



# SHEPHERD

RULE BREAKER ROMANCE

MACKENZY FOX & DAKOTAH FOX

# **SHEPHERD**

RULE BREAKER ROMANCE

QUICK BURN

BOOK 4

MACKENZY FOX  
DAKOTAH FOX

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# QUICK BURN

BOOK 4

SHEPHERD

Rule Breaker Romance

MACKENZY FOX & DAKOTAH FOX



## AUTHOR'S NOTE

Welcome to our Quick Burn series! We wrote these books because we wanted to give those readers (like us), who don't have a lot of time to read, the chance to still be able to enjoy a quick, fun, spicy romance with all the feels.

Shepherd will be the fourth book in the Rule Breaker Romance series in sports romance before we move onto the next genre, that's right, we're going to give you all the feels with different tropes and new books every six weeks! The Quick Burn series can be read in any order.

Each book will have different levels of spice, with tropes listed at the front. They will all have different themes (some insta-love, some slow burn, some straight to the good stuff) but always with a handsome hero and a strong, lovable heroine. Each book will have a HEA with no cliffhanger and no cheating.

Happy reading! We hope you enjoy 😊



# TROPES & SPICE RATING

## **Tropes for Shepherd:**

Football romance

Bad boy of the NFL

Feisty heroine

She's his therapist

Slightly taboo

Fake dating

Reverse age gap

Lots of steam

HEA

**CHILLI PEPPER RATING: 3.5/5**

# BLURB

## BLURB:

I'm the bad boy of the NFL.

Cocky.

Handsome.

I always have a good comeback.

The best linebacker in the league.

The guy everyone loves to hate.

But then I did something bad.

And now my Coach is making me go to therapy.

Like I need it.

Or, I think I don't, until I meet *her*.

Olivia Quinn.

She's older than me.

She's beautiful.

The woman of my dreams.

And she's my therapist.

She also sums me up in all of five minutes.

Impressive. And hot.

But if she thinks one minor detail is going to stop me and my pursuit, she can think again.

Maybe this therapy stuff won't be so bad after all?

That's if I can survive hurricane Olivia.

NFL player Dexter Shepherd is the star linebacker for the Dallas Raiders and is known equally for his off-air antics that has everyone talking.

Until he has to go to therapy as part of the deal his coach made him agree to. Something about anger management and his inability to stick with anything. Like Coach really knows.

Olivia Quinn is beautiful, talented and good at her job. She's used to dealing with people who are reluctant to be in therapy, but she definitely isn't used to Dexter Shepherd and his flirting, charming, play-boy ways. He'll say and do anything to get a pass.

Throw in some fake dating, when Olivia is accosted by her ex at a function, and you've got one heck of a battle of wills.

Will Dexter overcome his troubled upbringing and finally let love into his heart? Can Olivia see past Dexter's charade and realize he's all talk?

This romance is a quick read with no cheating, a possessive, alpha hero, and a hard-hitting heroine who doesn't take any crap- a HEA guaranteed.

ONE

# SHEPHERD

I have an endless list of things I want to be doing and probably should be doing. Sitting here in downtown Dallas, in Dr. Olivia Quinn's office, waiting for my first therapy session isn't one of them.

I'm the star linebacker for the Dallas Raiders, and Coach thinks I'm going to go off the rails.

I don't need to be rushed to therapy just because I've been getting into hot water on and off the field.

It's true, sometimes I take my frustration out in the game. I like to defend hard and play even rougher than usual. Sometimes I take it out on the opposition.

Isn't that what every serious pro athlete does?

It's kinda what I'm known for, and it goes with the territory of my position.

I had a very famous rivalry with Garrett Huxley, also known as Grizz, because he resembles the size of a bear. He was the Quarterback for the San Diego Devils. We were well renowned for our push and shove on the field, and slanging matches off the field. It's all part of the game.

That was until they forced him to retire last year because of injury.

I can't even imagine that nightmare coming true. I was forced out of the game a couple of years back because of an injury. They said I'd never play again.

Thankfully for me, I recovered. Since then, I've had more injuries than I can even count. Every time I pray that I'll bounce back. So far I've been lucky.

Sometimes the pressure is a lot. I've been feeling it more and more intensely.

I don't know why that is. Fame comes with the responsibility to continuously raise your performance and with that the expectation to excel increases. So does my anxiety.

Whether we're losing, someone is pissing me off, or I just had an argument with this week's flavor of the month. It doesn't seem to matter. Perhaps some past issues are resurfacing.

I often feel frustrated without understanding why or what to do about it. Maybe I'm just tired. Despite being only twenty-six, I've been in this game for a while.

That could be it. Maybe this happens when you're at your peak.

I'm certain my new doc will figure it out quickly. Or I will talk my way out of it.

It's not like I haven't been in therapy before. A doc outside the team has not assessed me in years. Coach must be worried.

I admit I joked with my teammates that I should be able to sort this minor problem out in a matter of minutes. I should be so lucky.

I'm pretty good with these kinds of things. I'm great with women. They like me.

She's probably an old woman who thinks she can comprehend my inner mind. Good luck with that. I struggle to go there, let alone a stranger.

Yeah. I guess I'm used to getting who and whatever I want. I'm known for my loud and wild reputation, where anything goes. I've also had issues with authority, and that usually lands me in a whole world of trouble. Not with Coach. I'll do just about anything to please him.

The previous shrink claimed it was due to my unstable upbringing and my father's abandonment. I went through all the motions to get back on the field.

Whatever it takes, I will do it. No matter what's going on in my head, I still fucking love this game. I'll take care of it. I will say what has to be said to pass. And that will be that.

Things may be more serious this time. They've suspended me for two games.

I went too far against Chicago, body slamming my opponent. It made the news. The game went from bad to worse. It all started when the lineman had his eyes closed when he called a foul against me instead of my opponent.

It's not like I meant to pull a douchebag move like that. Nobody sets out to do that when they know the entire country is watching. If they did, they'd have to be an even bigger idiot than me. My only excuse is: it happens sometimes.

I succumbed to frustration.

I have no idea how that relates to my childhood.

I've learned to manage things effectively, but sometimes I just lose it.

Again, I don't know what's the matter with me.

I might need to lighten up. I'm not usually full of this much fire, but I guess it depends on what's going on in my life.

Football is the only thing I've ever been good at. I can't imagine life without it. With Huxley, it wasn't his fault. He suffered an injury that surgery or rehabilitation couldn't help. At the rate I'm going, I'll be lucky to stay on the team due to my conduct.

So I sit and wait for Dr. Liv. I'm sure she won't mind me shortening her name.

That's what I'm going to call her anyway, not that I wanna be disrespectful and piss her off, but I've got an inclination that things are going to go just fine.

I've had time to think about my actions and all of that, and I need to do everything in my power to show Coach that I'm not a loose cannon. Not as much as he believes.

He's going to bench me if I'm not careful. I think that's even worse than being suspended.

I'm deep in thought when the door of Dr. Liv's office finally opens.

And I've been waiting for fifteen minutes.

My eyes raise from the carpeted floor I've been staring at and work my way from her heels all the way up her legs. She's wearing a knee-length skirt and a white silky blouse. My eyes keep traveling, and soon I'm met with the brightest green eyes I've ever seen.

She's fucking beautiful.

Where is the old lady I imagined? Of course, I'm thrilled she's not.

And she's a redhead. Fantastic. As if on cue, she tucks a shoulder length strand of hair behind her ear and glances down at me as I slide out of my seat.

"Dexter Shepherd?" She looks at me through black, thick-rimmed glasses.

My eyes dart to her mouth, full and juicy, stained with red lipstick. I swallow, trying to find my words. Anything will do right now.

But my mouth feels dry and I stumble. I never fucking stumble.

"At your service, Ma'am." I try my best at an attempted joke.

God knows what she's read about me in the file she's holding. I wonder if it holds all of my secrets. Lord help us if it does.

Something about her gaze compels me to hide all the game suspension issues and show that I am a decent guy beneath it all.



She's seen and heard everything. She knows exactly who I am and doesn't seem impressed.

"Doctor Olivia Quinn," she says, sticking out her hand.

I stare at her manicured fingernails for a moment. Her hand is as soft as butter as I slide my hand in hers to shake it.

"Great to meet you, Doctor Quinn." Fuck, that sounds hot.

"Come in and take a seat." She nods towards her receptionist as I step into her office and she closes the door behind us.

I have a brief moment to think.

She looks fucking smart. Too smart for the bullshit answers I had all prepared.

It's worked before. But something tells me I've met my match, and she's barely said a few words.

She walks by me and gestures to two seats by the window, separated by a small coffee table. The room is tastefully decorated yet minimal.

I get the immediate impression Dr. Quinn likes things neat and simple.

Something about that turns me on. I can't say I've ever been attracted to a therapist before. Maybe because they're all old dudes who think they know me.

I also get to glance at her body from behind. She's of medium height, maybe 5'8". She has curves in the right places. Big tits. Round ass. Wide hips.

Fuck! I'm already crushing on my therapist.

I wonder if she'll mind if I call her Dr. Liv. I'm not even sure I want to find out now.

"You found the office okay?" she asks as I sit in one of the comfy looking arm chairs.

I'm starting to sweat a little. I joked with the guys about her being hot, but this was just ridiculous.

Her perfume is some soft, violet concoction I can't place, and not overpoweringly. It's subtle and sexy.

"Sure did."

She offers me a glass of water, which I accept as my mouth feels like sandpaper for some unfathomable reason.

"Thank you," I say, after she pours it from the pitcher on the table. I take a sip and place the glass on the coffee table.

She smiles and pours herself one. She's all business though and I'm almost grinding my teeth thinking about it.

Not only do I have to bullshit my way out of this meeting and get the all clear, but now I have to think about how I'm going to answer the questions she has for me.

What the fuck is she going to ask me?

Is it going to be the usual barrage... Why do you feel this way? How did you reach this point? Tell me how you're feeling?

If it's the usual nonsense, I'm leaving. No matter how hot she is.

Glancing over at her now though, my earlier pre-planned spiel has gone flying out of the window. I can't think of anything useful to say for her assessment.

So much for me having this routine down pat.

I need to control myself. I'm letting stupid shit get to me.

I hate to admit it, but Coach might be right.

Maybe Dr. Liv's magic works already, and she hasn't even asked me anything yet.

My mind is filled with a million thoughts. I'm not equipped to deal with them as fast as they are coming. Plus, I slept like shit last night.

I'm glad I made a fucking effort, though. Dressing in smart slacks and a black linen button-down shirt with a collar. I almost donned a tie, but bowed out at the last minute.

Tying my long wavy hair back and keeping some of my stubble intact, I'll still pass. I'm known for that rugged Dallas kinda look. It hasn't led me short of admirers so far.

I spend half my life in the gym, so my body should look this good. Running keeps me fit. I also lift a lot, and I eat like I have hollow legs. Being 6'2" and muscular, I have to.

She takes a seat opposite me and places her clipboard down on the table.

I have about a second to study her profile before she glances up at me and starts her assessment. Maybe it already started the second I walked in, I don't know.

I've been sitting here as quiet as a mouse, and that's unlike me. Despite the uncertainty, I'm committed to proving myself.

Maybe she can work out what's wrong with me, or will I just keep on being the same?

Right now, that's the question that matters most, since I don't have the answers.

She looks at me. Her eyes lock straight into mine and everything I thought I knew to this point unravels. Like she has the key to the secret vault inside me, and she's about to let it loose and shake the contents.

I felt exposed in the shrink's office as soon as I entered, but that goes without saying.

This hasn't happened before to this magnitude. I'm a closed book. I talk on the surface and it's a total load of crap. No one penetrates this force field. End of story.

But as I stare back at her now, I wonder about my position as it stands in the team, and getting back on track.

What is this going to take?

Maybe Dr. Olivia Quinn could be just the person to do it.

TWO

# OLIVIA

Dexter Shepherd.

I've heard of him, of course I have. Everyone knows him.

Am I a Dallas Raiders fan? Yes to that too.

When I got the call from an official on the team and addressed the issues with his coach, I knew I wanted to take this on. It's not because of who he is, but because I'm fully booked for the next six months. But Coach Jackson was insistent. I have to admit that Mr. Shepherd's career is fascinating.

I've seen athletes come and go over the years. Some screwed up more than others. Guys that struggle with the fame thing, that's a big one. They start out as nobody and then have everything thrown at them. They can buy anything. Anyone. Anytime. And then there are the bad habits. Where do we start? There are a string of them.

They often struggle with handling fame, money, and pressure until something explodes.

It begins as a novelty, but the desire for anonymity and normalcy emerges over time.

The competitive edge they need to strive for can also often be too much. I've seen many players go down because of stress and anxiety. The body and mind have limits.

I try to teach breathing exercises in my sessions. Decompressing and knowing when to do it is important.

I keep my biro in my hand as I sit down, a comforting thing I do when I have a new patient.

I can almost feel the tension in the room radiating off him. He's sitting up very straight. Like he's an errant school boy about to be told off.

He's also huge, much bigger than he looks on the TV. Though I've admired his career, I'm not star struck.

I read his profile, I know what they wrote on the pages. I know he's six foot two and weighs around two hundred and thirty pounds. He's from Ten Mile Creek, Virginia, where his mother Viola still lives. He has no siblings, and there is no mention of his father.

There are numerous scorecards, injuries, and suspensions. There are also details about his love life. The days he dedicates to training. His free days. The food he enjoys the most. Yada Yada.

I have a good grasp on most of the paperwork.

He's a wild card, to say the least. He seems like a cocky little shit, too.

He looks at me with dark, ochre colored eyes that have little flecks of honey in them.

I should not be noticing that...

"So, Dexter," I say. I want to get to know him before taking notes. Maybe talk about something neutral. He doesn't need to see me scribbling things down. It can be intimidating.

He tilts his head to one side. I've heard about his charming ways. He has been in therapy as much as he has for his love life.

"You're no stranger to this". It's not a question.

He glances down at the pad and file like it's his enemy and sits back in his seat. I watch with interest as he folds his arms across his chest. That tells me right away he's a closed book, and he will not answer anything I ask him with conviction. He has it all mapped out for himself in his head.

“No, Ma’am.”

And that cute southern drawl he still seems to have will not swing him any favors.

I want to tell him to quit it with the nice boy act. He isn’t fooling anyone.

But I say nothing, because I want him to feel comfortable, and I want him to open up to me. This is the only way this is going to work.

I have to work with him, but he will do this my way. Whether he realizes it.

Of course, I will make him feel as though he is doing it his way. Because that’s my job.

The Raiders need him back on form ASAP, and I need to be the one to assist him.

“Tell me about yourself, Dexter.”

He glances at me long and hard. I can’t read his expression right now as he hides it well. I wonder how long it will take to break that barrier down.

I feel confident that I will be able to do it.

His eyes flick back to the file. “It’s all in there, isn’t it? My life story. You should know everything about me... nothing’s sacred anymore, isn’t that right, Doc?”

I push my glasses up as I listen to his words. Yep, he’s been here before.

“That may well be true, but I want to hear it from you.”

He shrugs. “What’s to know?”

“Anything you want to say.”

“I’m pretty sure everything except the size of my dick is in those files... pardon my French Doc, but on second thoughts, maybe that’s in there too?”

His arms stay crossed as he stares me down, or tries to. It will not intimidate me. Dick-talk from a man ten years my junior? Please.

“I don’t see the relevance,” I say casually. “Unless that’s an underlying issue, of course.”

I’m unorthodox, but that’s why I’m so good.

I realize I’m treading on dangerous ground, even responding to his comment. But these guys have massive egos.

“Trust me, it isn’t.”

“Fine.”

“I am aware of how this works. I could sit here and pull all the bullshit under the sun. I’m good at that. But, I’ll spare you the details and boredom of going through it. In fact, we can just cut to the chase. I need to get back to work, and you need to get paid. So fix me.”

I almost stare at him agog, because this is taking a turn. I expected cocky, but this is a whole other level.

“What are you suggesting, Dexter?”

“Call me Dex.”

“Fine, Dex. What are you suggesting from that statement?”

The corners of his mouth turn up. “I’m suggesting you get to it and tell me I’m this, that or the other, according to your professional evaluation. I’ll admit my difficult childhood and attribute my anger to my father leaving when I was five. My frustration overload comes from not having a father figure in my life. If you’re not taking my mom’s ex-boyfriend into account, who loved stubbing cigarette butts out on me at ten years old? She kicked him to the curb, of course, and pressed charges, but hey, the scars remain, right?” He pulls up a sleeve of his shirt to show me the evidence imprinted into his tattooed arm. I can barely see any skin. “Got me real good here,” he adds, pointing to his covered arm. I can see faint scars.

Jesus Christ. He has been here before.

My face stays neutral, though my heart races. “I’m sorry to hear that, Dex.”

“So what do you think, Dr. Liv? Do you mind if I call you that?”



“Not at all,” I tell him. “I’ve been called worse.”

He smiles now and his facade drops for about half a second.

That’s when I know it’s there, pain, lying just under the surface. And I know I can help him. That isn’t even in question.

“That seems like a pretty tragic start to your young life,” I comment, knowing it can’t have been easy no matter what he says. “And frightening for a child.”

“Frightening being the operative word.” He sighs, running a hand through his hair. “So you see, it’s just part of my life. It comes and goes. There’s nothing wrong with me. The scars of the past, and such... They come up from time to time, and this is the result: me acting out.”

“Do you really believe that’s what it is? You expressed everything openly, disregarding all the chaos. If that’s true, why are you here?”

“You tell me.” He shrugs.

I’m tempted to laugh, but refrain because that would be unprofessional.

He’s cute when he really wants to be. He’s also hard-headed. And I get why.

“You can’t avoid therapy by talking your way out. Am I correct in that assumption?”

He can’t contain his smile.

“What changed?” I prompt.

He eyes me for a moment. “Wasn’t expecting a hot doc,” he states quite openly.

I shake my head. “That’s all it took?”

“Apparently so.”

“Now we’ve established that, hopefully, we can move on.”

“It leaves me curious, though. What’s your story, Doctor Liv? You know mine. I can’t help but notice you have very

little ‘stuff’ like normal people have. You like things how you like them, neat and orderly, right? Not a thing out of place. I bet your entire life is like that, isn’t it? I see no wedding band and no family photos on your desk, except for a cat. Why did you dedicate yourself to work and fixing others?”

Oh God, I’m the sad old cat lady.

This time I openly stare at him and reach for my notebook.

It’s time.

“Have you quite finished your assessment?” I ask him. Trying to rein it back in. He can’t steer this in the direction he wants, no matter how hard he tries.

“I can continue, but some of it might make you blush.”

I sigh, long and hard. “You know, Dex. If you were trying to charm me, flattery would have worked better. And the truth is, nothing you could say would make me blush.”

“Is that right?” He unfolds his arms as though it’s a challenge.

Shit. I don’t want him to test it. I need to keep steering this back to him.

“As fascinating as this is - noting switching the subject to me as a ploy to avoid any more questions about yourself - I might remind you that you’re the one in hot water with the team and your coach. You need me to fix it. So while I’m all for the cute face and pretty eyes, I won’t play nurse to your bad boy patient. But I am ready to roll up my sleeves if you are.”

He opens his mouth, then closes it again.

Yeah, I’m tough.

He doesn’t need to know I had a hideous divorce five years ago. I have no kids and no family, aside from my parents, that I get along with, other than my cat. And I don’t have much of a social life outside of my job.

I could eat him for lunch without even breaking a sweat.

“Are you always this chirpy?” he asks. An easy smile playing on his lips.

I know he’s testing me out. Seeing how far he can push me. He could tip things over the edge, but he has his career to consider. And he won’t risk that.

Common sense would tell me he doesn’t want to jeopardize that any further.

“Always,” I confirm with a nod. “And I’ve only had one cup of coffee so far.”

His lips twitch and he says, “I need to learn how to do what you do.”

“In what way?” I ask.

“You sit there as calm as a cucumber while I know for a fact that you’re just dying to pick apart my life. In turn, I hurl shit at you, and you have no reaction. That’s my ideal. Maybe you can teach me.”

Oh, brother.

I laugh a little. “Well, I’m not here to ‘pick apart your life’. My intention is to help you, that is my main goal. That’s why we’re here.”

He sizes me up, and he’s not even subtle about it. As I reach toward my water glass, his eyes dip and I’m pretty sure he’s checking me out.

Guys do this all the time. I’m used to it. I never involve myself with patients.

I expect some kind of snappy comeback, or at least some innuendo. But he says nothing. He sits back again, folding his arms across his chest.

“What impression do you have of someone like me?” he asks. “And I don’t mean a therapist’s answer.”

“We’re still human beings.” I point out.

“I know that, but you’re smart and I think you know what I’m getting at. What’s your diagnosis so far? I’m screwed, right?”

I want to laugh again, but my face remains neutral. He really is something. I'll give him that.

“Dex, I don't have a diagnosis yet. I'm not a psychic that can read into your soul or your inner thoughts. I'm a therapist. Communication is key to understanding everything.”

“I'm sure you have an inkling,” he presses.

I shake my head. “It's too early to sum you up at first glance, Dex. That wouldn't be fair. That's my honest answer.”

“Good.” He nods and looks me in the eye. “I'm glad you're not giving me some bullshit answer, thinking you know shit about my problems because of some file they gave to you yesterday that you haven't even read. That goes a long way doc, you're a smart woman. I like you. I think we're going to get along just fine.”

And with that, our time is up.

THREE

# SHEPHERD

Holy shit. This woman takes no prisoners.

I might as well have brought my shovel so I could dig an even bigger hole for myself.

Of course she'll see straight through me with my hot shot one-liners I thought were clever.

I know nothing about smart women. That much is apparent.

Her intensity strikes me even as I get up to leave. Knowing I've thrown her my best curveball, I've no idea what she thinks about me.

Maybe that I'm an asshole, I don't know.

I know I can be a cocky son-of-a-bitch. It's a knee jerk reaction. Fuck knows why I spilled everything about my childhood in one sentence. I'm sure she's heard it all before. The thing is, it's the truth. My upbringing was rough, like many others.

And I'm sure she thinks I have an answer for everything. Maybe she thinks I'm a poor little rich kid, which couldn't be further from the truth. I didn't grow up with the best of things or an easy ride. I wonder if that's in any of her files.

Why the fuck do I care what she thinks?

I'm not disappointed that I'll see her again in two days. As much as I forced myself to obey Coach's orders, I didn't want to come. They made me.

And I thought I'd just breeze through today, maybe do one more session and pretend I'm calm and collected. It was just a bad day. We all have those days, right? But now I want to come back.

Her calmness is impressive, likely from years of practice. She handled me like a cool breeze on a warm night. I dig that.

After we part ways, I take off to practice. Even if I am suspended, there is no point letting my fitness, or my routine, fall by the wayside.

When I jog out to the field with my teammate and fellow Linebacker, Jamison Sanders, I notice Coach firing glares at me. I realize more than he knows that I'm not in his good books. Nothing compares to playing my best on the field. Being benched sure sucks ass.

"How did therapy go?" Jamison asks as I tear my gaze from my mentor.

"Don't even get me started," I groan. And not because she's a pill. Far from it.

He eyes me. "That good, huh?"

"The therapy itself was okay. She's easy to talk to." I shrug, then lower my tone. "I may be slightly crushing on her."

Jamison laughs, shaking his head. "After one session? Jesus."

"Yeah, it took about a minute." I sigh, remembering the soft waves to her hair and her pretty colored eyes. "She's a hot-blooded fox, James. I'm telling you now. She's a redhead, for starters. Leggy, busty, fucking smart too, and has an ass I could grab onto and take for a ride to Disneyland."

"Doesn't sound like punishment to me."

"Trust me, the hardship was leaving."

He gives me a look. "When are you seeing her again?"

"Tomorrow."

He snorts. “That soon?” “Coach’s orders.” I glance his way, but he’s focused on another teammate.

“Will you still be going to the benefit on Friday night?”

He’s talking about the annual local youth football organization that our team sponsors. There’s a huge benefit coming up. It’s a black-tie event to raise money for their club and it happens once a year, followed by a charity auction.

I palm the back of my neck. “I need to patch things up with coach.”

“Good idea. It might be a good move to get some extra credits. Not that it looks like your punishment is gonna be too painful.”

Coach catches my eye while we talk and signals we need to do laps. Knowing him there will be hundreds of them.

Oh boy.

“Trust me it’s not.” I grin. “My doc is a hottie. She might be older than me. That’s so damn hot.”

She doesn’t look older, but she’s far more mature than the women I’m used to.

“What the fuck?”

I shrug. “I know. She’s smart too. Got a goddamn mouth on her, though.”

“You’ve lost it.” He shakes his head.

All jokes about my hot doc aside, I need to get the all clear from her, so I decide to pull out all stops for tomorrow’s session.

I won’t be a dick and sit in silence like I have done in therapy before. Not team therapy, but that time when I was a kid and the abuse I received from my moms ex boyfriend got reported to the cops.

I sat silently for an hour until time ran out. I’ve always been good at keeping quiet. I’ve had enough practice at it.

But this feels different, and not just because she’s hot.



Perhaps Dr. Liv is the spark I need to improve and leave my demons behind? Maybe I'll let her tap into my brain a little.

I don't know if she'll like what she finds, but that's a price I'm willing to pay.

This is going to be one challenge I'm more than eager to accept.

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I don't douse myself in cologne, but I give my shirt an extra squirt before the therapy session the next day. My scent smells like the ocean, crisp and cool, but I don't want to overwhelm her. I take extra time with my appearance too.

I dress in jeans and a nice textured button-down shirt with polished boots. And I'm on time, again.

Not that she is. I wonder how many clients a day she sees. While I'm sitting in the comfortable, plush waiting area I flip out my cell and google the woman.

I mean, why the fuck wouldn't I? Her website comes up with the practice I'm sitting in now. I flick through it, the home page outlining her credentials. She's been practicing for ten years, confirming my suspicions that she's older than me. She likes the beach and playing with her cat.

That makes me smile.

I wonder what else she does for kicks. Besides that small insight, I don't know what kind of hobbies she'd have. I know I pushed her buttons mentioning she didn't have a wedding band, as well as how tidy she kept things. Maybe I went overboard. It's possible. I guess I will gauge it soon when she opens the door.

Anyway, I wasn't meaning to insult her, they were just accurate observations.

I also see that she has social media, but only for her business practice.

Interesting.

I have someone to run my PR and my social media so I can't say I blame her for not wanting to broadcast her life to the world. It tells me she's a private person.

I wish that my life were more private than it was. One downfall of being high profile is that everyone scrutinizes everything you do. Sometimes I feel as though I can't get anything right, maybe that's part of my frustration.

Finally it's time to go in.

She's dressed immaculately again. I note she favors smart skirt suits and why not with legs like that?

Today is no exception. She's wearing a cream-colored ensemble, sporting a dark blue silk blouse underneath. Black pumps showcase her long legs and her vibrant hair is down. It hangs straight just below her shoulders.

After my quick initial assessment, my eyes flick to hers.

She greets me with a smile, though she caught me checking her out before she invites me in.

"We meet again," I muse.

"Dexter. How are you?" she asks as I step through.

"I'm doing just fine, Doc. What about you?"

"I'm good, thank you."

She closes the door behind us and motions to the same seat.

I walk through her office with ease. I skip sitting down and head straight to the window, looking through the gap in the blinds at the city skyline.

"It's a world away up here," I sigh. I glance back at her. She's also still standing. "From the hustle and bustle."

"I try to remember that when I have unruly clients," she jests. I like her.

"How often is that?" I ask boldly, folding my arms over my chest and continue to look at her glorious face.

She's fucking gorgeous. She has this presence. An aura, or some shit.

Sometimes you just can't explain it because right now, I can't pinpoint it.

It's everything.

She's strong and gutsy, I get that part. And that turns me on.

I resist smiling when I think about the men who would hit on her. She'd turn them down, no doubt. She looks like a rule follower to me.

I doubt I'd have a chance, not in the real world.

The thought makes me smile. I like challenges.

"Not too often," she says, pulling out her chair first and taking a seat. "Though sometimes I get hot-shot NFL players who think I can just fix them by clicking my fingers."

Her clipboard and pen is already in place, along with that file underneath. The one I suspect contains all my secrets. Trust me, there are plenty. I have dust in every corner.

I choose to ignore her comment. "Workaholic, Doc?"

She taps her notepad absently. "Something like that."

I move to my chair and plonk down. "Ready when you are."

"You feel that good about being here?" She glances at me, those deep green eyes settling on my face.

"It's not that," I say. "I like your company, Doc. It's everything else I'm dealing with."

"Well, let's talk about that."

Unease washes over me as I clear my throat. "I think this is helping, as I feel better than before."

"After one session?" She seems surprised. "I mean, that's excellent, Dexter. Unless you're attempting to smooth talk your way out of therapy?"

I scoff, but also get a thrill from the way she says my name.

I feel my cock twitch.

“Smooth talk?” I scoff, flashing my baby blues. “Like I would try. You’re my therapist after all.”

She crosses one glorious leg over the other. She gives nothing away.

What I would give to get on my knees and roll down those panty-hose while I push up her skirt and...

“Why do you think you’re here, Dexter?”

“Call me Dex, remember?”

Her lips form a small smile. It’s a little tight, but she indulges me. “Fine, Dex. What brought you here to begin with?”

I sigh. I can’t charm my way out of this like I thought. “I might have meant what I said before. You know I haven’t had the best time growing up.”

She nods. “It can’t have been easy. It was just you and your Mom?”

“Correct. And she’s a good Mom,” I blurt. “The best. But it wasn’t always easy.”

“How so? With your Mom.”

I swallow hard. “She did her best. She struggled. I guess some of those scars remain. But it’s not all the time. Sometimes I’m happy.” Oh fuck.

What is this woman? Is she wielding some kind of voodoo? I didn’t mean to say that.

One eyebrow raises at my admission. “Do you think certain things trigger those terrible memories, like when you’re on the field?”

“Sometimes it’s hard to drown out the noise.” I am well aware I’m speaking without even thinking about it. I should stick to sprinklings of the truth, like I told myself at practice.

“Well, you may or may not know I also teach proper breathing techniques. Most people aren’t even aware they don’t breathe.”

“Seriously?”

She nods. “Calming the nervous system is important. Flight or fight mode can be resolved by reducing stress and anxiety.”

I think about that for a moment. I haven’t heard of this kind of thing, and if I have, I haven’t paid much attention to it.

“You can teach me all you like, Doc.”

She pushes her glasses up and I resist the urge to smile. I shouldn’t be acting so cavalier, but I can’t help it when my defenses drop. It’s like she’s peeling back the layers without even trying. Soon she’ll expose me, maybe not literally, but it’s an appealing thought if she’s involved.

FOUR

# OLIVIA

I looked him up on the internet for professional purposes only. That's what I tell myself, anyway.

When I first heard Dexter Shepherd would grace his presence in my office for therapy because of suspension, I had more than one reservation. Regardless of being a Raiders fan, I still have a job to do.

Despite his increased openness, I see through his bravado. I mean, it's my job after all. But he didn't give me much on the first appointment except crass comments and a roaming eye.

I've seen his eyes on me when he thinks I'm not looking. I wonder what he sees.

I can't let him flirt with me just to get a pass to play again. I know his type with their flashy cars and black credit cards that have a limit worth more than my apartment.

I take my job and everything about it seriously. And my clients are number one.

"To improve your situation with your coach, I'd absorb all available information. Don't you want to be just free of it all, Dex? A place free from the past's control, where you can release everything?"

He sighs as he casts those dark eyes over at me. I hold his gaze for as long as I can. I'm usually better at this, but with him I look away first.

He throws me off balance. No one has unsettled me in a while.

So far he seems very level-headed, making it easier to get to the root of his troubles. He's also driven. Ambitious. Hard-working. Those things are acceptable as long as they do not jeopardize your happiness.

I want to help him. I won't judge any of the guys on the team, as they all have things written about them. As time goes on, he will unfold.

I want to be the one to lead him to where he needs to be.

This is what I do. I do it well.

"I would love that," he admits, then hesitates. "Well there are other things." He pulls his lip under with his teeth while he contemplates his words. Then he glances up, releasing his lip and gives me a wink for good measure.

"Such as?" He gives me a look.

I shake my head. "Really?"

"I like sex, Doc."

Here we go again. I'm sure he gets plenty, looking the way he does.

"I believe I can grasp the underlying implication, but your sexuality wasn't a topic of conversation unless it's a problem?"

He looks horrified. "Of course it isn't a problem. Why would it be?"

"You brought it up. In fact, whenever we get close to anything that may resemble feelings, you turn to innuendo or jokes."

He rolls his eyes. "I'm the funny guy in the group. Sue me."

I study his face for a moment. It's clear he tried with his appearance, but he's an athlete who gets photographed wherever he goes. His jaw is firm. His skin tanned from the



Texan sun and his long hair tousled like it's supposed to be like that. The ultimate bad boy with the pretty looks.

But has an easy air about him, even if he's still trying to protect himself by playing me off against his bravado.

Please.

I can see right through it.

“So tell me,” he urges. “I’m curious about your thoughts. I know you told me before, it’s not enough time to assess me, but I need to play ball, Doc. More than anything in the world. We have to find a way through it. But just so we’re both clear. I don’t have an issue with sex.”

Instead of answering right away, I keep studying him without saying a word.

I believe he really wants to play football, but I’m not convinced he’s willing to get to the root of his anger issues.

“You want to know, Dext-.”

He gives me a look when I almost call him by his full name.

“Dex.” I amend.

“Throw it out there.” He shrugs.

I sigh. He shouldn’t have the capacity to twist this any way he wants, but here he sits doing it, and here I sit complying! “Fine, if you want to know, I think you’re a decent guy. It’s difficult to let go of things from your past that you’ve struggled with. Sometimes high profile people self-sabotage because they don’t feel worthy of their success.”

I glance up at him as I see something shift on his face. I hit the nail on the head. “Dex?” I swallow, thinking I’ve gone too far, or is he far off thinking about something else?

He recovers, swallowing hard as our eyes meet, his expression guarded. Like he’s seeing me for the first time.

My friend Patti says I can crack a client wide open from instinct alone. I’ve never been certain if it’s a real concept or if I could have those powers. But when I see him shift in his seat

and he doesn't respond straight away, my mind flicks to her and the words she's always telling me.

"You have a sixth sense, Liv. You know how to get right in there, to the heart of it."

I guess it's true in the sense I do sometimes go off script, depending on the client and how far along and how open they are to talking, and to change. That's why we're here.

Dexter Sheperd is a whole other ball game.

"You think I self-sabotage?" he asks. And the way it comes out of his mouth sounds like he's asking himself, not me.

"I'm sorry if I..."

He doesn't take his eyes off me. "Hey, I wanted to know your thoughts."

"So some of that is true? Do you self-sabotage?"

He looks like a little boy lost and my heart breaks just a little. "I never really thought about it," he admits.

He leans forward as if to leave. I've never had a client walk out. As difficult as some interactions can be, they've always stuck it out.

"And now that you have?"

The mask goes back up again, and he rests his hands on his thighs.

I notice he hasn't brought up the part about being unworthy.

Interesting.

Because that's what it is.

It's obvious. I don't even need him to admit it, because clients rarely realize it for themselves, so there's no way he's going to tell me out loud. Not just yet.

"I told you why two days ago when I walked in—isn't that enough for you hearing about how I got this way?"

Unfortunately, the mask is securely in place. His defenses are up and he's ready to defend.

This is how Dexter Shepherd works.

Hide behind bravado, innuendo and funny jokes. Who doesn't love the funny, cute guy who gets all the chicks?

The thing is, I'm not attacking him. I'm on his side, I've just hit a nerve. This realization can be confronting.

"It isn't about me, Dex. It's about you and only you. Do you feel deserving of all the success you've had? How does it all make you feel?"

He avoids answering the question, looking awkward and unsure of where to go or what to do. "Of course I'm deserving, I've worked fucking hard!"

He's angry.

"I know that." I glance up at him. "Dex, I didn't mean to offend or upset you. Please sit down."

"Offend or upset me?" he scoffs. "No one has that ability, Doc. You may be good, and a hot broad, but you're not that good."

I purse my lips. I find it worth taking notes, but I keep my hands clasped in my lap.

"Confronting this is actually a good thing," I explain to him. "Therapy involves delving into the details head on, which can be uncomfortable."

"Uncomfortable!" He shakes his head. "I'm not uncomfortable, Doc."

"Are you sure? You seem agitated," I shoot back, keeping my cool and not moving from my seat.

"Maybe I'm just not good at relationships, period," he goes on. "Low expectations make it easier to get caught up in everything. The money. Fame. Women. But none of it means anything."

And there it is.

“Money doesn’t buy happiness,” I reply. “The same problems still lie under the surface regardless of wealth.”

“Don’t I know it.” He runs a hand through his hair.

“So, you don’t have issues with sex, but you keep saying you’re fine and it’s clear that you’re not.”

“I’m feeling fine. Especially around you.”

I open my mouth and then close it again. What the hell?

“I’m glad I make you... comfortable, but the real question is, when was your last relationship?”

He palms the back of his head.

Just as I thought.

Commitment phobia. I see it a lot and it’s not uncommon with men his age in sports.

I believe Dexter Shepherd is capable of more. In fact, I think he wants more. Not only in everyday relationships but also in intimacy.

Of course he shuts down again...

“I have to cut this short,” he says, his voice curt.

I glance at the clock. “Dexter, our time isn’t up yet. Are you sure you don’t want the full hour? We’re making genuine progress here. We can figure it out. Like I said, confrontation can be hard.”

He assesses me for a moment, his brows knitted together. “We can figure it out? You mean my attraction to you, or something else?”

I stare at him, a little stunned. “Look, maybe it is best if we leave it for today,” I rasp out, though my voice is a little hot, bothered and shaky.

“Isn’t that what I said before?”

“You’re a client, Dexter. You can’t say those things to me, it’s inappropriate.”

“I was being honest. You don’t feel it?”

Oh, I do feel it. But we can't act on it. "You're smart enough to understand the situation. I'm your Doctor, you're my patient."

"Call security then, if you think I'm a threat."

"I don't think you're a threat, but you run away the second the questions get too hard. You hide behind this ego that I don't even think you want."

He stares at me, lost for words.

He stalks toward the door.

I slide out of the chair and follow him, but he stops, his back to me. I place a hand on his shoulder, I don't know why I do.

"Are you okay?" I ask, concerned.

He turns on me. "You really think I have an ego?"

I shrug. "Don't all pro athletes?"

He turns, and I reach for his sleeve. "Dex..."

He whirls around, then our roles are reversed and I'm in front of him as he backs me against the door.

"I'm more than just sex," he tells me, caging me in. "Women never want more from me, but maybe I do."

It's just as I thought.

"Dex!" I whisper. "This isn't..."

"What?"

"It's inappropriate. I'm your therapist." Even as I say it, my eyes drop to his lips.

This is all wrong.

This is all wrong.

But I can't help the hammer of my heart in my chest and the throb between my legs.

This is wrong on multiple levels.

I've never, ever let a client do this, or accept this kind of behavior when they've implied they find me attractive. It's always professional.

He's a pro. He knows how to talk. How to seduce. He's had enough practice.

But our faces are so close, it's like he's going to kiss me...

Like a jug of cold water pouring over my head, the timer goes off and breaks the spell. I shake it off.

"Will you look at that," he says, smirking again. "Time's up, Doc."

My breathing is hard and labored and I hate myself for it.

I hate that he's done this.

He pushes the door and I step aside for him to pass.

He leaves without another word.

I peel myself off the door as it closes behind me as he leaves.

What in the hell just happened?

FIVE

# SHEPHERD

I've thought of nothing else except my encounter with the Doc for the last twenty-four hours.

As mad as I was about her getting under my skin, I'm more mad at what the hell I did. Backing her into the door and wanting to kiss her? What the fuck?

I was being a complete asshole.

Deflecting again and using my sizable dick to get out of confrontation. That's what I'm kinda used to with women.

She's different, and not just because she's my doctor. She's fucking consuming me. And she ripped me wide open without even breaking a sweat.

My unworthiness has long-stemmed from being a poor kid with no father, and a dead-beat step-dad who used to beat up on me. As I told Olivia, it didn't last long.

My mom left the situation, but I'm still dealing with the scars. I've never gotten close to telling any of my girlfriends about my childhood, not that I've had that many lasting relationships, as the doc picked up on.

She thinks I'm a complete asshole now. A man who tries to seduce every woman he meets, which isn't true. She'll likely report me and get me kicked off the team.

I'm a fucking idiot. Not being able to control my emotions with the hard shit and not being able to control myself around her.



I haven't been with a woman in a while. Lately, the status quo has changed. And it's not them. It's me. I want more. But more isn't an option.

I'd love to have her soft, warm body wrapped around me while I pleasure her body. But it's also more than that. I want to get to know her. What's in her head, as much as what's under her clothes.

I have a crush on my therapist and I need to make it right again.

I should send flowers, or an apology or something.

I need to see her again.

I need to get back into her good graces, and make her see that I'm not the total asswipe she thinks I am.

The night of the benefit looms.

Tonight, I'll check up on her. I need to make sure she's okay.

I sent her an embarrassing display of roses in every color with a tiny note on my Dallas Raiders business card saying 'Forgive me for my sins. You're one damned good therapist.' Dex.

At practice I somehow keep my face neutral when my teammates ask me how everything is going, including Coach. Thank fuck she hasn't spilled the beans on my behavior. I'm sure I'd have heard about it by now.

The illicit almost-kiss haunts my thoughts all afternoon. Wondering if she got the flowers, what she thinks, if I am as fucked up as they say I am — and more importantly, if she hates me or not.

She might kick me out next session, if there even is one.

It hasn't deterred me from jacking off in the shower. Just thinking of how sweet she smelled and how much I wanted to grab a handful of her wild, flaming hair and press my lips to hers.

It's unlikely we can continue seeing each other, so it will soon be a distant memory. Around her, all rationality goes out the window.

I need to get my life back on track and get back to doing what I do best.

The fact that I am not playing this week is going to kill me. And now she holds all the cards.

My mom isn't happy with me, and I need to call her this weekend.

It's black tie for the benefit tonight so I shave and splash some cologne on my cheeks. I gel my hair back and plaster my award-winning smile on display.

My suit came back from the dry cleaners earlier and I polished my shoes to perfection.

When I arrive at the benefit, I sidle up to two of my teammates Jamieson, and Quarterback Ralph Ferdinand. We grab a drink before the night gets underway.

It's a full house tonight at the Ritz-Carlton, Dallas. The event organizers have decorated the ballroom extensively and set up a stage at the front.

I eat my way through most of it. I'm not a big drinker and I never have been. It slows me down. I'm just as strict preseason as I am in the offseason.

I've been training like a mother-fucker because it's always been my motto since I hit the pro's that I need to be fitter and faster than the next guy. I need to stay ahead of my opponents. I'm not gonna do that by slacking off.

Coach Jackson and the owner of the team, who's a business executive named Chance Hardy, start the proceedings with an eye-watering check to the organization for its continued efforts in helping underprivileged kids. It's something that I feel very passionate about because I was there once.

Everyone claps, hoots and hollers.

As the night progresses, I head to the bar for a soda water and feel a tap on my shoulder.

I almost get the shock of my life when I see Grizz Huxley standing behind me. It's been a while. I'd almost forgotten how big the fucker is and how mean he looks.

"Grizz," I try not to snort as the bartender passes me my drink.

"I thought that was your ugly mug," he muses.

I know he settled down with his PT, Amy Dawson, from our home town in Ten Mile Creek and they've got a new baby.

"How's retirement treating you?"

Giving me a look he says. "You know I retired because I was injured?"

"Uh, huh."

"Not because I'm too old."

"Whatever you say, big guy."

"Your Mom sends her regards," he snipes. "She seems to still like watching you play. Fuck knows why."

His lips twitch. Fuck I've missed sparring with him.

"Don't worry, most of the time it was when you were tackling me."

I snort and he laughs too. "Probably," I concede.

I signal the bartender for another drink for Grizz and turn back to him.

"So I hear you're teaching now?" I do admire the fucker for that. It's something that's always been close to my heart too, teaching kids. We were both recruited from our home town as kids by a talent scout. We were fortunate to not slip through the cracks like many from small towns.

"Yeah, it's a change of pace," he says. "I love it. The kids are great. Small towns house a great deal of talent, as you know."

I respect what he's saying. To some, taking a job in our hometown is seen as a step down. But it isn't like Grizz needs the money. He could do anything.

Even I, with a long-standing rivalry, don't go there. I'm not a total asshole.

"Took one fucking big job off my hands anyway," I tell him. "You were always the hardest to keep track of on the field."

He grins. "Sounds like a compliment, Dex. You going soft on me?"

I chortle. "Hardly. Though this fucking suspension is killing me."

"Do what you gotta do," he tells me. "Just don't fuck it up when you don't need to. I'm not the person you should listen to for advice, but I would still be there if it weren't for unforeseen circumstances. You never know when your time is up."

I consider the impact it would have on me. I'd go off the rails and on a downhill slide — that much I know. I wouldn't move back home, get married and have a kid with-in a year. He's done well for himself. He looks good. Not that I'd admit it outloud.

I think it's the first time we've ever been able to see eye to eye, and the first time my vengeance for wanting to beat him hasn't raised its ugly head.

"Thanks man, appreciate that." I glance up at him, he's nicknamed a grizzly bear for a reason, the guy hasn't lost his form in that respect. He's six foot five and as big as a bear, with dark shoulder-length hair and dark eyes. "For what it's worth I'm sorry, for what happened with your injury."

He shakes his head. "It's tough, but I moved on and I'm happy now," he says. "I'm with a wonderful woman and we just had a baby girl. It all makes sense in the end I guess."

I quirk a smile. The big guy is getting all sentimental, shit, things really have changed.

“Yeah, I heard that. I’m happy for you,” I tell him.

“We don’t have to like each other,” he gruffly acknowledges, as if realizing this is our first rational conversation.

I grin. “Thank fucking God.”

He slaps me on the back. “Gotta keep moving,” he says. “Wife is waiting, you know how it is.”

I nod. “Good to see you, Grizz.” But really, I know nothing. Sitting here at the bar with my career still somewhat intact, even if the edges are fraying with my suspension, and here is my arch rival, forced out of the game he loves because of an injury he sustained on the field, and yet he’s happier than I am. Way happier.

How can that fucking be? I glance at his retreating figure and wonder if there will be an article in the papers about us talking civilly for once.

The thought makes me smile.

I sip my tame drink and realize I should rejoin my teammates at the table. I’m sure they will want to know why Grizz and I weren’t throwing punches like we used to. We’ve exchanged right hooks over the years. Seeing him face to face changed my feelings; I don’t hate him at all.

Most of the team is here tonight. Along with the Dallas pro basketball team and countless big business people, politicians and celebrities.

It’s when a group next to me clear away from the bar that I first see familiar flame colored hair and it catches my attention. Olivia. She’s sitting further up the bar and has her back to me. She’s deep in discussion with someone. Not just anyone. A man. Is he her date? I slide off the bar stool and step a little closer.

“I don’t see how that even comes into it,” she’s saying to the guy standing next to her.

The guy says something back, and she shakes her head. “Just because we had a thing that one time—”

I move closer to hear more of the conversation. My hackles go up where she's concerned and I kinda get the impression that they're arguing.

"You know we were good together, shrinks who fuck together—stay together," he says and just as I glance back, I see him slide a hand around her waist.

Oh, fucking no way.

She doesn't want him touching her, even with her back turned I notice.

"You need to back off Jeff, I won't say it again."

He laughs, but it sounds like a sneer. "You too good for it now in your fancy office downtown, sweet cheeks? Gone are the days where you were one of us?"

"Jealousy is a curse, Jeff, haven't you heard?" She removes his hand from her waist but he slides it back around again. "Now go away and leave me alone!"

My blood is at boiling point. Who is this asshole?

My hand clenches at my side, unable to resist stepping in, even at a kid's charity event.

I walk right up to them and shove him away as he sputters, stumbling backward.

I turn to Olivia, her wide eyes gazing up at me as I put an arm around her shoulders.

"Honey, where did you get to?" I say, snuggling into her side.

I give her my most award-winning grin. Her eyes grow wider as I give her a look and she catches on.

I'll pretend to be her fake-boyfriend to get rid of this asshole.

I suppose I could always wipe him with the floor, that's Plan B.

She opens her mouth and closes it again and I wait for her response.

SIX

# OLIVIA

Jeff's advances have been annoying me for months. We hooked up about a year ago after months of him asking me on dates and to have drinks with him. We had too many drinks at a conference downtown and ended up spending the night together.

Not my finest hour, and not the best sex I've ever had in my life.

Once again, he's trying to make up for lost time. I've repeatedly said no to him.

I've mostly kept to myself tonight, talking to a few colleagues, but I don't know many people here. I spoke with Jim Jackson, the Dallas Raiders coach, and wondered if Dexter might be here tonight. I didn't think he was until now.

I stand there looking at Dex's furious face. He's glaring at Jeff, who loses his balance after Dex pushes him off me.

He's fierce like this. Protective. This is the same Dexter Shepherd on the field before one of his infamous standoffs.

My eyes grow wide at his sudden presence, and his touch. It scorches right through me.

I'm wearing a long, black, silk and lace gown with a deep V neck plunging neckline. Patti encouraged me to go hard or go home. And after a hearty glass of wine, I thought what the hell. Thank God for Hollywood tape is all I can say.

I style my hair up in a fancy chignon, courtesy of my hair stylist late this afternoon, and my makeup a little more smoky



and daring than I'd wear to the office.

My mouth gapes open as I try to form some kind of response.

Jeff steadies himself and stares at us both aghast. "What the—"

Dex shakes his head. "You need to back off," he throws at him, not letting go of his arms tightening around me. "Now!"

"Hey, I'm sorry—" Jeff holds his hands up in the air in defeat.

One look at Dex towering over him and he becomes more reasonable. He also doesn't miss the possessive arm around me and the angry look on Dex's face.

I don't want a fight or a scene, so I turn to Dex and play my part.

"Hey," I croon, looking up adoringly. "Where have you been, baby?"

I see Jeff glance at Dex in my periphery, sizing him up.

Dex dips his head to my neck and breathes me in, rubbing his nose along my jaw.

I squeeze my thighs together because I instantly feel the heat, and the throb that he causes. Jeff still stands there agog.

I feel Dex's lips on my skin, and plants kisses close to my ear, murmuring his appreciation in a low voice. "You look so fuckin' sexy," he purrs. His hand slides down to my waist.

I smile up at him, even though my heart is racing, as he grins back at me.

"You two are a thing?" Jeff looks confused.

Of course, he does not know Dex is my client. Which reminds me of the consequences especially if Coach Jackson sees us.

"You're still here?" Dex growls, turning to face him. "Fuck off."

Jeff holds up his hands again and then scampers off like a frightened deer.

I try not to stare.

“Jesus Christ,” I mutter.

“Doc.” He smiles, not removing his hands from me right away. “We meet again.”

I open my mouth, then I take in his appearance and snap my jaw closed.

His face is bare. His hair gelled and slicked back. He always looks good, but in a suit, he looks amazing. Like a movie star, not a football player.

“Dexter.”

He scrunches his brow. “You keep calling me that, Doc, and I think I’m liking it.”

I shake my head. “Thanks for saving me and all, but you can stop now. Jeff’s long gone.”

“Maybe I don’t want to.”

“Look, we need to set some boundaries,” I say, lowering my voice.

I’ve been thinking about this for the last twenty-four hours, actually. I also thought about it while using my rabbit vibrator last night, wondering if Dex’s dick was as hard as the rest of him.

It’s wrong on so many levels, and I thought I could justify it in my mind by banging one out with my trusty rabbit because nobody has to know. But all it did was intensify my curiosity for Dex.

I’ve never fantasized about a client, nor have I let them touch me like this.

“Boundaries are frowned upon in my book, Doc. Haven’t you heard?”

I pick up my glass of champagne, trying to steel my nerves.

He looks so sexy and dapper that the force almost knocks me off my feet.

Why does he have to be a client? My internal monologue sounds as whiny as I feel.

His eyes dip down to the slit in my dress. I am all too aware it leaves nothing to the imagination. His eyes linger on my cleavage for a brief moment.

“Haven’t heard that one,” I counter.

A sexy smile plays on his lips as he lowers his voice. “Did you get the flowers?”

I blink rapidly. My receptionist Jess couldn’t stop jibing me all day about who they were from.

“Yes, thanks to you, half the office had their tongues wagging all day about a secret admirer.”

“My tongue wasn’t the only thing that was wagging,” he mutters.

I glance at him, narrowing my eyes. “You just can’t help yourself, can you?”

He sighs. “Told you, I’m the funny guy.”

“You don’t see me laughing.”

“We’re not in the office now. We can play nice, can’t we?”

“Are you deflecting again?” I’ve had a couple of champagnes so the words just fly out of my mouth and my feet do not try to move.

“Again?” He laughs. “I wasn’t deflecting before. I admit, you hit a nerve. I was unaware that my childhood or relationship issues were a sensitive topic until then.”

“Wow, is that an actual admission? You have been drinking after all.”

He shakes his glass. “Soda water. I rarely drink, sweetheart.”

“Don’t call me that.”

“You look sexy tonight, Doctor Liv.” The way it rolls off his tongue as he assesses me is sexy.

I glance at him. “Speak for yourself. Every woman turned her head when you walked in.”

He laughs, giving me a lopsided grin. “Careful, Doc, that almost sounded like a compliment.”

“It wasn’t, but I owe you one. So thank you.” When he frowns I add. “For rescuing me from that creep. Not that I wasn’t handling it.”

“Woah, a compliment and a thank you. I’m on a roll.” He leans toward my ear. “If I’m lucky, I might get a goodnight kiss or a nightcap.”

I shake my head. “You really are full of yourself.”

“I aim to please.” He watches me. “I couldn’t help overhearing what he said.”

I take a deep breath. “Should I add eavesdropping to your ever-growing list of non-attributes?”

“Among many.” He gives me a wink. “You don’t want that guy back here, right??”

I go to shove him and in the process my glass slips from my hand. Dex catches it with lightning reflexes and suddenly his eyes are staring down at my cleavage.

I glance down and realize that my breasts are practically flashing the entire room... the Hollywood tape keeping me together just gave way. Holy shit.

I quickly pull my dress closed and glance around.

“It’s okay, Doc.” He grins, then takes a sip of my champagne. “Didn’t realize this was dinner and a show, I should’ve bought popcorn.”

I give him a withering look. Clearing my throat, I say. “I think we need to set boundaries.”

“You’ve already said that before and it sounded boring then,” he tells me.

“What I meant was, I can referer another therapist for you.”

He snorts. “Why would you wanna do that?”

I give him another look. “Dexter.”

“You think we need to see other people?” He quirks a brow.

He’s being cocky, I get that. But there’s a hint of sincerity to his words.

“I think it’s imperative.”

“Does that mean we can fool around?” He tilts his head on the side.

“No, Dex. It does not mean that.”

“Why not?”

“It’s still not a good idea.”

“I think it’s a great idea. Wait till you’ve spent some time in the sack with me.”

“You know I’m over ten years older than you?” That should put him off.

It’ll steer him safely away from me. Not that I want that if I’m honest with myself. Even though I know it’s wrong...

Instead of looking horrified, or confused, he just smiles.

“Who’d have thought that could be so hot.”

“If you use the word cougar, I swear to God I’ll sock you.”

He laughs. “That would be a compliment. Older women only get called cougar’s because they’re hot.”

“Don’t even,” I let out an exasperated sigh.

“Look. This is the real me. I joke a lot. I use innuendo, as you pointed out to me. But I’m not the guy who is just pursuing you because you’re unattainable.”

His face is sincere. I guess he’s had to use humor to mask anyone getting anywhere near him. It’s all just surface stuff with Dex.

“I honestly don’t know what to do when I see it or hear you say it,” I say honestly.

He makes a noise in the back of his throat. “Not possible. You’re a shrink.”

“It’s very possible, we both know it. I want to help you, but you don’t allow it.”

“Oh I’ll allow it, Doc. Not in the way you suggest, though.”

He passes me my glass, which miraculously still holds a mouthful of champagne. I’m tempted to ask the bartender for the rest of the bottle. It’s necessary for me to be able to handle what’s happening here.

“You were mad at me yesterday,” I point out.

“No. It frustrated me. You were angry with me, if anything.”

I lower my voice once more. “That’s because we almost kissed.”

His finger touches my bare shoulder. It’s such a subtle move but I feel goosebumps rise all over my skin.

He looks pained, for the ghost of a second. “If we ever kiss, it’ll be you making the first move,” he says in a low growl that tells me he won’t be responsible for his actions.

Our heads are so close together, if anyone saw us now...

“Thank goodness we both have level heads,” I stammer. Trying to regain just an ounce of self composure.

He looks at me confused. “But the night’s still young, Doctor Liv.”

“Don’t call me that.”

“You said you’d been called worse the day we met.”

“I was being polite, and I was trying to build rapport.”

“And how’s that going for ya’?”

I sigh, this guy is exasperating as much as he is sexy as sin. I could teach him a few things under the duvet, if he wasn’t

my client. Despite him soon becoming my ex-client, we won't go there. Crossing that line is so tempting, as much as it is ethically wrong.

"I'll keep you posted." I know I could rock him into next week.

In bed, I know we'd be compatible, but I can't let myself go there. As much as I feel the same attraction he does for me. I can't even imagine what it would be like to have his dick inside me. I almost moan at the delicious thought.

Stop it. I chastise myself for the millionth time. He's too young for you.

And it's wrong. It goes against my better judgment and client/patient trust.

My professional reputation could be on the line, and I'm not risking that.

Not even for Dexter Shepherd and his sweet talking.

The angel and devil on each of my shoulders disagree with each other, but I know he can always get a new therapist...

No. It doesn't matter what he says, or what he's preaching this time.

The answer is no.

# SEVEN



# SHEPHERD

So she probably thinks I've lost my mind.

Maybe I have. The jury is still out.

I don't need alcohol. I'm drunk just on the fumes of Doctor Liv, as corny as that may sound.

That silky, figure-hugging, leave-nothing-to-the-imagination dress is doing things to my insides. I need to maintain some level of dignity, but around her, I'm toast.

I want to toss everything away that I thought I knew. Especially when I hear she's ten years older than me. It's hot as fuck.

Am I scared of her getting too close? Maybe. Then again, I fear anyone getting too close, even my teammates.

Maybe I want to be understood so I can move forward.

After some thought, maybe it's not so bad. You get to the other side, eventually.

Opening burdens and old wounds I didn't even know I was carrying is difficult. Another therapist may be more suitable, and not just because I want to sleep with Olivia.

It's because I'm afraid of her getting too close.

"If you want to blame anyone, blame Coach Jackson," I tell her as she downs the rest of her drink and panic strikes me as I figure she's about to leave. "He's responsible for all of this."

“Umm, correction,” she interrupts, wagging her finger as she slides off the stool. My eyes follow the movement as her tits jiggle in that hot dress. “*You* got yourself in this mess, *not* me, *not* Coach Jackson.”

I eye her amusedly. “Fine, I take full responsibility.”

“If you truly mean that, you’ll be well on your way to getting back on the field.”

I reach out to touch her before she leaves. “Doc, wait.”

Her eyes lift to meet mine. She has more makeup on than usual. Her lashes are long and dark, her eyes smoky and sexy. The bright red lipstick on her perfect pout does nothing to slow down my illicit thoughts of fucking my therapist or that red lipstick around my dick.

Yes, she’s getting too close to the truth. And yes, that part makes me uncomfortable.

But I need to fucking change. I know it.

“I fucked up the other day.”

She blinks rapidly, as though she’s adjusting to my words.

“I shouldn’t have acted that way towards you. I’m... I’m sorry.”

She nods like she understands. “Not here, not now.” She flushes and I hope it’s me that affects her and not the alcohol she’s consumed.

“Well, let’s talk outside of here.”

“Fine, you can book an additional session with Jess—”

I cut her off. “No, I mean now.”

“We’re at a charity benefit,” she reminds me.

“You might not be on duty, but surely that doesn’t mean we can’t talk?”

Why is she so reluctant? She thinks I’m just a fuck boy, obviously. The tabloids are responsible for that, and I didn’t do much to refute the rumors about me being a playboy. But you’re never allowed to come back from that, not in this game.

“I’m starting to wonder who the therapist is here.” She places her empty glass on the bar.

I panic. “Fine. But if you’re leaving, I’d rather walk you to your car, so I know you’re safe.”

“I’m going to the ladies’ room,” she tells me. “Goodnight, Dex.”

I shake my head. She can’t just dismiss me and walk away like that. “I’ll walk you there then.”

I fall in step alongside her as she glances at me. “What are you doing?”

“I’m trying to make up for my behavior. I don’t see you trying to make up for yours, though.”

She laughs a little. “My behavior?”

“You wanted to kiss me back,” I say.

She opens her mouth to retort something, but snaps it closed again. I’m pleased she doesn’t refute it. How could she? That would be a lie.

Yeah, because she knows she has nowhere to go from there. She keeps walking, like that will save her.

I know she feels it, too. It’s written all over her perfectly composed face. I know her body is reacting to me and her mind is probably doing overtime.

“Dex—” she sighs when we round the corner and are out of sight of the lobby, near the elevators.

I catch her arm and pull her to me. “I don’t wanna be an annoying Jeff fuck-face. If you want me to back off, then just say the words.” I watch her mouth. She parts her lips to speak and my heart falters, but she presses her lips together again. I push her backwards toward the wall.

My hands find their way to her hips and I can’t help but want her to know what she’s done to me. “Doc?” I tilt her chin up with my finger.

“We can’t,” she whispers, looking either side of her. There’s no one around here. No one at all.

“You worried about getting caught?”

“Yes! Of course,” she snaps. “And losing my license, being disgraced and God knows what else. This is unethical and the consequences could be severe.”

I make a face. “Okay. You’re fired,” I say as her eyes go wide.

“W-what? You can’t fire me.”

I smirk. “Yes. I. Can. And I just did. So now I’m no longer your client and I can misbehave.”

I keep hold of her chin as we face a stare off.

“Dex,” she whispers.

I push my hips to her, testing the waters. She grabs onto my biceps and sighs, leaning forward into my chest. That’s exactly what I fucking want, some reaction to me at last.

My dick is painfully hard, and she gasps when I tilt my hips.

I reach into the side of her dress that’s gaping again and slide my fingers into the front, feeling her erect nipple as she groans. She has such a fucking huge rack that I can feel my dick leaking like a damn horny teenager. I need to fuck them. I pull her nipple and she cries out.

She holds onto the lapels of my jacket and we stare at one another.

“Your move, Doc.”

Her eyes dip to my mouth and she pulls me closer once more. Our lips crash together as a groan leaves her mouth. My tongue finds hers and she opens her mouth to let me in.

It’s so fucking hot. Her lips are just as I imagined; soft and sexy. I don’t even care that she’s smearing that lipstick all over my face.

I cup her breast, kneading it as she groans again. “Babe,” I mutter as I pull my mouth from hers. “I need to see them.”

“Not here,” she breathes. “God, Dex. We shouldn’t even —”

I place my finger over her lips. “Don’t say it. You’re fired, remember.”

She shakes her head. “If anything, you’re fired for being an ignorant ass-”

I cut her off with another kiss.

She melts into me and my heart races so fast in my chest, I’m afraid it might burst. I’ve never felt like this before.

“We need a room,” I mutter. “I need you.”

She squeezes my biceps and I glance down at my hand inside her dress as I pull it aside further to expose her breast.

Just as I thought. Her tits are big and perfect. “Fuck.” I can’t help myself. I dip my head and suck on her nipple as she squirms against me, her hands in my hair.

“Oh, God!” She grasps onto me for dear life. “Find a room, Dex. Fast.”

I want to suck her all night, but I have to drag myself away.

Adjusting my dick, I grab her by the wrist and rush down the hallway, looking for somewhere to get some privacy. Just for a moment while I figure things out.

At the end of the hallway, there’s an empty room. I think it’s a linen closet, but it’s clearly not being used tonight. It smells of fresh sheets and fabric softener as I pull her inside and close the door behind us. I don’t turn on the light to avoid suspicion, I can see her by the moonlight.

All of her.

I can barely get the words out, “I just need to look at you, Doc.” I’ve never wanted to fuck so badly in all kinds of ways.

She wraps her arms around me as I push her against the door and reach for the back of her dress, unzipping it all the way down. She carefully peels the front section of her taped V apart and we both watch her dress fall to the floor.

She's left in her sky high heels, thigh-high stockings, a sexy black thong, no bra, and those luscious red lips with her tongue rolling over them. *Fuck.*

I step back to glance down at her massive rack. I cup each breast as she mewls and I flick my thumb over each taut nipple, loving her reaction as she gasps.

"Where was I?" I dip my head and resume sucking on her nipple while I play with the other one. *Fuck*, her tits are perfect, as is the rest of her.

"Jesus, Dex," she cries out. "Oh."

That's what I want to hear above all else. Her calling my name is all I need. I suckle and lick and move my tongue over to the other one and reach one hand south over her stomach. I love how curvy she is. Her hips, belly and ass are round as fuck and I love it. When I reach the seam of her thong, which is barely a scrap of material, I cup her mound.

"Oh, Dex."

"Yeah, you like that?" I glance up at her.

She bites her lip and meets my gaze. She looks... worried. Kind of.

I stop. "You okay?"

She swallows hard. "I've always been a curvy girl, Dex. I'm not stick thin... And I don't... I don't just jump into bed with anyone. Jeff was a mistake."

I shake my head. "First, your curves are hot as fuck. I've jerked off to you every damn night since I first saw you, imagining you riding my face while you suffocate me with that sweet pussy." She gasps at my words. "Secondly. I know you don't sleep around. And third, please don't mention that jackass's name while I'm trying to fuck you."

"You feel so good," she cries when I rub my cock against her pussy.

I place my finger over her mouth. "You're fucking beautiful. I'm so turned on." I grab her hand and lead it down to my dick. "I'm leaking, baby. I won't last the first time, but

that ain't my fault. It's yours for being too damn sexy." She squeezes my cock and I groan.

I kiss her again and go back to suckling her tits while she strokes my dick through my pants.

"*Olivia.*" I can barely breathe, let alone talk. "Need you so badly, baby."

"Dex, oh God, that feels good."

I grin. As I reach down to the lacy scrap of material pretending to be underwear, I slide my fingers down her crease and I feel how wet she is. "Fucking hell." I rub her clit, still playing with her tits as she fondles me through my pants.

My cock needs attention before I come in my underwear.

"Babe, unzip me," I groan.

She complies, her fingers brushing me as she unbuckles my belt, then undoes the top button and fumbles with the zipper, all in a couple of swift seconds. I help her push the top of my pants and my boxers down in one movement and my cock springs out.

She gasps.

That's always a good sign.

I can't help my smug grin as I loosen my bow tie and unbutton my shirt to give her better access. Yeah, I know I have a big dick and it's not even my ego talking.

She takes a hold and massages it up and down with a tight squeeze as I grow longer.

"Dex, you're huge."

Music to my fucking ears.

"I need to get you to a bed," I murmur between licks and sucks. "Let's play here for a while, then I need to go and fuck you."

"So romantic," she chortles.

Watching her fist my cock... I don't think I can come back from that, but at least her barriers are down and here we are.

“You know what I mean.” My thumb rubs her clit as my fingers reach under the material of her thong, finding her wet hole with ease. I circle around and slowly insert a finger, letting it slide in as she groans loudly, knowing soon it’ll be my swollen dick.

She holds onto me for dear life, and I know I’m going to give her the best ride of her life. She just needs to hold on..



EIGHT

# OLIVIA

It registers somewhere in my brain, the same brain I used through several years of college to become a therapist, that this may be wrong. Not even. I *know* it's wrong.

For one, he's Dexter Shepherd. He's always being photographed and in the headlines.

Two, he's on suspension for bad behavior.

Three he's my freaking client! Okay, well. Well, he did just fire me. And I let him.

So, technically, he isn't my client anymore.

Oh, how the mighty have fallen.

My head is telling me to halt this immediately.

But realistically, how true could that be? I'm standing in front of him now with just my thong and high heels.

He's got me all wound up in all kinds of ways and I want him.

I should not be stroking him up and down in the hotel freaking lobby for the kids' charity fundraiser! I'm going to need serious therapy myself after this.

But I also know if Dex doesn't ram into me soon, I'm going to explode.

The way he looks at me, sucking my nipples and fondling me through my thong, it's so freaking hot. I've never felt this turned on in my life.

His thumb rubs my sweet spot, and now his finger is inside me. My free hand grabs onto him as I sag back into the door and let him insert another. My other hand still grips his cock as he watches my every move.

“Dex,” I breathe, as if saying his name like that’s going to save me from my sins.

He glances up at me as he moves his fingers in and out of my slick hole with ease. I’m a freaking mess.

I pump my hips to match his moves as I let him finger fuck me. Our hands are everywhere, like neither of us knows where to put ourselves.

“Yeah, baby?”

“Feels so good,” I moan. I know I’m going to explode any minute. Watching his huge frame eating me up and enjoying my body is a sight to behold. My tits bounce heavily back and forth, and watching him fascinated by my body is such a turn on. “I’m close, Dex.”

I feel the quiver in my body. I know I need to give into it. We also need to get out of the linen closet before we get busted.

I pull him off harder as he pumps his hips to the same beat I’m pumping mine against his fingers.

“Fuck, yeah,” he moans, pulling back to watch the movements for a moment.

I can’t even form a coherent sentence.

“Dex, that’s it. Oh, yeah... oh yeah...” I squeeze him harder as the orgasm building hits me like a tidal wave and crashes through my body full throttle. I feel my back press into the wall and I lose my sense of direction as I feel him holding me up.

I call out his name repeatedly as he places one hand over my mouth to drown it out.

I lift my head to look at him. “Wow,” I breathe, my body reveling in the aftershocks and still humming with adrenaline.

I realize I've stopped jerking him off. I continue what I started as he places his hand over mine to set the pace he likes. His fingers are still inside me as he sets the pace to bring him home to mama.

"Gonna coat your tits," he moans as we both jack him off faster and faster. He's watching my tits bounce with every thrust of his hips. He pulls his fingers out of me moments later and takes them up to his mouth and licks them clean. My eyes grow wide as I watch him.

To make it easier for him, I slide down the door and drop to my knees before he comes. He holds himself up against the wall with his hand as he throws his head back. My hand pumps furiously until he stills, and I feel his hot cum squirt over my chest. He sounds incoherent, calling out the sexiest sounds, including my name, as he unloads all over me.

*Olivia.* It's the second time he's called my full name in the throes of passion tonight. And I like it.

It's always Doc or Doctor Liv. I'm surprised he hasn't gone all out and called me Doctor Quinn.

It takes a few minutes for him in the aftershocks, but when he finally stills, he grins down at me. "Fuck."

"Um, yeah. You can say that again."

He glances at my tits covered in his cum as he helps me to my feet. "I made a fucking mess."

"It was hot," I assure him. "God damned hot."

He steps back and reaches for a hand towel from the shelf, wiping his juices off me and then discarding it in one of the laundry baskets.

"I'll go get that room."

"You do that," I tell him. I need a moment to compose myself.

He kisses me chastely on the lips, then does up his shirt and buckles himself back up, making his escape a few moments later.

I quickly adjust my dress and question my actions, debating whether to escape before he returns.

It's not that I don't want to sleep with him after we just hand fucked each other. But my brain is working overtime.

I need to think straight. But he's all too consuming. His scent is all over me.

And from what I sampled just now, I know I want the whole enchilada.

I take a second to try to just breathe. My cheeks are on fire and my body is warm and still craving him after what he did and where he had his fingers.

Less than five minutes later, the door opens again, and he slides back in.

He looks sexy with his loosened bow tie, and the two top buttons of his shirt open. "We're all good to go," he tells me.

"Okay, I think we should go up separately though, just in case."

"Good idea." He flashes the room card. "We're right at the top, floor twenty-one."

"Okay." I nod.

He kisses me again quickly and passes me a second room card. "You're not thinking about ditching me, are you?" He tilts his head to the side.

I shake my head. "Wouldn't dream of it. I just don't want either of us getting sprung. Not until we figure this out."

"It's alright. I'll text my friends and say I had to leave, and that I'm not feeling well. They probably won't buy it, but at least they won't wonder where I went or try to call me a million damn times."

"Good idea."

"I'll see you in five."

"Alright."

He quickly leaves and I wait a minute before following.

He's nowhere in sight. He's definitely fast, I'll give him that.

I'm halfway across the lobby floor towards the elevators when I see Jeff again loitering, but I quickly duck around the side of the elevators until he's gone.

That's all I need. I am tempted to knee him in the balls.

When the coast is clear again, I press the elevator button and wait anxiously until the car arrives. When I'm safely inside, I let out a sigh of relief. I realize then that we're heading to the Penthouse.

Of course. Dexter Shepherd does nothing by halves.

When the elevator slides open, I see Dex's shoes lying in the entryway.

I walk inside the plush suite as my eyes land on Dex, his back to me. He's shrugging his jacket off, looking out over the city.

"It's beautiful up here," I say, feeling relief at finally being able to kick my heels off for the night and be alone with him.

"Isn't it?" He smiles, turning toward me.

Holy smokes.

He's so damn sexy and unkempt and I love I got him this way.

The fact he didn't balk at the ten years age gap has me practically skipping up to the room.

He turns from the window, placing his jacket over the back of one of the plush armchairs and then unbuttons his shirt, letting that slide off too.

I pull my dress carefully over my head and stand there before him once more while I watch him peel the rest of his clothes off. My eyes flick down to his cock when he tugs off his pants and boxers and kicks them both free.

"Wow, ready so soon," I murmur, licking my lips.

“I’m always ready for you, Doc. Make no mistake about that.” His eyes devour my body and it makes me feel so beautiful.

I smile, reaching to my hips and rolling my thong down my legs to the floor.

“Fuck you’re beautiful.”

“You’re not too shabby yourself,” I muse as he reaches for me and pulls me into his arms. I’m surprised by the gesture. He’s not in a hurry to finish this.

He steers me back toward the bed. “You gotta admit this is kinda hot, Doc.”

I bite my lip because I know it’s true and I don’t want to admit it.

I’m not a risk taker in my real life, not at all. I always follow the rules.

This is by far the most reckless thing I’ve ever done.

“It’s very dangerous too,” I say as he kisses the top of my head.

“No one has to know. Not until my suspension is over.”

I glance up at him.

I bite my lip. “Is this your way of getting me to sign off on your therapy, Dex?”

He snorts at that notion. “That’s not what I meant. This chemistry between us is more than just tonight.”

My heart leaps in my chest.

I can’t deny it. “Besides, you fired me, remember?”

He chuckles. “Exactly. Let me show you what my mouth is really made for.”

I shake my head as the back of my legs hit the mattress.

I sit on the edge and spread my thighs. Never have I been so glad I’ve kept up with the Brazilian appointments, even though it’s been a dry spell.

His eyes flick up at me hungrily. “Such a sweet pussy,” he says, sheathing himself.

I watch him pick up his pants and pull out his wallet, a foil packet visible in his hand.

“I wanna eat you out, Doc, more than anything, but I need to be inside you before I die.”

Good lord. *His words...*

I nod in agreement. “I need that too, Dex.” I know I’m panting and going crazy, but I want every inch of him inside me.

He stalks back to the bed, ripping the packet open with his teeth and quickly rolling the rubber on. He kneels on the bed before me, stroking himself as he leans down to kiss me.

“Do you like it slow and passionate, or hard and fast?” He asks me cheekily.

I smile, resting back on my elbows as he takes me in with his hungry eyes.

“All the above,” I tell him.

He laughs. “Any which way then, fine by me.”

I reach for him, pulling him down to me as our lips lock and his body melts with mine.

God, he smells divine.

He reaches between us and rubs my folds with the head of his cock. It feels oh so good.

Then he grabs himself, lining up at my entrance. “Beautiful,” he mutters.

He pushes inside with one jerk of his hips, and he fills me as I gasp.

Holy cow. He is big.

He groans and closes his eyes as he stays seated deep inside me.

Dex Shepherd is the stallion I always thought he was.



And he's about to prove it to no end.

NINE

# SHEPHERD

I move my hips slowly at first because I want to savor those first few moments of easing into her. I also won't last very long if I pump her into the mattress full throttle.

As she pulls me inside with her tight walls, I immediately marvel at the way we fit and how fucking great it feels. She strangles my cock and I can't get enough of her.

To think she was slightly worried about being heavier than the average woman... I don't care.

I love every damn inch of her curvy, sexy body. She's the whole damned package.

I still for a few seconds and take her in, holding my weight off her with my hands on the mattress.

"Maybe this temporary suspension is the best thing to happen to me," I murmur as I move slowly, glancing down at my length before sliding in and out of her.

She smiles up at me in the moonlight. I love seeing this different side to her. Her office demeanor is a stark contrast to how she's looking at me now.

I like this look a lot better.

"You don't mean that," she whispers, clutching onto my arms as she moves her hips to my slow, sensual movement. I want her to feel all of me.

"I do mean it," I whisper back, moving my kisses upward. Along her décolletage, trailing her neck and then finding her luscious mouth as I groan. "Because we wouldn't have met."

“We might not be saying that in the morning.”

“Oh, I’ll be saying it,” I assure her. I know one night with her won’t be enough. It’s not possible.

“Dex, you feel so good,” she purrs. “So big...”

I grin into her neck as I move my hips back and forth, looking down at her tits jiggling with every thrust. “You’re beautiful,” I say back to her. “I knew we’d fit like a glove.”

I quicken the pace a little, and it’s a sight to behold, our bodies moving as one.

It’s fucking beautiful.

It’s hot as fuck knowing we shouldn’t really be doing this, even though she’s no longer my therapist. And the fact she’s older... man, that speaks to me on a whole other level.

I thrust deeper, and she cries out. “Yeah, you like that?” I grit between my teeth. “You like my big cock inside you, Doc?”

She mewls in response, and that makes me grin. Good. I’m glad she’s got nothing to counteract that with, for once. She closes her eyes instead and meets me thrust for thrust. Because I can’t get enough of her tits, I suck one nipple into my mouth and play with her, pulling it with my teeth and caressing it with my tongue. I slide my hand between us, lifting slightly as I find her clit and rub.

She has to be close.

I feel her grip on my biceps, and as I glance up, she has the sexiest look on her face, with her eyes squeezed shut. Her lip pulls under with her teeth. She’s clearly lost in the world of me and her and I love that.

I pinch her sweet nub and she cries out, suckling her all the way to orgasm as she cries out my new favorite words.

“Dex, Oh God, *Dexter!*”

I pump a little harder and feel the pull of her orgasm squeezing my dick like a vise.

“Fuck!” I groan into her skin, popping her breast out of my mouth. I’ve never seen anything sweeter than my girl coming undone.

I think I’m obsessed with her body and the way she feels so good beneath me.

My balls feel like they might explode. “I’m coming,” I rasp out, pumping harder as she grips her nails into my ass.

I feel electricity shoot through my body as I spurt deep inside her.

She milks every pulse out of me as she cries out another release of her own. I collapse on top of her and revel in the aftershocks. I’ve never felt this good before.

She wriggles underneath me and I realize I’m crushing her.

“Fuck, sorry.” I lift my weight off with my hands and move some hair out of her eyes. Her fancy up-do is a little on the ‘I just got fucked’ side now.

She laughs under me, shaking her head. “It’s okay.”

“God, that felt good.” I’m reluctant to pull out of her, as I don’t want to lose the connection, but I know I’m not done with her yet, anyway. I slide out as she winces.

Straight away, I feel the loss of not being inside her. The warmth she radiates. Her beauty. Her goddamned legs wrapped around me. There’s nothing I’ve ever wanted more.

“You’re very good at that,” she says. As I roll onto my back and look up at the ceiling, covering my face for a moment with my arm, I try to catch my breath.

“No, you’re very good,” I pant. “That was fucking fantastic, Doc. Just to clarify, I’m not done yet.”

“We can’t stay here all night,” she says, her voice an octave higher.

I chuckle. “Wrong again. They don’t rent rooms by the hour, babe.”

She slaps me on the arm.

I roll on my side to look at her. “You think I’m joking?”

“About rooms by the hour?”

“No. about me not being done yet.”

“Dex, we’re playing with fire here.”

“We’ve played with mere sparks, baby. The fire is just getting started. There’s no turning back now. Shouldn’t have worn that sexy fuck-me dress if you wanted a night playing patty-cake.”

She stares at me, blinking rapidly, then bursts out laughing.

“You really are the funny guy,” she muses.

“Told ya.” I glance down at her body as I move off the bed. I discard the rubber in the nearby bathroom and throw it in the trash and take a leak.

She’s sitting up with the sheet up around her armpits, covering her body from me.

As I walk back towards the bed, she sizes me up and I see true appreciation in her eyes for my form. Her eyes scan the tattoos on my arms.

“Don’t hide from me,” I say, pulling the sheet away. “Unless you’re cold?”

Her lips twitch as she fights a smile. “And here I was thinking you’re just a wham-bam-thank you, ma’am.”

“With you?” I snort. “Never.”

“I think I like this sweet, nurturing side to you,” she singsongs. “I think you’re really growing.”

I shake my head, leaning over to kiss her chastely. “Oh Doc, there’s no cure for what I’ve got.”

“Is that right?”

I grin and cup her chin. “I think you need to roll over.”

She bites her lip, and my cock rouses. I’ve already come twice and my dick ain’t done yet.

“Yep. Now I’m gonna prove to you I’m not all just hearts and flowers.”

She giggles. “Wow, I didn’t know you cared.”

“Oh I do, Doc, I really fucking do.”

I know she loves it when I call her that in bed. It’s written all over her beautiful face.

I fist myself a couple of times and reach for another rubber as she turns and gets onto all fours.

Seeing her hot, beautiful ass makes me wanna be a very bad boy.

I can’t resist fondling her there, too. She wriggles around as she groans.

She’s impatient for me, and that turns me on.

I can’t wait to have her on top, riding me into the mattress.

I slide onto the bed and scoot behind her. Reaching between her legs, she groans as I feel how wet she is from her release. I have to have a taste... I bury my head between her legs and have at it with my tongue. She gasps, trying to close her legs, but I’m faster, pushing her knees wider.

“Let me in,” I growl at her.

I suck each pussy lip as she makes sounds that’ll live rent free in my memory forever.

“Jesus,” I hear her whisper.

I flatten my tongue to her clit and she moans louder. Fingering her hole, I see her body shake as I take her over the edge. So fucking fast. My cock bobs impatiently between us.

I don’t even give her time to recover as I line up my cock and sink into her.

She cries out.

That’s the fucking reaction I want.

I grab hold of her hair, loving how unkempt she is after I fucked her once. I gently pull her head backwards. Our mouths

meet as I pump my hips against her ass. I won't be so gentle this time. I can't be. She's too hot.

I break away, kissing her neck, looking down over the top to see her tits bouncing to our beat, and I groan. She's so perfect.

"God," she breathes. "I could get used to a younger man."

I grin into her shoulder. "Just me, no one else. We may need an extra night here, baby. So I can do all the things I wanna do to you."

She laughs quietly and closes her eyes as I slide in and out, loving every single time she clenches down on me.

"*Dex,*" she moans.

She's such a good fucking girl. Meeting me thrust for thrust as we fuck furiously. It's different, intense and hot.

I meant what I said, I can do it all ways. I have no preference, other than being inside her. Making her scream.

It's all I want.

I know I'm losing myself. I'm feeling things for her I never knew I could, and it's not because I'm buried deep inside her as I watch us fuck like wild animals. It's because I'm drawn to her.

She's smart. She's sexy. She's beautiful. And damn it, I want more.

"That's it baby, let go," I murmur in her ear.

"Dex! Dex... I'm coming, Oh.My.God.....*Ohhh.*"

Once again, her clamping down on my dick and her sexy moans draw my orgasm right out of me. It's like she controls it and I'm spiraling at the same time as she is.

The thunder I feel forces me to close my eyes and ride the storm. My seed pulses as my body stills, groaning her name until I'm empty.

I'm panting and my mind is spinning somewhere in orbit. I don't know where to put myself.



Once again, I stay inside her, not wanting to lose the connection as we sink down to the bed.

“Dex,” she murmurs, panting hard.

I know just how she feels.

“You’re gonna be the fucking death of me, woman.”

“I hope not,” she chuckles as I pull her back to my front, trying to keep most of my weight off her this time.

I don’t want to be anywhere else.

It feels like somewhere deep inside, a weight has been lifted. It’s not just post orgasmic afterglow. This is the real deal.

Maybe I was wrong earlier telling her I need to be fixed.

Maybe I already am.

TEN

# OLIVIA

Somewhere after we shower and play the bucking bull with me riding the cowboy, we sleep. Or more like fall into exhaustion.

It's past midnight and I'm unsure about staying the night here, especially since we'll have to walk out in the morning wearing our evening clothes. But I'm so exhausted, sated and feeling so content with him spooning me from behind that I can't bring myself to leave.

At least for tonight, I pushed the part of my brain that is still fighting for recognition that we did a bad thing — several bad things—into the distance. I let myself have tonight because since my divorce, I've never let myself have anything. I've never been reckless.

I feel my cell vibrating from somewhere in my evening clutch that I left on the floor. I glance behind me to Dex, still spooning, his arms around me. He hasn't moved an inch during the night.

Sunlight threatens to spill through the shades as I slide out of bed carefully, trying not to wake him. Thank God for the blackout blinds. I realize, as I pick up my cell, it's seven-thirty in the morning. And Patti is calling me.

I quickly sneak into the opulent bathroom, sliding the door closed as I swipe to answer.

“Patti!” I do my best to keep my voice hushed, and to also not sound too enthused to my best friend, who doesn't know what I did last night.

“Hey, Liv.”

I probably should have let the call go to message since I don't know how I'm going to explain this, even to my bestie. I close the toilet seat lid and put on the hotel bathrobe hanging on the door as I sit down.

“Hi!” I know I sound weird. I'm over compensating.

“Where are you? In the bathroom? There's an echo.”

“Yes, I am. But not in *my* bathroom,” I whisper. I know she's probably calling me to see if we're still on for our hot yoga class this morning. *Shit.*

“What? Where the hell are you?” She says, her voice excited. “OHMYGOD — You're with someone, aren't you?”

“Shhh,” I whisper again. With Dex sleeping, I don't want to wake him. “I'll fill you in later.”

“You hot dog!” I can tell she has a big grin on her face. “Deets, Liv! I need them pronto. Pictures are better.”

“Ew.”

“Not *those* kinds of pictures, you sicko. I mean him, at the benefit.”

“How did you know...”

“I was Nancy Drew in a former life. So that means he's an athlete?”

“Yes,” I confirm, peeking around the door. Dex hasn't moved an inch. “And it's complicated.”

“Slick.” She giggles. “Well, I'll cancel yoga then since you're tied up... see what I did there.” She snorts.

I shake my head. “What will I ever do with you?”

“Find me a hot pro athlete. I'm sure he has some friends.”

“I'm hanging up now.”

“Details!”

I end the call, rolling my eyes as I rest my head against the wall.

I can't believe that I stood up my friend. Then again, if it was her she would do the same, and I'll make it up to her.

I put my cell down, pee and then splash some water on my face.

I glance up at my reflection. Yup. It's still me. Though it doesn't feel like it.

I feel different. My appearance isn't as bad as expected despite not washing my face properly last night, though my hair is a mess.

I try my best to smooth it out but eventually give up.

Returning to the bedroom, I contemplate making an escape.

It's a shitty move, and don't I know it, and I feel bad for thinking it, but the light of day hits me all over again and I doubt myself. It's his age... and the fact he's my client. *Former client*, I remind myself.

His open eyes eliminate any chance of quietly leaving.

"Doc," he mutters, his voice still thick with sleep.

It's hard to know if I've even seen anything sexier than Dexter Shepherd and his tattooed arms and gorgeous eyes looking up to greet me. It's a sight I could definitely get used to.

"Hey," I say ruefully, perching on the end of the bed.

I can definitely feel where he was all night. My body aches in places I had almost forgotten existed.

"You okay?" He folds one arm behind his head and rolls on his back, yawning loudly.

"I'm good," I say, albeit a little shyly. And I'm not a shy woman by nature.

Remembering what we did all night makes me blush.

"I'm glad you're not running out on me." He glances down at my robe and smirks. "We have a lot left to do before checkout."

“We have to talk,” I tell him. Running a hand through my messy hair.

He watches the movement and smiles. “Don’t even tell me you’re regretting one second of what happened last night.”

“I don’t regret it,” I say. “But technically, it was wrong because of how we met.”

“Well, I don’t think it’s wrong. It’s just a minor detail, and here we are together. That’s all that matters.”

*A minor detail!* “What exactly do you think is happening?” I ask.

He sighs, running a hand across his face. He looks thoughtful for a split second. “I’m falling for you, Doc. It’s not a one time thing for me. I know it’s fast, and you think I’m too young, but I know now. I feel it...”

I stare at him, a little dumbfounded. “You’re falling—”

“Yeah, don’t rain on my parade. And don’t deny that you don’t feel our connection.”

“We had sex several times. Pretty sure I felt it.”

He shakes his head. “There’s more to it than that. I realize I’ve been looking to settle down, but none of the women I met were right for me. They just wanted a slice of the pie, then they split. In a lot of ways, they were using me.”

*Settle down?*

*Does he really mean that?*

“Dex, what are you saying?”

He shrugs. “I haven’t felt this kind of connection before. Never. Being with you last night reminded me of how much I’ve missed having someone to come home to. I have a deep longing to be with one woman.”

*Holy shit.*

“Dex, you can’t know that after one night with me!”

He props up the pillows and pats the bed for me to join him. My body betrays me by moving towards him like a

magnet.

“I know it, Doc. I felt it the second I walked in. You’re someone special. This isn’t just about me and my therapist. It’s about how I feel when I’m around you.” His words and his sincerity floor me.

I lay down next to him, facing him side on. He looks cute when he’s just waking up. He’s disheveled and very sexy.

I smile to myself.

“I think you’re someone special too, Dex. I’m just trying to navigate my way around all of this.”

“But you admit you feel something?”

I swallow hard and nod. “Of course I do.”

“So why navigate? We both like each other. We have a connection. I know I have problems, but we can work it out. I need to address my anger issues, which are rooted in my childhood.”

“I know, Dex, This is just a lot.”

He sighs and sags back a little, running his fingers along the neckline of my robe.

“You hit the nail on the head. I’ve never felt worthy. My Mom did her best. I don’t blame her for what happened. But shit was rough. I’ve always tried to make her proud of me ever since, yet I’ve run from any kind of commitment in other areas.”

“I get that, Dex.” My heart breaks for him just a little.

I can’t even believe we’re having this conversation, after we just woke up together, but I let him speak because I’m intrigued, like everything else about him. I just can’t leave it alone.

“I know now,” he repeats.

“What is it you know?”

“What I want.” He runs a hand down his face again and glances at me. “I didn’t know that I felt unworthy, Doc. Truly I

didn't. It's something that has eaten away at me since I was a boy. It triggered memories of that time and as a result I was deflecting. Wanting no one to get too close."

"Dex, I'm so sorry." I squeeze his hand as he gives me a small smile.

"It's not your fault. I just didn't realize how fucked up I was until I opened up about it. I didn't feel capable of being the best version of myself."

I'm amazed by his confession, and the fact he's being genuine.

I'm proud of him.

"This is major."

"I know."

"Do you think maybe that's what rears its ugly head in stressful situations? You feel you have to act out to mask what you're really feeling?" I ask.

"Bang on. And I've buried it deep down for so long."

I inadvertently rub his forearm with my fingers, feeling the ridges he showed me that day in my office.

He glances at me. "You know, I think that's enough therapy for one morning." He tilts his head to the side. "We have a couple more hours until checkout."

I give him a look and swat his arm playfully. "We're onto something profound here, and you're worried about having your way with me again before ten am?"

"Straight up," he laughs, and I can't help but laugh too because he looks so sweet when he smiles like that.

"Dex. I'm in a real dilemma here. This is my first time doing this with a client... and despite your protests about firing me, we both know what was happening in my office that day."

"We can't help it if we're attracted to one another." He shrugs.



“You say that like it’s a small thing.”

“No. It’s a very big thing, and I want to take you out on a date. A real one. Buy you food and listen to all the things that make you tick, if you’ll let me.”

This man.

“You know, maybe you’re right.” I can’t believe I’m saying this. “After the dust settles and you find a new therapist. I think I’d like that. A lot.”

He grins and pulls me closer to him, planting a row of kisses on my neck as I giggle like a schoolgirl and squirm. “Babe, your secret is safe with me for now.”

I shake my head. “You’re a bad influence.”

He tugs at my robe. “No, you are. You’re older than me, therefore you’re the influencer.”

“Nice justification,” I muse.

“You’re not gonna give me some sugar?” He coos into my neck, pushing his hips into mine.

“I can’t believe that thing still works after last night.”

“Trust me, it never goes down around you.”

I stop him from opening my robe as he pulls on the belt loop. “Dex, things appear different in daylight.”

He pulls back to give me a strange look. “What?”

“I mean my body. It was dark last night...”

“You think I don’t wanna see your beautiful curves now it’s daylight?” He snorts. “Fuck, babe. I want it now more than ever.”

I bite my lip. My weight has never been a problem and I know I don’t need validation from a man. But he makes me feel sexy. And I like it.

“There are younger women out there...”

“Plenty. But I’ve never had an attraction like I have with you.”

I cup his face. “I won’t allow myself to be hurt again, Dex. My divorce was awful,” I say. “And you could have anyone you wanted...”

He cuts me off. “So could you.”

“It isn’t the same.”

“Trust me. It is. If you were mine, I’d never let you out of my fucking sight.”

This is a lot. I don’t know exactly what to make of it, or if he’ll feel differently after things settle down, but I enjoy hearing it.

I like knowing that he wants me. That I could be all he needs. It does something to me.

“Dex, are you sure you know what you’re saying?” I let my hand loosen over his as he pulls my robe apart, looking down as he exposes my body.

He reaches for my breast and gives it a squeeze. God damn, he drives me insane.

“I know exactly what I’m saying, *Doctor Liv*. This is the only place I want to be.”

ELEVEN

# SHEPHERD

*2 weeks later*

Olivia and I have kept it hush hush over the last couple of weeks, though we've been at it like rabbits and my appetite for her only grows every time we're together. But it's not just the physical. I love how her brain works and how smart she is.

She tried to fight it at first, and made me agree to the last couple of sessions with a new therapist she knows well at another practice. As long as I kept up the work she assured me a recommendation would be given to the board at the Raiders to get me back on track. I've been doing well over the last couple of weeks, and I was even privy to some of her breathing techniques to calm my nervous system and rewire my mindset. There's something in that shit.

It was probably one of the hardest parts I've had to learn. Just sitting and breathing.

But it has worked wonders.

Olivia takes her work very seriously, so there was no goofing around when it came down to that part. When she hit the nail on the head about me having issues with my worth, things were difficult, but she guided me through it. Even if my final sessions were with some old guy, I would debrief her afterwards.

Getting to the root of my problems from my past has been one of the hardest but most rewarding things I've ever done. And it's all thanks to her.

I may have put the work in to pave the way for a better mindset, and being able to handle my frustration a lot better, but Olivia is the one who has really pushed me to get there.

We agreed to let the dust settle, before we made things official.

I told her in no uncertain terms that I want to be with her. I want to see where this goes.

We've been seeing each other in secret at her place since there's too many risks with paparazzi around my apartment. I've even made friends with her cat Mojo.

Running out on the field today felt good. It's the first game back since my suspension and a shit load of therapy. I'm back in with Coach and more importantly, back doing what I love. My head is more clear. And my fucking heart is singing Doctor Liv love tunes.

I've got it bad.

I fell in love.

That's what happened.

I also love how she's stopped hiding from me. She's letting me in, and I can't get enough of her and those curves.

I feel the rush as soon as my helmet is on. Jamison and Cornerback Carter Monroe are either side of me as we get into position on the field.

It's safe to say I feel alive again. This is where I'm meant to be.

I love what I do, more than anything. I knew it well before my suspension, but being away from the field just for two weeks has reinforced everything tenfold.

The buzz of the crowd tonight has me pumped more than ever.

We're playing the San Diego Devils and it's a strange thing to not have to keep tabs on Grizz, since I always have one eye on the Quarterback.

He was the best of the best. It's never been the same again since he was forced out, we always made headlines when we played against each other.

Now probably isn't the best time to be thinking about Grizz or sacking the Quarterback, but the thought makes me smile to myself.

Grizz or no Grizz I have often been called the Swiss army knife of the defense, and tonight is going to be no exception. Tonight I will pull out all the stops to show Coach that I can be trusted on and off the field. I know I'm a force to be reckoned with, coupled with the talent of my teammates who are happy to have me back on form, I feel like I can do anything.

I love to tackle. I love intercepting passes. I love the speed.

The thrill of the game has always been the thing that pushes me to be the best.

And a load has definitely been lifted this last couple of weeks.

Now with Olivia set in my sights as my official girlfriend, I'm like a dog with a bone. And I can't let her go.

I've lined up a proper date tonight. Since we're both off the hook with not worrying about getting caught; technically we did hook up after I fired her, we can rest easy.

I still find that part funny. Olivia just rolls her eyes in that way of hers and I'm glad I'm here to keep her entertained.

That night in the hotel after the black-tie benefit was so hot. We didn't just hook up, we cemented everything that I already felt. I'm crazy about her.

The night raised a lot of money for the charity, and I know it will all be put to good use.

Anything that helps kids get into the game and helps schools buy more equipment for their teams is a good thing in my book. It's something I want to do more of in the future.

I play harder tonight than I ever have before. Especially because I know Olivia is watching me from the sidelines. I

gave her and her best friend Patti tickets for the game. I know they were good seats, but I'm not exactly sure where they're sitting.

It's probably a good thing that I don't get distracted by my woman. She's beautiful, sexy, voluptuous and her smart brain has me completely smitten.

When a blitz is called close to the final minutes of the last quarter, I get a chance to rush the Quarterback, adding pressure to effectively disrupt the play. I go all out when I tackle him from behind the line of scrimmage before he can throw a forward pass, sacking him just before the final seconds.

I fist pump the air, right in front of the camera as my teammates rush me to celebrate our win. *Yep, that one's for you Grizz Huxley.*

It's probably a good thing Grizz isn't here to witness us taking down his beloved team, but I know he'll be watching it on the big screen and probably cursing my name.

They've had us plenty of times before, and if we keep on our winning streak, we're going to be sure to make the playoffs.

We celebrate an epic win, because it's never easy against San Diego.

I'm sore, battered and bruised by the time we hit the showers.

I make haste in getting changed and out of the stadium where I'm going to meet Olivia for dinner.

I would have invited them both behind the scenes after the game, but I wanted to make a swift getaway to see my girl and soak up everything that happened tonight.

She's the one who saw through my shit and got me from point A to B. I love my game, I always will, but she has to be a priority.

I meet her outside at the rear of the stadium when all the hustle has died down.

She's wearing a team jacket that I gave her the last time we were at her place, and my jersey. There's nothing that turns me on more than seeing her wearing my shit.

Her Raiders cap just tops it all off.

"Anyone would think you're going for the Raiders," I joke, pushing the brim of her cap down playfully as I lean in for a kiss.

"Nice game. Glad I chose the right team," she laughs, looking up at me with those beguiling green eyes. I get lost in them every time I look at her.

"You look as hot as fuck," I add.

"Always a charmer."

"Seriously, *Doc*, that jacket is doing things to me." I take her by the hand and we walk to my truck.

"You know I'm not exactly dressed for dinner," she complains as I throw my sports bag in the back and turn to look at her from head to toe. She's wearing jeans and ankle boots along with Raiders gear.

"Why the hell not?"

"I'm dressed a little casual."

I laugh. "Don't worry about it. The place we're going is tiny and no-one will bother us. We can cozy up in a booth, make out, that kinda thing."

"Sounds very intimate," she says as I open the truck door for her. "I like it."

"Oh, it's going to be intimate when I get more than a second alone with you," I assure her as I swiftly walk around to my side. Climbing in, I lean over to her and place another kiss on her lips. I'm a greedy fucker when it comes to her, I can't help but want to touch her all the time.

"I like the sounds of that," she muses.

"I thought the decent thing to do was take you on a first proper date. Now I've been given the all clear and my career is back on track."



“Ah, so you weren’t just using me for my brain work.”

I laugh as I start up my truck, letting it rumble to life for a moment. I place my hand on her thigh, giving it a squeeze before I back out of the lot. “More like your body work, babe. Those skirt suits are fucking hot.”

She gives me a well-deserved whack on the arm but I just laugh.

The restaurant, Maples, which is more like a small-town cafe is less than five minutes away. I know I could have taken her to any fancy, five-star, fine dining restaurant dotted along the city, but I wanted to be cozy and intimate for our first official date.

I can do flashy any day of the week. I wanted to make it more special without the worry of being photographed.

“You know, you surprised me a lot over the past few weeks,” she says, as I snuggle her to my side in the booth seat after we order a wood fired pizza to share, along with a bottle of red.

“I did?” I muse, quirking an eyebrow.

“Yeah, you’ve come really far since that first day in my office.”

I smirk at the memory. That was kinda unique. “I still maintain it was the best thing that ever happened to me.” I shrug. “Though, you must’ve thought I was a cocky little shit.”

She laughs giving me a shove, but doesn’t deny it.

“So you thought I was a cocky little shit?” I clarify.

“Among other things,” she laughs. “But I think it could be the best thing that happened to both of us, Dex.”

“I think so too.”

“You looked great out there tonight,” she says, shrugging her jacket off. She pulled her cap off in the car and her hair now hangs loose around her shoulders.

“Yeah? You liked watching me?”

“Loved it. Games are so much better live, especially when you’re banging the linebacker.”

I laugh just as I reach for the bottle of wine, pouring us both a glass, trying not to spill it. “I hope this is the first time you’ve banged a linebacker, baby.”

“Oh trust me it is, and one is enough.”

“Maybe even too much.” I prove this by discreetly sliding her hand over to my thigh and brushing it up higher so she can feel what she does to me sitting here wearing my jersey.

She gasps, glancing down. “Holy shit, Dex.”

“I ain’t kiddin’. You make me rock hard.”

“I wish I could get under the table and take care of it, but that might be considered rude in a family cafe.”

I can’t help but laugh. Yes, she’s a suction expert when it comes to blow jobs. I’ve been having the best orgasms of my life when she sucks me off. “Don’t worry, back seats are also really great places to relieve tension.”

“I’m sure.” She smirks.

I lift my glass up and she follows suit. “Let’s make a toast,” I chime, giving her a wicked smile. Knowing what she’s going to be in for later, she smiles too. “To us.”

“To us,” she repeats, as we clink glasses and I reach in for a long, slow kiss before we both take a sip. “I love you,” she whispers. “I know it might be too soon—”

I lick the wine off my lips as I put my glass down, her hand still on my thigh.

“Not too soon.” I shake my head. “I love you too, Liv. I’m crazy about you.”

Hearing her say those words... My heart pounds faster.

I reach to kiss her again just as the waiter comes over with our meal and we break

apart. I’ve never said I love you to many people in my life, especially anyone this soon in a relationship, but it feels right.

*She* feels right. And I know that we can only build on what we've already made special in such a short space of time.

"I'm crazy about you too," she whispers. "Even if you did fire me."

I laugh, pulling her into my arms. "Bet you're glad I did that now, huh baby?"

She shuts me up with another kiss.

It's like music to my ears hearing her say those words. Maybe even better than any touchdown or tackle on the field. It's better than anything I've ever heard, or felt.

My defenses are down when it comes to her, and I couldn't think of anything better.

She's my happy place. Plain and simple.

# EPILOGUE

# OLIVIA

## SIX MONTHS LATER

I would have thought it was ridiculous if someone told me Dex Shepherd would be my future boyfriend. But that's exactly what happened.

Dex openly shared his life and struggles, which resonated with me due to our instant connection.

It turns out, when he's not being all possessive and alpha on me, he's a bit of a sweetheart. We took a trip recently to visit his mom at Ten Mile Creek, Virginia. We figured it was time. I love Virginia, it's so lush and pretty and Dex really gets to relax away from the press.

He met my folks a few weeks before as they live in Florida. That was our first big trip together. They loved him. My dad spent the entire time doing the football bonding thing with Dex. I hardly saw him the entire weekend.

Meeting his mom was the next big step. He's very close to her and talked about buying a vacation home the entire time we were there.

His mom is so lovely. I couldn't imagine her being with the man Dex talked about during that short time in his life where he experienced abuse. She also endured it. He believes it made her swear off men forever, as she never dated again. She says she's happy on her own. But I know Dex secretly wishes for a man who can spoil her. Maybe someday.

I absolutely loved the small town he grew up in. He even drove me around and showed me where he went to school and the places he used to hang out as a kid.

The fact that he and Grizz Huxley are from the same place still amuses me. Dex has been in talks with him about doing a

charity workshop the next time we're in town as Grizz now works at the local high school as the football coach.

I don't think they will be best friends anytime soon, but they both have a common interest in wanting to help kids reach their full potential in the sport. Dex has made impressive progress and is now heavily involved in charity work.

His on-field antics have definitely curbed since I started working with him. Dealing with past anxieties has been challenging. There was nothing easy about it. But he's only gone from strength to strength throughout the entire process. He surprises me in so many ways.

Like today, when I walk into the office and a dozen red roses are waiting on the front desk at reception. Jess is beaming at me over the top of them when I walk in. I stop to take a sniff, half wondering if they are for her, but then Dex has sent me roses multiple times now.

"They're for you," she confirms.

A smile creeps across my face as I reach for the little card.

We both know who it's from, but I love to read his little messages.

Jess is one of the few that knows how we met, though I maintain to her and everyone I meet nothing happened until he found another therapist. Of course, it's unlikely anyone believes it, but I can't have them thinking otherwise.

I never heard or saw Jeff again, thank goodness.

"I wonder who," I muse.

She giggles as I open the card.

*Happy Wednesday, beautiful. See you tonight.*

*I have a surprise waiting for you, love u, Dex*

"He has a surprise," I tell Jess, looking up.

She smiles. "I'll bet he does."

I can't help but laugh. Dexter causes a stir wherever he goes—or wherever he sends flowers because they're always

an over the top display.

We've been getting closer and closer as time has passed. I moved into his condo a couple of months back, and we've been inseparable ever since.

I kept my place and rent it out for the time being. His condo is like a penthouse and much larger than mine, so I took his walk-in closet. Not that he minded.

Game-wise, Dex has never looked back. The Raiders were one of the team favorites to win the playoffs, and they did, taking the title of league champions in the Super Bowl.

I was so proud of Dexter. I'd never seen him so elated.

The vibe at the stadium was like nothing I've ever witnessed before.

I've watched the Super Bowl for years on the big screen and have always loved it.

But being at the live game and seeing Dexter on the field doing what he does best, feeling the buzz, the excitement, and the roar of the crowd — nothing compares. Maybe, except for meeting Dex to begin with, that was pretty special.

He was in his element after the Super Bowl victory, and I think he will be for some time to come.

The age-gap hasn't bothered either of us. Other than him still making jokes about me being a cougar. He thinks it's hot.

We've discussed the future and having kids. With my biological clock ticking, I know we can't wait forever. I didn't honestly think it was something in my immediate future.

I threw myself into my career after my divorce, but now the roles have switched again. It would be nice to take a step back and concentrate on raising a family one day. I think Dex would make a great father. Even if he is still young, he certainly seems to know what he wants.

"I'd better take my roses and get some work done," I tell her, when I've finished stargazing about what my surprise could be tonight.

“I’ll find a vase,” she tells me.

The days goes by without a hitch and I finish work on time, something that doesn’t happen too often.

I can’t wait to kick off my heels as soon as I walk in the door.

When I step in, I immediately see rose petals and flickering candles adorning the hallway. The petals are the same color as the bunch of roses he sent to my office this morning.

My heart skips a beat as I drop my purse down and shrug out of my jacket.

“Dex?” I call out. “What’s going on? Where are you?”

I walk barefoot up the hallway, following the path of red rose petals which lead to the expansive lounge area. I still don’t see Dex. The trail keeps ongoing all the way back to the French doors leading out to his huge, decked balcony. “Dex— are you out here?”

As soon as I step out, I see him standing there holding onto the railing, looking out to the city below. He turns to look at me, a sexy smile on his lips.

“Baby,” he breathes, taking me in.

He still loves the office attire I wear every day.

There are candles adorning the balcony, as well as rose petals spread everywhere.

My heart hammers in my chest. He’s never done anything like this before, despite being a romantic guy. “Dex, what is all this?”

He smiles even broader. I notice then he seems a little nervous, despite the cute grin on his face.

Our eyes lock as my heart races even faster. It’s when he pulls up the leg of his pants slightly, and without taking his eyes off me, he slowly drops to one knee.

A million thoughts flash through my mind at once.



We have talked about this. He knows that even despite my divorce, I would remarry again some day. Despite everything, I still believe in love and a happy ever after.

I've envisioned it a few times, what it would be like to be his wife. Calling Dex my husband is the sexiest thing I could ever imagine.

My senses are swimming from the way he's looking at me. I'm smiling from ear to ear.

"Olivia Grace Quinn — there's something I've been meaning to ask you."

I stare at him. I mean, it's obvious what he's about to say, but the anticipation is almost overwhelming. I feel the butterflies in my stomach and the blood rushing to my ears.

"There is?" I know I sound breathy, and as I look down at him, I feel flushed. Like he just hung the moon for me. It's nothing like the proposal I had the first time around.

"Oh, there is." He nods, fumbling around in his pants pocket, pulling out a little box.

My heart slams even faster, if that's even possible, as he opens the box and I see a huge red diamond ring sparkling back at me. I know they are extremely rare and pricey. Now I realize he was fishing months ago when he asked me about my dream ring, and I half-joked about a red diamond. I never dreamed I'd actually have one.

Our eyes interlock again, and I bite my lip, waiting for his next words.

"Will you marry me, baby?"

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# SHEPHERD

I planned this whole thing for weeks. It was amazing how hard it was to find the diamond she wanted and the right time to propose. I've been thinking about it for a while. A few weeks after we met, I already had an inkling that I would marry her.

What can I say? Once I found her, I knew.

I haven't been able to keep my hands, or my thoughts, off her ever since.

In my mind, I've asked her a million different ways and driven myself crazy. Finally, I sent her the roses one random Wednesday afternoon after I picked up the ring, and propose to her at home.

I've learned enough about her in the last six months to know that she hasn't given up on love, despite her difficult divorce. In the past, she briefly mentioned their growing apart and differing desires. She has talked about marrying again.

It's a first for me. I'd never considered it before. I always knew I would get married and start a family, but I didn't know when.

The fact she's ten years older than me is still a huge draw card.

I like that with her there's no drama. She's the most undramatic woman I've ever met. And the fact she's successful in her own right and knows what she wants only drew me in even deeper.

I glance up at her. Her face beams with joy, her eyes twinkle, and I know the red diamond will look gorgeous on her hand.

My heart is beating so loud in my chest, I feel like it's going to burst while I watch her hands fly up to her face at my question.

“Dex! OHMYGOD!”

I bite my lip in anticipation, raising one eyebrow, hoping she will put me out of my misery any second now. Though I love her rapid breathing and the way her chest is heaving, I could watch that all day.

“Of course I’ll marry you!” She cries, joining me down on the ground, throwing her arms around me as I hang onto the box. I kiss her deeply and passionately as she pulls back to look at me. Tears stream down her face.

“Thank God for that,” I muse, pulling the ring out of the box.

She already has her hand waiting. I slide it on, and it fits perfectly. I also had that all figured out beforehand. She cries again when she holds out her hand to look at it.

I must admit, I wasn’t entirely sure about a red diamond. In fact, I’d never really heard of one. But once I’d sourced the ring, as well as splashed out on the eye watering sum I paid for it, I saw how much it would suit her. I was totally onboard.

Now, looking at it on her hand against her skin, and how beautiful it looks with her deep red hair and her green eyes, I know it was the right choice.

“I’m going to be your wife!” she whispers, kissing me again.

I wipe her happy tears, kissing them away as we press our foreheads together.

“And I’m going to be your husband,” I tell her. “I can’t wait for that, Liv.”

“I can’t wait either,” she gushes. “This is the most amazing moment of my life, Dex.”

“Mine too.” I grin. I’m like a kid in a candy store. I just can’t wipe the smile off my face. Yeah, having her say yes, it’s even better than winning the Super Bowl.

“The best moment so far,” she says, breathy, taking another look at her ring.

“Yes, so far,” I agree. I’m excited for what’s to come.

“Dex, I love it. I really love the ring. I can’t believe it.”

I laugh. “Do you know how hard it was to find a red diamond?”

She giggles. “I’m sure you’re going to tell me.”

I shake my head. “It was all worth it.”

She tugs at my shirt and I know where this is going; straight to the bedroom.

She reaches her hand downward, touching my hard dick with her fingertips.

“Baby,” I moan. I’ve been thinking about making love to her all day.

She squeezes and I glance down to look. She tilts my chin up with her finger and leans in to kiss me, our lips moving as one. It intensifies fast and we’re all tongues as I reach for her breast.

“I need to get you inside,” I tell her, since we’re both on our knees now.

“Take me,” she says. “I want you, Dex.”

Now that is music to my ears.

“You gonna let me put a baby in you yet?” I ask, getting up and helping her to her feet. She’s already unbuttoning her blouse.

She giggles, shaking her head. We’ve had this discussion. We wanted a little time alone before trying, just to enjoy one another.

“When?” I ask her, ripping my shirt off as we step back inside, the rose petals scattering as we move.

“Soon,” she whispers, letting me lead her down the hallway. “Very soon.”

“Good.” I reach to her belly and rub my hand across. “I can’t wait to have our baby inside you.”

“Dex,” she moans, letting her blouse fall on the way to the bedroom. She unzips her skirt and lets that fall, too.

She’s just wearing her red lacy thong and matching bra. How fitting.

She scoots back onto the bed, unhooking her bra, letting her tits fall out.

I’ll never get sick of those, or anything, about her body.

“Come to Papa,” I muse, unbuttoning my pants and shoving them off, along with my boxers, stalking toward her as she squeals and scoots back.

“Dex, I love you so much,” she says as I climb over the top of her, our bodies pressing together as we mold together. “You’re the most amazing man I’ve ever met.”

“I love you too, baby.” My cock is pressing against her wet hole, ready and waiting. “You’re the woman of my dreams, *Doc.*”

I push into her as we both moan. She lays flat on her back looking up at me, her eyes shining in the fading light.

She’s the most beautiful woman I’ve ever seen and to call her my wife soon is going to be a dream come true. I know I’m home when I look into her eyes.

That’s exactly where I want to be.

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THE END

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS:

Mackenzey Fox is an author of contemporary, motorcycle, dark mafia, sports and steamy themed romance novels. When she's not writing she loves vegan cooking, walking her beloved pooch's, reading books and is an expert on online shopping.

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Dakotah Fox is a new author of contemporary, dark mafia, sports and small-town romance. She enjoys walking and hiking, finding new tea haunts, and is a qualified yoga instructor.

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