behind my closed eyes, an image of my parents' startled expressions flashes, and my eyes shoot open. I don't think I can face them. Even though what I wanted was for my parents to accept me, mistakes and all. I don't think I can handle the look on their face if they don't. At least not right now. My heart racing, I take the cowardly way out and rush out of the restaurant. I don't stop, even when I hear calls of "Ava" behind me. I hop in the back seat of a cab and go home. My pregnancy emotions are taking a toll on me. Maybe I'll have the strength to face them another day, but for now, I feel like I can't withstand any more disappointment... I know it'll break me.

I get to my apartment, spent and weak. Telling everybody has taken everything out of me. I think about Drake, trying to figure out how I'm going to tell him, too. And as though I conjured him, he's waiting outside my apartment door. My nerves are having a field day. And for an instance, a sense of relief washes over me, followed by worry at the serious look spread over his face. But the overall emotion I'm filled with,

Something I don't think I should be feeling, especially for someone I can't be with.

Love.

“Ava.” Hearing him call my name since that night when I walked out of his house sends goosebumps down my spine. I close my eyes and take a deep breath.

“We need to talk,” he says, taking a step closer.

I shove my hand into my pocket because I'm scared I might reach for him. These hormones are making me do a lot of unpredictable things lately. I don't think I can honestly blame everything on them, though, when it comes to Drake.

Without a word, I open the door.

As soon as we get in, he turns to me and goes straight to the point. “I know your secret.”

My heart stops beating.

How does he know?

Heat wells up in my chest, and my face goes numb. Did my mother call him? I shake the thought—she wouldn't be caught dead interacting with anyone from that family.

His gaze travels down my length, assessing me. I guess he can see the slight weight I've put on these past weeks or the bags I tried to cover with makeup under my eyes. I take a step back, not ready for this conversation. “Drake, I—”

He shakes his head.

What does that mean? That he doesn't want the baby?

Instinctively, my hand flies to my stomach protectively.
“Drake. I’m keeping this-”

“You don’t have to be so hard on yourself, Ava. I see how much you’ve tried to redeem yourself; you don’t have to spend the rest of your life making up for past mistakes. And you don’t need to end us.”

My eyebrows crease in confusion. What are you talking about?

“I saw... a file.” He shakes his head and continues. “The point is, I know the role you played by helping Daniel Strong gain ammunition against your father’s law firm. I understand why you feel so damned guilty all the time, and I now know why being with me is hard for you.”

My brows crash. “That’s what you think my secret is?”

“Ava, listen, if there’s more that I don’t know, trust I’m going to be there for you. And anything you think you need to hide—I already love you through it.”

“Drake,” I whisper, barely holding it together.

“Yes, Ava. I said I love you, and I’ll say it as many times as possible for you to believe it. Stop pushing me away. I want you. And I don’t care what I have to do to make that happen.”

His grip on my hand tightens. “I love you, Ava, I love you, I love you.”

I know in my heart I feel the same for him, but I’m just not comfortable saying it when I know I’m keeping this secret from him. What I don’t say with words, I prove with my

actions. I place my lips on his, hoping he can taste them on my tongue, and I lead him to the bedroom.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

DRAKE



AVA SMELLS LIKE HOME.
And when I'm with her, I'm at peace. I look at her beautiful sleeping body and those beautiful eyes that looked at me through a hooded gaze while I slid deep inside her. Her lips all over me, and her face that twisted in ecstasy through the night makes me ready for more just thinking about it. Watching her chest rise and fall, I know I'd do anything for her. Ava lights me up, bringing me to an unfamiliar, peaceful place whenever we're together. She's kind, smart and beautiful.

And I love her.

With that thought, I slip out of bed, being careful not to wake her, and head to the kitchen to surprise her with breakfast in bed. There's something intimate about cooking for her, and it feels good to do something that'll make her happy. Maybe it'll

shake some of that nervous tension she's been dealing with. I brew some coffee, relishing the rich aroma that fills the air. Although I'm a bit slow getting around her kitchen, I make do, ready to kickstart the day.

I hope she doesn't mind me mucking up the place.

Just as I finish poaching the eggs, I hear the door open—my heart skips a beat, like a teenager trying to impress his crush. I wish she would've stayed asleep longer so that I could've surprised her. But now that she's up, I'll just set the table, and we'll eat together. I head in the direction of the footsteps. Halfway down the hall, I freeze. It occurs to me if Ava were coming, she wouldn't have come through the front door but from the bedroom. Which means it isn't her. Cautiously, I head to the source of the sound, and when I see who it is, I stop short. It feels like I'm looking directly at Ava, but not quite. Hair tied back neatly in a low ponytail, eyes big and brown, but with a stern gaze. I've seen too much of Ava not to place two and two together.

"Mrs. Miller?" I ask cautiously, even though my answer is staring me right in the face. Within seconds, a flood of emotions appears to cover her face, from shock to disbelief to disappointment, then replaced again with a stern gaze.

"Drake Armstrong." She spits my name like it's some kind of poison, and I find myself recoiling at the emotion she expressed with just those two words. She doesn't wait for me to respond—she just glares at me and says, "What the *Hell* are you thinking—she's half your age."

“I know this is shocking to you, mam, and to be honest, I never planned it this way, but Ava’s stolen a piece of my heart, and what I feel for her is more real than I ever felt for anyone. I’ll do anything to prove my love and loyalty to her.” She eyes me up and down before saying.

“So, you’re taking responsibility.”

“For everything that’s happened between us, yes, I do.”

“And the baby?” My eyebrows crease because I don’t know what she’s talking about. My face must’ve revealed what I’m thinking because Mrs. Miller looks me dead in the eyes and says,

“She’s pregnant... Ava’s pregnant with your baby.”

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

AVA



DRAKE IS GONE.

I open my eyes and look at his side of the bed, cold and empty, just like my heart is starting to feel. Maybe while we were having sex, he noticed my slightly protruding tummy, realized I was pregnant and changed his mind about being with me. My heart flutters painfully in my chest, the gaze of sleep lifts, and I sit up in bed. Before more thoughts hit me, the strong smell of freshly brewed coffee hits. My spirit lifts. He's probably just downstairs making himself a cup of coffee. I sit up like a child, slip into my fluffy home slippers, and tiptoe to the kitchen, hoping to surprise him. But as I near the kitchen, I hear muffled voices and hold on. Maybe he's on the phone. Even better, I can surprise him because he won't hear me coming. When I round the corner and end up in the living room, I don't expect two pairs of eyes to lock on me.

“Mom?”

“You’re up.” Drake takes a step towards me, then stops. He looks down at my stomach, covered by a robe, and back at me. He knows.

He licks his lips, eyeing me up and down. “Ava, are you?” I look from Drake to my mother—no sense hiding or lying at this point. “Yes, Drake,” I lower my eyes, embarrassed, “I’m pregnant.”

“Mine?” He stutters. I know he’s processing it all, so I answer.

“Yes, Drake. Yours. The moment holds for a second that feels like an eternity. Drake already has a daughter—one he’s raised by himself. If anyone knows the pressures and milestones that come with raising a child, it’ll be him. Would he want to do that again? And with me? I’m suddenly weak. I don’t want to be here and face the sting of his rejection. Neither do I want to break down in front of my mother. I turn around slowly and place one foot in front of the other when I’m lifted in the air.

“You’re... You’re pregnant!” Those words come from a distance because Drake is spinning me around.

“Yes!” I squeal. He turns me around so I’m facing him and spins us around again. I let out another squeal.

“Oh. Wait. Shit. You’re pregnant; I shouldn’t spin you that way.” He places me down. His eyes are iridescent, alight with emotion. His uncharacteristic joy is contagious.

“We’re pregnant!” His gaze moves from my face to my tummy, and unconsciously, my hand goes to my stomach like

I've been doing lately, but this time, Drake's hand is there, too. "My baby," he mouths with his brows in question.

I nod, smiling, and he places his hand on both sides of my head, smoothing my hair, then cupping my face as he looks into my eyes. His smile dims a little, "But why didn't you tell me?" I think about my doubts and fears, all that that's gone through my head since I found out. But I don't need to voice them because he nods in understanding. Drake tips my chin so I can look into his eyes.

"I told you—I'd love you through anything. And right now, this isn't anything—this is everything." He smiles at me. His mouth motions like he's trying to say something else, but eventually, he gives up his lips, crashing into mine. The kiss is tender and soft, taking my breath away. I feel like I'm lifting off the ground— my insides melting with how soft his lips caress mine. I could take this man right here. He gently brushes my cheek with his thumb. Even with my mom right behind us, we're lost in this moment.

"I'm going to be a father," he whispers, a mix of happiness and disbelief in his voice. "Again," he adds.

"I love you, Ava. You just made me the happiest I've ever been." I gaze into his eyes, and for the first time, I can share what I'm feeling without fear of anything standing between us. No secrets, no half-truths.

"And I love you." I think about how much we've been through and what Drake Armstrong means to me, making me crave him even more. He wraps his strong hand around my neck as

he crashes his tongue to meet mine. We say with our lips what we feel in our hearts: *Indescribable love and passion like no other*. Desire slams into me, and our kiss turns to fire.

Drake's lips are an aphrodisiac, lighting my fuel, and I need to feel him inside me.

I want him. I love him.

My pussy thumps, and my already sensitive nipples are hard and pointy, aching for his touch. I pull him in closer, and he draws away as someone clears their throat. Drake's hands drop from my neck, but he doesn't let go of me. Instead, he takes my hand and interlinks our fingers as if to say I'm under his protection.

"Eh- Ehm!" Someone clears their throat again, bringing me to my senses.

Shit, "Mom!" I say, embarrassed.

But she doesn't look hostile; she's just standing there with a soft, stunned look on her face as if she's witnessed something both wild and beautiful. The room is filled with silence before she smiles softly and emits. "I'll leave you two love birds alone."

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

DRAKE



I ASKED AVA TO move in with me on Star Island.

And I'm not taking no for an answer. She promised to think about it, and I told her I'll wait for her *yes* till the end of the week.

She should give it to me by tomorrow, and I can hardly contain my nervous energy. Even Zoe senses it.

She looks up at me confused while I'm tucking her into bed and says, "You're being weird again."

Knowing that to Zoe, 'being weird' means I'm happy. But I ask anyway. "Weird how?"

She shrugs. "I don't know. But it's weird in a good way." She ends with a smile.

I guess there's no time like the present to bring it up. So, I nudge Zoe softly. "How would you feel about having a brother

or sister?" I ask, thinking about the best way to break the news to her. But it's like, Zoe is way ahead of me. Her eyes light up with excitement.

"Is it Ava?" She says, signing the words at the same time.

"Close, I laugh But Ava can't be your sibling."

She thinks for a second before she says, "Then can Ava be my mommy?"

I can't put into words exactly how that question makes me feel, but it's something like how I felt when I first saw Ava and Zoe laugh together. I smile, wrap her in my arms and say. "Ava can be your mommy, if you'd let her."

Zoe thinks again. "Sooo who's my new baby if Ava's my mommy?"

Before I can respond, her eyes light up again and she turns to me. "Does Ava have a baby?"

I laugh again, and she giggles with me. "Yes, I want a sister! And I want Ava as my mommy too! Yay!"

She squeals and kicks her pajama-clad legs in the air.

I wrap my hands around her and kiss her forehead. "I love you, sweetie. Sleep tight."

"I love you too dad."



At the house, Zoe at one side and Ava at the other, everything is perfect.

I hold Ava's hand as our eyes scan the space, while Zoe skips around squealing about how big it is. As we step inside, the foyer welcomes us with polished marble floors and a dazzling chandelier overhead. Chad the enthusiastic realtor glides through the space pointing out every meticulous detail.

"To the right is your nanny or in-law quarters with an ensuite powder room." I squint smiling at Ava because we were just talking about how important she felt being as hands-on with our little one as possible.

He continues, "And following the newly refinished gold trim staircase to the second level, you'll find the master suite and family theater. Zoe eyes grow wide and a smile spreads across her face, as she squeals, "A theater!"

Ava shoots me a look and whispers, "This is nice," and I can tell by her eyes that it's a huge understatement. Heading out to the outdoor entertainment area, the realtor points out, "Star Island has very few spots available with an infinity pool spa combo like this," referring to the lavish oasis backyard, overlooking the crystal clear ocean waters. The sprawling lawn, and garden, is meticulously manicured, it's perfect for our new growing family. All I can think about is how peaceful I feel having Ava in my life. Everything is finally falling into place.

"It's perfect, I say."

She smiles, her eyes twinkling bright. "It is perfect," she repeats. Nodding her head.

Zoe joins us, her eyes wide with excitement. “Can I pick my room? I want the room with the big window! Please mom, please daaad!” Ava smiles at her softly. She always does that when Zoe calls her mom. It’s a beautiful sight.

“Anything for you love,” Ava says.

“Hey what if I want the room with the big window?” I feign a pout.

“Nope I picked it first!” Zoe does a victory dance.

“Yeah, too bad for you,” Ava says, with a giggle and joins in the dance.

“Wow. Ganging up on me again. I see how it is.”

We laugh as we explore the space. The room with the oversized window is painted a mixture of pale pink and light blue—making me think about the nursery. Ava seems to read my mind as she asks.

“So, boy or a girl?”

Zoe bounces with enthusiasm as she yells. “I want a girl!”

I shake my head, “So you girls can gang up on me? No fair, I need a boy on my side.”

“Well, I think she’s going to be a girl!” Zoe retorts.

It doesn’t slip past me that even Zoe’s happier these days.

I turn to Ava and place a hand on her growing tummy. “What do you think?”

I pull her closer. She’s smiling, her body soft against me. “I think, we’ll have to wait and see.”



A few weeks later, we're settling into our new place—Zoe has the room with the big window as promised. It took all day for the three of us to decorate the nursery in the best neutral way possible. Zoe's ecstatic at a job well done and signs "She's gonna love it, Dad!"

"Or he," I tease. We finished up just in time to squeeze in a story on blended families, Tuck Zoe in, and kiss her goodnight. Ava takes a few steps toward our bedroom, and I scoop her in my arms bridal style.

"I can walk you know," she says, resting against my chest.

"I know, but I don't want you to. I love holding you, sweetie."

I close the door, place her on the bed, and help her with her shoes. I stare as she slips off her top.

"Your body's amazing, and I never want to be without you." She squints her brows and gives me a look.

"What are you talking about? Stop. You're making me embarrassed."

"Oh, honey, I'm not joking." Her brows shoot skyward and her lips part—her face soft and sweet. I take in every inch of her gorgeous, protruding belly, and big, beautiful tits, my mouth waters, and the urge to be buried inside Ava engulfs me. My cock is thick, bulging, and ready.

This woman does it for me.

“You’re so beautiful.” Her face takes on A hungry look. We both want the same thing. My clothes are off in a flurry—I lay her back propped with pillows, my hands caress the length of her body.

“You’re a goddess Ava, my goddess.”

“Mmmm...” she giggles, “I like the sound of that.” I prop her legs, trailing kisses along her inner thighs until my head is buried, nuzzled in at her opening. Parting her folds with my tongue I lap along her slit— she smells sweet and inviting. I nudge at her hardened clit tickling it with my nose, while I slip my curved finger inside her wetness stimulating her nub from the backside.

“Ava, you’re delicious.”

She moans, rocking her hips forward—I nip, slurp, and suck her pussy causing her legs to shake and her head to twists violently, while writhing her soft folds against my face.

“Drake,” she says, letting out the sweetest mewl, causing me to beg for her mouth on my throbbing member. I kneel before her and she rises on all fours, teasing me as she licks along my shaft, slowly taking me in till I bounce off the back of her throat. Ava gags, driving forward, forcing thick saliva down my length. I grab a fist of her hair as she quickens her pace, bobbing up and down.

“Oh Fuck, Ava!” I groan as she increases her suction while cupping my balls.

Damn.

Ava is showing me everything I need to know about us. She wants me and isn't afraid to prove it. I've never had this kind of attention. She's open, selfless and willing.

Her lips pop on and off my tip, as she slides her hand along my length, my legs buckle, my balls tighten, and my body jolts. I grunt, holding back as I slide out of her parted lips, and position her sideways. I penetrate her plump pussy, and she squeals.

Ava's warm, wet, perfect— and All mine.

We both moan as I thrust in and out of her. Ava's walls are dripping, pulsating along my shaft. She's going to end me.

"You feel so good, Drake," she whines. I'm so close but hold back my release to bring her with me. Squeezing her nipples with one hand as I finger her clit with the other. I increase my pace, and in my deepest lowest voice I ask, "Your pussy is so sweet, do you like to be fucked like that Ava, hmm?"

Ahh... she gasps, "Yes, Drake, just like that. I like having your big dick inside me...mmm." She moans arching her head back toward me as I wrap my hand around her neck, pumping and rubbing her clit, faster, loving how her plump warm pussy contracts around me. She feels like heaven. We're both moaning and sighing, the sound of sex and pleasure filling the air. Ava pants, "You know what the best part of this is?" I kiss her and growl in her ear. "What is it, baby?"

"You can come inside me, all you want." Those words send me over the edge, I jolt adding more pressure to her clit and

throat, while I fuck her hard and fast. She mewls, “Ooo...yes, Drake, I’m coming.”

My balls clench and my cock pulses in waves as I shoot my load inside her. Breathing heavily, I gently kiss the back of Ava’s neck, and with my arm still wrapped around her, we roll to the side, panting into the night.

“I love you, Drake.” I’m finally in a place I can call home.

“And I love you, my Caribbean dream girl.”

EPILOGUE



Ava

A *YEAR LATER*

“Step one: steal—OK, not steal, swap your bags with a sexy older man.

Step two: have an unforgettable one-night stand with him.

Step three: become his A+ student... in more ways than one.

Step four: your families have to be enemies.

Step five: get pregnant and live happily ever after.”

As she says that, she pens them down in her imaginary notepad and then looks up at me.

“Am I missing something else?” Daphne’s eyes twinkle as she says that. “Oh... see, I’m trying to curate a five-point step to being happy, according to Ava Miller.”

I shake my head and sit beside her. Daphne’s been to the house almost every weekend since I had the baby—she likes spending time with the kids with the kids. You think your best friend is yours alone until you have kids, and she betrays you for them.

“Or should I name it five -steps to becoming Mrs. Armstrong?” I look at the ring on my finger and smile. Even though it’s been a few months since we got married, my heart flutters at anything involving Drake. Speak, or rather think of the Devil. At that moment, Drake walks into the house with

two bags in his hands while Zoe skips past him with a bouquet of roses and the biggest smile on her face.

“This is for you, Mommy,” she says as she hands me the flowers. She calls me ‘mommy’ so naturally now, and I truly feel accepted. Even though my hair is in a messy bun and I’ve been in lounge clothes all day, Drake winks a sly smile at me, and a shiver runs down my spine. Just looking at this man makes my heart race. And if we were alone, I’d be all over him in a minute.

“We got everything on the list,” he announces, referring to the list I made him this morning. He drops the bags on the marble counters and joins Daphne and me in the living room. Zoe skips out, announcing that she’s going to wash her hands.

“Daphne was just summing up our love story in five steps,” I tell him, and one of his eyebrows goes up.

“Just five?” he chuckles, and she joins him.

“Well, it’s a bit better than mine that can only be summed up in three steps,” she chirps. In response to our curious look, she leans in and clears her throat.

Raising a finger, she starts, “One, start a new job at a realty development firm. Two, allow your silver fox boss to convince you to nanny for his troubled sister’s neglected kids.

Three, end up in his bed and... we’ll see...the rest is history.” Daphne laughs.

“No...” My eyes widen in shock, and the slight cock of Drake’s head tells me he’s surprised too. “What? No, C’mon...”

how the hell have you hidden all this with us not having a clue—Is that why you’ve been so tight-lipped about who you’re dating? Oh my God, Daphne.”

She shrugs. “To be fair, it’s too early to know where it will all go... and honestly, it wasn’t intentional—you had a lot going on. Plus, most of this happened a few weeks ago.”

“Spill, now!” I say.

“Yeah... we want details, “Drake adds, and I give him an approving nod.

My best friend looks between our curious faces and shakes her head. “You two are becoming disgustingly similar. Anyway, it all started when you were busy thinking about what to do when you found out Drake was your professor. Well, it turns out that—“

She’s interrupted by a knock on the door. Drake shoots to his feet to answer it.

I don’t hear who’s at the door because I get caught up in Daphne’s story.

A few hours later, after Daphne leaves and Zoe and Zack are thankfully asleep, Drake brings up the package he received earlier this afternoon.

“It’s from my dad—he sent this,” he says as he settles in bed beside me. I look up and down his shirtless body before I focus on what he’s handing over. Drake’s holding out a watch. It’s clearly expensive, but that’s not what’s important. The

back is inscribed. It reads, '*Zack Armstrong,*' and underneath the name is the date of Zack's birth.

I'm touched by the gesture. And I'm sure Drake is, too. At least it's an olive branch of sorts. Sure, Drake and his father won't instantly become best friends, but it's a step. And I can tell this means a lot to Drake, too, even if he wants to play it off all non-cholent.

"I don't know what it all means, but if he wants to reach out, you're not shutting him down, right?" I ask. Drake nods and then looks up at me with a smile that melts my heart. "How do you know me so well?" I shrug even though a small smile appears on my face, too. "Living with you for almost a year must have taught me a thing or two."

"Or maybe it's because you're my soul mate who knows me more than I know myself."

"Hmm. Something like that," I say and kiss his cheek. When I withdraw, his arms wrap around my waist, pulling me into him.

"I'd like to know you deeper, deep enough to touch your soul...if you know what I mean." He wiggles his brow. I can't help the laughter that rips out of me. "Professor Armstrong, are you running lines?"

"Mrs. *Armstrong* shut up and kiss me," he chuckles before taking my lips in his. Our tongues find each other entwined in an undulating dance. My body tingles everywhere his hands touch. *My back, my waist, my ass.* I'm instantly ready—I want him.

“Will it ever stop feeling this good?” Trailing kisses down my neck and chest as he plays and sucks my sensitive nipples, I moan. “Never, my love.” He says, his eyes fixated on my chest.

He slips my top down looking at me with stormy eyes and says, “I’ll always be here baby, going and growing deeper with you—Sliding between my legs Drake buries his face into my breasts, inhaling deeply as I lace my fingers in his tussled hair, and whisper. “I love you, professor.”

“And I love you, Kitten.”

THE END



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CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

GRUMPY DADDY'S BABY SNEAK PEEK



Blurb

I just discovered my grumpalicious one-night stand is my boss
and my best friend's father...

It was a simple ride home following a life-altering break-up
text.

The next thing I know, shirts are off, and I'm undone,
experiencing the biggest O-MG of my life.

Now, two years later, I find out my new boss is Mr. O himself.

The trouble is, he's my best friend's father, but I can't
resist *him*.

He's off-limits, hot as hell, and wants me.

His lips pressed against mine pushes my flower to bloom in
ways I didn't know possible.

We share a love only seen in fairytales, and my body quakes at the thought of being his princess.

But it's complicated, by giving in to my feelings, I risk losing everything- my job, independence, and my best friend.

And now that these two blue lines confirm my greatest fear, I'm forced to break the news and could lose him too...

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CHAPTER ONE

RAY

I don't mix business with pleasure. The irony is The Gold Spike caters to both, where Miami's elite indulge in their wildest desires, blurring the lines between sin and salvation.

The stakes are high, and the consequences are real. As the owner, I toe the line separating the two. It's a strict rule that isn't meant to be broken. But Dave, one of my long-time friends, persuaded me to break that rule today.

"Here's to my friend Ray." Dave yells over the loud music booming in the VIP lounge.

"It's his birthday today!"

He shoots his hand in the air, and a bit of drink spills on one of the three women sitting around him. She doesn't seem to care. Instead, she continues cheering loudly with the others as they raise their glasses in my honor. I raise my drink too and down it all at once. The sooner I'm done here, the sooner I can leave. Dave's legs struggle to function as he staggers to where I'm

seated; he loops an arm around my shoulder and proceeds to whisper-shout in my ear.

“You don’t have to make it obvious that I forced you here. At least try to look friendly, man.”

I resist the urge to glare at him because I’m sure he means well throwing this party. But it’s at my club, so the bills are all on me, anyway. When I say nothing, he adds,

“Anyway, you can retreat into your cave now. I’m leaving for the night.”

Dave’s my right-hand man, but he’s always been a fucking mooch. He turns his focus back toward the three women he was sitting with and winks. I don’t know if the wink is for one or all of them, but clearly, they shared it as they all giggled in response. I clap him on the thigh.

“Alright, thanks for the party, Dave.”

I go to stand, but he tightens his hold on my shoulder.

“Wait! That’s it?” He asks, and I raise an eyebrow at the question. “You’re leaving?” his eyebrows shoot up.

“Yes, Dave, I’m leaving. As you suggested, I’d like to retreat to my cave now.

He tries to shake my shoulder with the arm he has around me.

“No, man. You can’t leave alone, not on your birthday. You need to get laid.”

I glower my eyes at him. Dave shoots me a wide-eyed look.

“Are you crazy? Ever heard the term birthday sex?”

“I’m sure you can get more than half the women in this club.”

With as much finality as needed to get through to an intoxicated man, I snap back,

“I don’t want more than half the women at this club,”

I carefully take his hand off my shoulder.

“Goodnight, Dave.”

“Alright, suit yourself,” he says, staggering back to the three women.

Dave bends down and says something to them. The girls all stand. Two latch onto him, and the third leads the way to the exit. He turns and throws a wry smirk my way.

I’ll be hearing about that shit tomorrow.

Trailing behind them, I leave the lounge and burst into a smoke-filled casino floor. Pungent wafts of whisky, cigar smoke, and a mixture of cologne fill the air. Drunken players are milling about the main floor. I contemplate going to my office to touch on a few things, but when a woman bumps me on purpose, making a clumsy attempt at eye-fucking me where I stand, I decide to get the hell out of here. It’s in these moments I’m grateful I live on the Island, just far enough from the crazy of this place. I make a beeline for the exit, doing my best to avoid the drunken bodies that flounce around me when yet another body crashes into me.

I growl in irritation and look down, ready to snap at the nearest obstacle between me and total silence. But the words are knocked out of my mouth when her big gray eyes pop open,

looking up at me—they study me as intently as I do her. Thick wavy dirty blonde hair flows wildly, covering just below her cleavage.

She's. Fucking. Perfect.

I zone in on her full, parted, pink lips—my cock immediately stirs with excitement. All I'm thinking about is what that pretty little pout could do. My mind racing, I traced her mouth one more time. I shake the idea, bringing me right back to the middle of a rowdy club. It's now apparent I've been too caught up with work to notice a good time, even if it punches me in the face.

I drink in her features again. The most striking detail on her face is the tears in those big gray eyes. They look like a pool worth drowning in. Now I've gotta resist another urge, getting involved.

Snapping out of our short reverie, she mouths the word, "Sorry," turns around, and disappears into the sea of bodies. I blink rapidly, her quick exit bringing me back to reality.

I leverage my 6'4" height to find her small body or at least a trace of her, but after scanning the crowd for almost a full minute, defeated, I accept it's a lost cause.

Focus Ray.

I shake the occurrence from my mind, heading outside and taking a much-needed deep breath in the fresher, saner climate. Once satisfied, I continue heading toward my car. I'm almost at my destination when the sight of a familiar figure

stops me in my tracks. It's her. Keep moving, Ray. I say to myself. It's none of your business.

But I'm stubborn, so I'm not surprised when my legs slowly walk toward the woman staring blankly into space. Her hair is still everywhere, and a mix of sadness and confusion plays on her face. Although the tears have stopped, her eyes are still misty.

"Are you okay?" I ask. My question jolts her out of her trance, and she turns to me. She pauses for a second before a knowing recognition enters her eyes. She looks away immediately and takes a deep breath. Her lips slightly parted like she was about to speak, but she immediately clams up again. A tear spills, trailing down her cheek, her lips quivering. Shit, I think I made it worse. "Are you here with someone? Is there Anyone you can call?" She shakes her head vigorously, and more tears run down her face. *I should stop asking questions. Things only seem to get worse whenever I open my mouth.*

"Thanks...." the word comes out in a whisper, "I-I... I'll probably get... an Uber or something," she chokes out like it's such a chore to speak. But even with the tears, intrigue sets in. I can't help but feel turned on by the sweetness of her voice; it's a lullaby to my ears. My thoughts tease and immediately have me wanting more. Ray? What has gotten into you? This situation could easily not be any business of mine. In fact, it isn't. Rather than press any further, I simply respond, "Okay," and turn to leave.

But once again, my traitorous legs betray me by remaining planted where they stand. What kind of person would I be to leave a vulnerable, unbelievably attractive woman alone in front of a club when I could very easily offer to help? I tell myself I'm just trying to make up for making her cry more as I turn back to her and say,

"I could drop you at home." She looks up at me sharply, her tears pausing as she asks, "What?" At least I've finally managed to stop the stream of tears rolling down her cheeks. "I could drop you at home instead of staying out here alone, where it's cold dark." She scans my full height slowly, and when she stops at my face, her eyes narrow suspiciously.

"I'm not gonna... you know..." she trails off suggestively. I suspect she wants me to fill in the blanks, but when I make no effort to do so, she adds, "I'm not that kind of girl, you're really good-looking, but I just don't have it in me to- " I interrupt her stumbling disclaimer with a low chuckle.

"No — no, I have nothing like that in mind." That Isn't entirely a lie; my interest is piqued. There's a part of me that wants more—but I'm decent enough not to be a fucking animal that preys on the vulnerable. "You don't?" She asks, and I'm sure I imagine her slight disappointment.

"No, but I'm happy to hear I'm good-looking," I pull from her words, and her wet cheeks heat in a blush as she quickly looks away.

"So? The offer still stands."

As I watch her calculate her response, I wonder how funny Dave would find this entire interaction. Minutes ago, I was the man who left his own birthday party in a rush, eager to be alone, away from people and beyond the stifling leer of intoxicated women. Now I stand in a dark street, still plagued by the muted thrumming of the music from the club, hoping this sad little beauty accepts my offer to drop her home, all while fighting the stirring in my pants.

“Okay,” she agrees softly. “Thank you.” I was sure she’d reject the offer. I mean, who accepts rides from a stranger at a club? But, instead, she says yes—I let go of the nervous breath I’d been holding. “Are you sure?” There’s no harm in being careful. However, I wouldn’t want my kindness to be something she’d regret or feel pressured to accept. She looks me straight in the face and holds my gaze. With the tightening of her brow, I see resolution take form. She straightens her back and swipes at her cheeks as she answers,

“Yes, I am.” I refuse to focus on how the motion causes her breasts to push against the thin silk of her top, instead; I note how her voice has the steel and finality it previously lacked.

“Alright then,” I gesture towards my car, “this way.” Her eyes follow the direction I point to and widen slightly when she sees the car. It’s a typical reaction, but I don’t know why I’m pleased to see it on her face. It’s a beauty, and cars are a guilty pleasure I often splurge on. She quickly covers the distance to the car, temporarily distracted from her tears. “This is a Bentley Mulliner Batur, right?” I arrive beside her, surprised at the question.

“Right, it is.” She also knows her cars.

If this woman gets any hotter, I'd be a dead man.

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and get “Nola and Emerson’s Sizzling

Off-limits, Enemies to Lovers, Romance Free

**I just found out the one-night stand from last week is half
my age and my best friend’s daughter.**

She’s been working here two days and walks around like she
owns the place, a straight pain in my a\$\$.

Nola’s drop-dead gorgeous but gets on my. Every. Last. Nerve.

I just couldn’t get that night out of my head when I tossed
back my bourbon with a side eye and told her to get her act
together.

Before I could blink, she was on my lap, her thick thighs
straddling mine.

Being with her means I risk losing everything her father and I
built.

He's the one person responsible for my success.
She's off-limits, but when I'm pressed against her, I can't
resist.

I didn't reach this level of wealth without making hard
decisions.

Protecting Nola unleashed an animal in me I haven't seen in
years.

I'll do anything to win her heart and make her mine...

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Haley traveled west from Boston to Los Angeles over 20 years ago in search of a sunnier climate. She now lives in the beautiful high desert mountains of southern California with her husband of 26 years, three boys, and her furbabies, pup Ava and two cats, Sushi and Daisy. Whether enjoying a nice glass of Pinot Noir, taking in the beauty of the outdoors, or spending time with her bustling family, Haley's mind is blazing with new alluring adventures to tantalize your imagination. With characters that'll have you rooting, fun story arcs, and a writing style that's a delectable mix of *steam*, *swoon*, and *spice*, Haley's tales are guaranteed to light you up. From *bad boy billionaires* that'll melt your heart to sizzling *enemies-to-lovers* romances, her stories will captivate you. So buckle up, grab a cup of... And get ready for an exhilarating ride as you journey through Haley Storms Steamyverse.