

Silver

FOX'S SURPRISE

BABY

JOSIE HART

Silver Fox's Surprise Baby

An Age Gap Enemies to Lovers Romance

Josie Hart

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LEVI

KENDALL

If tuition is going to cost twenty-six thousand dollars, I might have to consider working as a dancer instead of a bottle girl.

As I look down at the figure written on my tuition notice, my heart starts sinking in my chest. There is no way that I can come up with twenty-six thousand dollars by July. It's already May. There's only a little over seventeen thousand sitting in my bank account, and even earning that much ate up most of my free time.

I feel like I'm going to be sick. I push the burger and fries to the side and take a deep breath. I have to go back out on the floor in a few minutes and I can't go out looking like my entire world is falling apart.

Even if it is.

Law school is everything that I've ever wanted. I'm nearly finished with my first year of graduate school. I'm going to be

done soon and then I can spend the summer working as much as possible but it still won't be enough.

Nine thousand dollars in two months isn't going to happen. Not with classes for the next three weeks.

I take a deep breath and get rid of my dinner before heading to my locker and tossing the tuition notice inside. I don't have time to think about that right now. When I get back out on the floor, some very rich men are going to be looking for a bubbly young woman to deliver their drinks.

Pull it together, Kendall. This isn't the end of the world and you've been taking care of yourself for years. You'll figure this out.

Turning, I look in the mirror by the door and adjust the white silk blouse, making sure it's properly tucked into the short black skirt.

After another deep breath, I open the door and head back out onto the floor.

The club is busy for a Friday night. There are people dancing in the middle of the club, drinks in their hands and smiles on their faces. Bodies move to the pounding beat as strobe lights swirl over them.

I watch as the waitresses try to weave among the crowd to the high-top tables, delivering more food and drinks. Not for the first time, I'm glad that I work bottle service on the VIP floor instead of fighting to get through the people on the dance floor.

My heels click against the faux black marble staircase as I head to the VIP floor. The lights are dim and low, all a hazy white instead of the throbbing rainbow down below.

The scent of expensive cologne fills the air as men in dark suits lounge on couches, looking at the bodies writhing on the floor below.

“Looks like it’s going to be a good night. Table four ordered these,” the bartender says, pushing a tray in my direction.

“Thanks.”

I grab the tray with the cocktail ingredients and head to table four. As I see some of my regulars, the tension in my shoulders starts to ease.

“I was hoping you’d be here tonight,” Colby says, leaning back against the black leather couch and loosening his silk tie. “Are you going to be here Friday too?”

I put the tray on the little bar at the back of their section and start mixing the whisky sours. “Yeah. I’ll be here Friday. Not until later though.”

“Well, I might have to make sure I’m here to get a table.” His smile is one that would break women’s hearts, but I’m not interested in the son of an oil tycoon.

“You better book that soon. I know of a couple others who are booking tables that night.”

Colby raises an eyebrow and pulls out his phone. As I pass out the drinks, he books his table for Friday. Once the men have their drinks, they start talking business. I head back to the

little bar, ready to pack up and head to another table for a few minutes.

The bottle of whiskey is open in my hand when a hard body collides with mine.

The amber liquid seeps through my white blouse, putting my torso on display as the bottle falls to the ground and shatters. A hand wraps around my bicep as I teeter on my heels.

“Sorry,” a gruff voice says. Several men near us look over. I hear a chuckle as I look up at the man who managed to dump whiskey all over me.

His apologetic smile makes my heart skip a beat. He’s older than me, his dark eyes piercing as he looks down at me. There’s a dimple in his right cheek that gives him a slightly boyish look despite the closely trimmed beard.

“Are you okay?” he asks, glancing down at my shirt.

I don’t miss the flash of desire in his eyes as I pull my arm out of his grasp. That one look is enough to send butterflies roaring through my stomach.

“I’m fine.” I bite my tongue against everything else I want to say. These men have more money than I will ever see in my lifetime. I can’t get mouthy with them.

“Kendall, are you okay?” Colby stands up and rounds the bar, his eyes narrowing as he looks between me and the other man. “Is this guy harassing you?”

“I’m fine, Colby. It’s just a little whiskey.”

The man arches an eyebrow as he looks at Colby. Colby crosses his arms, not intimidated by the man at all.

“Can I help you?” the man asks. There’s amusement in his eyes as he looks down at Colby. “I don’t see how this conversation concerns you.”

“Gentlemen, why don’t we both just go back to our tables, and I’ll bring everyone some drinks on the house?”

Except none of this will be on the house. It will all be coming out of my tips for the night.

The man who bumped into me rolls his eyes. “How much will this cost?”

He pulls out his wallet and my stomach lurches. This is what I hate the most about working here. All these men think that everything can be bought. That money will pay for the humiliation I feel still standing here with my bra on display for the club to see.

“Don’t worry about it. I’ll send another girl to help you while I get cleaned up.”

I brush by the men, ignoring the way they still glare at each other. Their egos and their wallets are battling for dominance and I’m not about to be caught in the middle of it.

Crossing my arms to hide my bra, I head toward the stairs. As I pass one of the other two girls working tonight, I ask her to take over my table.

“Wait!”

I look over my shoulder and see the man who bumped into me striding toward the stairs.

There's something about his confidence that's alluring. He walks as if he owns the place and knows that everyone is going to do as he says without question.

He's the kind of man I can't stand.

"What is the shirt going to cost?" he asks as he stops in front of me.

"Don't worry about it. It was an accident." I say it because I'm supposed to, not because I want to. The shirt is expensive, but it's required to work on the VIP floor.

I could use the money to pay for a new shirt. Or it could help cover the cost of the bottle that is likely still spilled on the floor. One of the bartenders hurries by me with a mop as I stare at the man before me.

His eyebrows raise and he reaches for his wallet. "I insist."

"And I told you no. Thank you, but no."

I turn to walk away but his hand wraps around my forearm, holding me back. As I spin around, his eyes drop down to the lace bra that is still showing through my shirt.

"My eyes are up here," I say, my tone harsher than intended.

His mouth curves into a shadow of a smile as he looks up at me. It's that slight smile that has me thinking about what we could get up to in the dark corners of the club.

"What's a woman like you doing in a club like this?"

My jaw nearly drops to the floor. “Why do you talk about me like you know me? You don’t know anything about me, and I would suggest that you don’t make assumptions.”

His smirk grows and it sends a rush of heat straight to my core. The man rolls up his sleeves, exposing the tattoos that cover his forearms.

I wonder if those tattoos cover the rest of his body.

“Look, if you ever think about a change in career, call me.” He pulls out a card with his name and phone number on it. Evan Tucker.

The name is familiar. It’s one I see advertised all over the city. Tucker Realty. My eyes widen as I look at him, waves of disgust rolling through me.

First, he spills a bottle on me accidentally. Now, he’s telling me that I could have a better job.

I know what kind of *better job* these men have in mind when they say things like that to me.

“Respectfully, no thank you.” I want to say more but I hold my tongue. I’m tired of rich men coming to the club and thinking that the women working here can be bought.

He chuckles instead of getting angry like I expect. It throws me off-balance a little bit, but I’m not going to let him see that.

His gaze travels up and down my body, lighting every inch of my body on fire. It only confirms my suspicion of what he wants, even if it excites me.

“Just take the card and think about it. It’s not the job you think it is. I need a housekeeper,” he says before walking away.

Even though he says that it’s a job for a housekeeper, I’m sure he has something else in mind.

Men don’t look at you that way and think of you scrubbing their toilets.

I sigh and look down at the card. Though I don’t know why, I tuck it into the pocket of my skirt before heading down to the locker room.

Please let him be gone by the time I get back out there.



When I get home later, there’s a bright pink notice stuck to my apartment door. I rip down the notice and my stomach lurches. Notices like this are never good.

My fears are confirmed when I walk into the apartment and read the note.

Rent is being raised over two hundred dollars when my lease renews next month. There is no way that I can afford that. I can barely afford to pay all my bills *and* groceries now.

I sigh and run my hand through my hair, holding back my tears. This has been the worst day ever and I don’t know what to do.

As I head to the bathroom to take a scalding shower and try to figure out my problems, I pull the business card out of my

skirt.

I may have to take that job offer after all.

Leaning back against the shower wall, I run my hands down my face. There is no way I'm going to be able to sort out my problems on my own, which means I need the help of a rich man and some massive stress relief.

As my hands trail down my body, massaging my breasts, I can see Evan's dark eyes staring down at me. I picture his big hands on my body instead of my own, my fingers trailing down to my pussy.

I'm already soaked thinking about the way his hands would feel on my body. I picture those muscled arms wrapping around me as he lifts me up and pushes me against the wall, sliding his cock deep into me.

My fingers circle my clit faster as I prop a foot up on the edge of the tub. I roll my nipple between my fingers, pinching it harder.

As I slide my fingers inside my pussy, I moan. It's nothing compared to the way I think his cock would feel, but it's enough for now.

I keep thrusting, my thumb rubbing against my clit until waves of pleasure are rolling through me.

Moving my fingers back to my clit, I moan, rocking my hips faster. Tension builds in my body as I pinch the other nipple.

I picture Evan sinking to his knees in front of me and licking my clit. I think about the way his tongue would feel as

it slides along my pussy, dipping inside and flicking my clit.

My orgasm comes hard and fast, coating my fingers as my body quakes.

I step under the water as my orgasm subsides, but I know that as soon as I'm out of the shower, I'll be grabbing my vibrator and heading straight to bed to picture him fucking me from behind.

EVAN

“**W**hat are you doing?” I ask as I walk into my office bright and early Monday morning.

My father is at my filing cabinet, the drawer open as he rifles through it. I take a deep breath, counting to ten and trying not to explode.

I wish that I could say this is the first time my father has overstepped boundaries, but it’s not. The man doesn’t know how to retire, even at seventy.

“Dad, why are you going through my files? You don’t have any business doing that.”

“I had to look for a file on that waterfront property you just acquired.” He closes the drawer and opens the one below it.

“Dad, we’ve talked about this. You can’t just come into the office and start going through my things. This is my company now. You stepped down, remember?”

As he turns to look at me, his eyebrows furrowing, I make a mental note to get all the locks on the filing cabinets changed.

I don't know how many keys he still has hidden at home.

Though I trust my father not to drive the business into the ground, it's clear that he still doesn't trust me.

If he did, he wouldn't be here right now.

"I know that I stepped down but that doesn't mean I don't get a say in what you do with my company. I told you that buying that property was going to be a mistake and now I need to know how much money you're sinking into it to redevelop it."

I sigh and roll my shoulders back, counting to ten again. "Dad, why don't you go out and enjoy the day golfing or something instead of looking over my shoulder?"

The statement is a little harsher than intended but I can't help it. I've had control of the company for four years now and he's still acting like I can't do the job without him. It frustrates me to no end. I talk to him over and over again about it, but he doesn't hear me.

"I need to make sure that you aren't sinking more money into the project than it's worth."

"I really don't think that's your problem." I take off my leather jacket and toss it over one of the white suede chairs that face my pale oak desk. "Dad, please just go relax. I'll look for the plans later and have my assistant mail you a copy."

He sighs and shakes his head. "I really don't know about this, Evan. I want you to do well but it's hard to keep sitting back and watching you make these choices."

It's on the tip of my tongue to ask him when he has ever sat back and just watched. He has an opinion about everything I do. Each time I make a new business move, he's on the phone immediately, telling me his thoughts about it.

"Make sure you send me that plan," he says before walking out of the office.

My shoulders slump as I stand in the doorway and watch him get on the elevator. As soon as he's gone, I breathe a sigh of relief. I love my father, but having his nose in the business is only holding Tucker Realty back.

I want to start moving forward with buying more land and having it developed, opening new gateways for the company. Dad thinks that we should stick solely to buying and selling properties.

With a groan, I run my hand through my hair and head back to my desk. Today is not going the way I want it to, but hopefully it can only get better.



"Call for you on line one," my assistant, Bronson, says before the phone on my desk starts ringing. He leaves my office and closes the door as I pick up the phone.

I take a deep breath, hoping it's not my father. He's been gone from the office for a couple hours, but I wouldn't put it past him to call the office and ask where the waterfront files are.

"Hello, Evan Tucker speaking."

“Very formal,” a sultry voice says. “If I didn’t know any better, I would think that you have more manners than approaching strange girls in clubs and offering them jobs.”

I smirk as I lean back in my seat. Kendall was stunning at the club the other night. The way she frowned when I offered her a job is burned into my mind. I thought that she was going to start yelling at me, but she kept her composure.

And then there was the way her soaked shirt clung to the curve of her breasts, showing off her lace bra.

In that moment, I had thought about throwing her over my shoulder and dragging her to the darkest part of the club I could find.

“Well, you look like the kind of woman who’s in search of a higher paying job.”

“How would you know what kind of woman I am?”

I swallow hard and look out the window at the view of the lake. My office building is right on the water, giving me a good excuse to spend my lunches on the beach.

“I assume.”

Kendall hums. “What did I tell you about making assumptions?”

“Is this you calling me to tell me that you’re going to take the job?”

Her warm chuckle makes my stomach lurch. I picture her right now, that blonde hair hanging wild and loose down her

back. I can see that fierce stare, challenging me even though she's holding her tongue.

She excites me in a way that no other woman has in a long time. There's something about her that makes me want to peel back her layers and see who she really is.

"To be honest, I thought about calling you and telling you to shove the job up your ass."

I laugh and kick my heels up on my desk, leaning back in my chair. "Is that any way to speak to your future employer?"

"It might be. That really depends on whether or not I can work as your housekeeper around my law school hours."

"Pretty and smart. I knew you had too much potential to put yourself on display for a bunch of rich men."

She sighs. I'm sure she's rolling her eyes. It's true though. I think that she's too smart to be working in a place like that. I saw the way that other man was looking at her. It was as if he was waiting for a chance to claim her and try to whisk her away to a better life.

I get the sense that Kendall isn't about to let anyone, man or woman, try to control her.

"I'm serious. My schooling comes first and if there isn't a way around that, I don't want the job. It'll only be for the next few weeks and then I'm done for the summer."

"You'll be able to work around your school hours. How does fifteen hundred a week sound?"

There's a long pause on the other end of the call and I know that I've taken her by surprise.

"If that's not enough, I'm willing to go to two thousand."

"That seems like a lot of money for cleaning a house."

I drum my fingers on the desk, knowing she's right. My house is large, but I don't know if I would offer to pay anyone other than her two thousand dollars a week. Most of the rooms in the house don't get used daily.

"Well, you might have to do a little more than cleaning the house. From time to time I might need some help organizing some files or looking through certain parts of my business when I work from home. In those events, I would expect you to help."

There's a long pause and I wonder if she knows what a load of shit that was. I'm willing to pay her two thousand a week—that's barely any money to me—but she seems like the kind of person who won't take it unless she knows she's working for it.

"Alright."

"Great. Now, it is a live-in position. There's a large bedroom with an attached bathroom that will be your space but you will have free roam of the house."

"I never agreed to move in with you," she says, nearly stammering over the words. It's the first time she's seemed off-balance since we started talking.

“Well, it’s conditional based on employment. I assume that you’re going to be working nights. It’s not safe to be roaming around the city in the middle of the night. Moving in makes your commute shorter.”

Although, I don’t know how I’m going to handle having her that close in my house.

She is a young woman and when I think about her living in my house, walking around in tiny shorts and crop tops, my cock hardens slightly.

“Fine. I’ll move in. When?”

“I’ll send movers to help with your belongings. I’m going to put the call back through to my assistant so he can get your number and address.”

My feet drop back to the ground as I sit up and make a note to get the phone number from Bronson on a scrap piece of paper.

“Alright.”

I push her call back through to Bronson before turning back to the file on my desk. No sooner has the call ended than my door opens and my father struts in like he owns the place.

Taking a deep breath, I roll up the sleeves of my gray shirt and lean back in my chair, crossing my arms. Dad’s gaze drops to my tattoos and his lip curls slightly. They are yet another thing he dislikes about what I’ve done with my life.

“Who was that you were just talking to about moving in?” he asks as he sits down in one of the chairs and crosses one leg

over the other.

“Were you listening in on my call?”

He shrugs. “I got back to the office early and I was going to see if you wanted to go for lunch. I heard you telling someone to move in.”

“My new housekeeper.”

Dad raises an eyebrow, his mouth disappearing into a thin line. “And who is this new housekeeper? You should have asked your mother and I for our recommendation. We love Carrie and her sister. I’m sure one of them would have been more than willing to come help you.”

“Kendall Murdock.”

His eyes nearly bulge out of his head. Guilt starts to swirl in my stomach at his expression. I don’t know what he’s about to say next, but I know it isn’t going to be good.

Not only am I hiring the daughter of my dead best friend, but she has no clue who I am.

And then there’s the way that I’m lusting after her to make everything so much worse.

“Kendall Murdock, as in the daughter that disappeared with her mother after Dave Murdock died?”

I swallow hard, my heart beating faster. “Yeah, Dave’s daughter. She doesn’t know who I am though. I want to keep it that way for now. She’s in a hard spot in life and I’m just trying to look out for her.”

“You’ve been keeping tabs on her.”

“I went to the club she works at a few weeks ago and saw her there. Started looking into her life after that. It’s the first time I’ve seen her since Dave’s funeral when she was little.”

Dad smirks and shakes his head. “If Kendall is anything like her father, you’re going to be in deep shit once she finds out who you are.”

“I know. It will be worth it.”

“I hope you’re right, Evan.”

So do I.

KENDALL

As I stare up at the massive mansion, made of glass and brushed metal and sitting on the edge of a lake at the bottom of the mountains, I can't help but think that I might have made a mistake taking the job.

There is no way that I'm going to be able to keep this entire house clean while working my way through law school.

At least balancing the two is only going to last for a few weeks before I'm out of school. And the house is close to my university.

After that, I still don't know if I'm going to be able to keep up with the cleaning, but there will be more hours in a day to try.

"Hello, you must be Miss Murdock," an older man says as he opens the tall black doors. "I'm Blake, the house manager for Mr. Tucker."

The man's hair is more gray than the red it looks like it used to be. Wrinkles line the corners of his eyes and his mouth. He

offers me a stiff smile, fully professional and not at all looking like he's happy to see me there.

“Call me Kendall.” I hoist my duffel bag over my shoulder and glance at the driver as he takes off. “You know, I hope you talk more than that man does, otherwise we are going to have a very hard time getting along.”

The corner of his mouth twitches. “I'm not going to do that.”

“I didn't think so.” I look up at the house and whistle. “So, this is how the other half lives. You ever wonder what that's like?”

“I've been working for Mr. Tucker for twenty years. I've seen a lot of what's that's like and I do very well at remembering my place. You might want to do that as well.”

I grin and shake my head, walking up the stairs to meet him on the front porch. He looks me over, his mouth slipping into a slight frown. I look down at my white shorts and sage crop top, wondering if there's something wrong with the way I'm dressed.

“Come with me and I'll show you to your room. After that, Mr. Tucker should be home and he'll want to meet with you. I do have to ask, where are the rest of your things? I was told that you would be arriving with movers.”

I shrug as I follow him into the house. “I don't know. I didn't have much. It's all in this bag.”

Something shifts in his expression before he nods and leads the way through the house. The walls are white, but the trim and the doors are a matte black. There are brushed bronze accents throughout the long hallway.

We climb a set of stairs that lead to a second floor with several bedrooms. There's a large lounge space in the middle of it all. A massive couch is in the center, facing a television.

"This is going to be your space while you're here. Mr. Tucker's rooms are on the floor above but you have access to this lounge whenever you please. There is a small study that you can use."

Blake leads me down another hall. The massive windows overlook the lake and the mountains. This is the kind of place where someone lives if they want to get away from the city.

It's a beautiful home but I can't help but feel entirely out of place.

I try to push away the feeling of my skin crawling as Blake pushes open a door. As I step into the room, my mouth drops open. The bedroom walls are mainly windows, like the rest of the house. Sheer curtains line the windows, diluting the light and casting a hazy glow over the room.

The entire bedroom is bigger than my old apartment.

"This is a lot," I say, looking at the couch on one side of the room.

It faces a television. There's a desk in the room as well, with a large white suede chair. More brushed bronze accents the

room and in the middle of it all is a king-sized bed.

Blake chuckles. “It is strange stepping out of the world of normal people and heading into the lives of billionaires.”

“Where should I put my bag? I don’t want to get my poverty on anything.”

The corner of his mouth turns upward. He is mildly amused by my sarcasm, even if he doesn’t want to be.

“Put it over there for now.” Blake nods to the long and low dresser at the foot of the bed. “The television is on a mount and you can position it as you want with the remote on the nightstand. There is another remote to control the blinds.”

“Blake, I don’t know how I’m going to be able to keep things this clean. This looks like a show home.”

“Mr. Tucker isn’t here much. It’s not going to be that hard to keep clean. Even when he is here, he rarely has guests here.”

I take a deep breath and try to take it all in. Blake waits as I set down my bag and kick off my shoes before following him out of the room. He leads me back downstairs, through the massive living room, into the kitchen.

Evan stands behind the dark green island, files spread across the white quartz countertop. He looks up as I walk into the room, his gaze traveling down my body with an intensity that lights every nerve on fire.

He’s older than me, he’s my new boss, and I want him.

“Thank you for showing her around, Blake. Have a good evening.”

Blake turns and gives me another polite smile before leaving. When the front door shuts, Evan looks at me with those dark brown eyes. He’s wearing a t-shirt today and I can see that the tattoos climb higher than I thought.

If I look closely, I can see the hint of dark swirls peeking out from the collar of his shirt.

The ink moves with his defined muscles, accentuating his body.

I want to pull off that shirt and see exactly what is hidden beneath.

“How are you liking the house so far?” he asks, putting his paperwork to the side and looking at me.

Unlike most men of his status that I’ve met, it seems like he is capable of having work take a back seat. His full attention is on me.

“It’s ostentatious.”

The corner of his mouth turns upward. “You say exactly what you’re thinking, don’t you?”

“Sometimes. Depends on the question.”

Evan nods, his gaze locking with mine. He stands up taller, looking down at me. I cross my arms and cock my hip, knowing that this is a silent standoff between us. Men like him use their body language to convey that they’re the ones in

charge. They're too aware of the way they move and the way it makes people feel.

I'm not going to let him see how he affects me. He doesn't get to know that I'm attracted to him or that I'm wondering what it would be like to have those large hands roaming over my body.

I may be a virgin, but that doesn't mean I don't have fantasies.

Since the moment I met him, Evan has been the subject of those fantasies.

"We should set some expectations," he says, his voice low. It sends a shiver down my spine. "I want the house to be kept clean and when I ask for your help with something, I expect it."

"As long as it's outside of my school hours."

The corner of his mouth twitches. "Yes. That is our agreement. I will stick to that agreement. Once you are done with school for the year, the expectations may change."

"And where did it say that in those contracts I signed this morning?"

"Fine print."

"No, it didn't. I'm a law student, Evan. The expectations were laid out clearly in the contract. I don't know what other expectations you may have in mind for me, but I can assure you that they are unlikely."

“Are you suggesting that I would want something more from you than working as a housekeeper?”

I shrug. “I’ve met a lot of men like you. You all claim to want one thing but you think if you throw enough money at something, it will just bend to your will.”

He smirks and for a moment, I consider lunging across the counter. I’m not a violent person, but I hate the way a single smirk is an easy dismissal of everything that I just said. I’ve come across it too many times working in the club to think that it’s anything other than that.

“Kendall, do you think I haven’t done my research on you?”

My eyebrow raises as my hands curl into fists. I try to stay calm. What I hate the most about men like him is that they think they have a right to personal information because they have the money to buy it.

It’s such a shame he’s just like all the others when he looks good enough to eat.

He rounds the counter, moving to stand behind me. My heart is hammering in my chest as I turn around. Evan takes slow steps closer, forcing me back until I’m pressed against the counter and his body is inches from mine.

I can feel the heat radiating between us and desire floods straight to my core. Even if I don’t like him, there is no denying the allure the man has. His gaze drops to my mouth for a second too long to be coincidence before he looks back up at me.

The earth feels like it's falling out from under my feet as he looks at me with desire burning in his eyes.

“I assure you, I know that you need the money. My intentions with you are purely professional. Every now and then, there may be a task that comes up that was not outlined in the contract. It is your decision whether to do it or not. I will not force you.”

There's a look in his eyes that says his intentions with me are anything other than professional.

“You have free use of the house and anything in it, as well as the cars in the garage. I want this to feel like your home as well. I'm not around much, but when I am, I do like companionship and will be expecting to see you.”

Right now, I should be telling him to forget the contract. I should say that I'll gather my things and go, but I don't.

Instead, I nod without saying a word and flee to my room before I can do something stupid. As attractive as he is, I don't need anything or anyone distracting me from my future. Not now. Not when everything I've ever wanted is so close.

I need the money. I may not know how long I'm going to be able to put up with him.

I just need to survive until I have enough money for law school.

EVAN

I t's been a week since I nearly took things too far in my kitchen.

The first night Kendall was in my house, all I could think about was taking her right there, bent over the kitchen island with her blonde hair wrapped around my hand.

The business trip out of Colorado couldn't have come at a better time. I was too close to losing my control that night and I had been around her for less than half an hour.

I don't know what it is about her that makes me feel this way, but I need to get myself under control fast before I do something that I'll regret.

Sighing, I look out the window, wishing that I was already home. The stars are hanging high in the sky and the further I get from the city, the brighter the stars shine.

Being able to see the sky at night, especially over the lake, is one of the reasons I bought my house. I enjoy being far away from the city, even though the commute is long.

I would rather the isolation than to have to surround myself with vultures who just want my money.

As the car turns up the driveway, the driver slowing it down, I start to think of the hot tub out back waiting for me. It faces the lake with more of the mountains in the distance. The view combined with the hot water working over my sore muscles is going to be bliss.

I don't waste time inside, changing into swim trunks quickly before grabbing a beer from the fridge and heading to the backyard.

When I get closer to the hot tub, I stop dead in my tracks. Kendall is already there, a glass of wine in one hand and a book of case studies in the other. Her blonde hair is piled on top of her head and thin bikini strings fall down her back.

All it would take is one pull of those strings to have her exposed to me.

I pop the top off the beer and take a long drink. She hears the noise as the bottle cap comes off and turns slightly to look at me.

My gaze dips to the scraps of fabric that barely cover her breasts. Even through the bubbles, I can see the stiff peaks of her nipples straining through the fabric.

"You're home early. I can get out if you want to relax alone," she says, setting her glass of wine to the side.

"No. You stay. I'll head back inside. I have some work I need to start looking over anyway."

She reaches for the remote and turns on the lights that are strung above the hot tub. “Don’t be a baby. There’s more than enough room in the hot tub for both of us and it’s a beautiful night.”

Even though my mind screams that this is a bad idea, none of my blood is in my head right now. I walk toward her, my beer clenched tight in my grasp as I get in and sit across from her.

Her gaze travels down my body. She stares at the tattoos that make their way up my arms and across my torso. I have more on my back, but she hasn’t seen them yet.

I don’t miss the interested spark in her eyes as she looks back up at me. Right now, I’m trying to remind myself of all the reasons why I can’t cross that line with her, but when she looks at me like that I have a hard time remembering them.

“Studying?” I ask, my voice strained as I nod to her book.

Kendall nods. “I have a couple papers coming up on the case studies. We have to compare the potential trial strategies in them.”

“Is that something you like doing?”

Because you couldn’t sound more awkward asking that. You’re a grown man. Get yourself under control.

“I like it well enough. Honestly, one day I want to get to the district attorney’s office which is going to take a hell of a lot of shit like this.”

“You’re still young. You’re sure that’s what you want to do?”

“Twenty-four isn’t that young. I’ve had a lot of time to think about what I want to do with my life. There’s a lot of injustice in the world.”

“Seventeen years younger than I am. When you put it into perspective like that, you are still young.”

She rolls her eyes. “I thought we were talking about my aspirations and not my age?”

“We are. Why do the injustices matter to you? The system is always going to be broken.”

She scoffs. “What would you know about the broken system? From what I can see, you’re sitting up here at your stunning house, living a life that most people don’t even bother to dream of because it’s so far out of their reach.”

“You’re right. I may not know about a lot of what’s happening or have experienced it, but I try my best to be educated.”

Kendall’s pretty green eyes fix on me and I can recognize the fire in them. She wants to say something but she’s weighing the consequences. I don’t blame her for that, although I wish she would just say what’s on her mind instead of holding back.

I want to see that fire in her come to life. I’m drawn to it even though I shouldn’t be. She is the daughter of my dead best friend. She has no clue who I am.

As she watches me, I can't help but think about the promise I made her father before he passed. I told him that I would always take care of his daughter after he was gone. No sooner had his funeral passed than Lydia disappeared with Kendall.

I tried to find Lydia for a couple years, but it was like she dropped off the face of the earth.

Though, I can't blame her for that. She lost the love of her life and was left trying to figure out how to carry on with life on her own. She had to become the sole parent for a toddler.

It couldn't have been easy and that just makes me feel worse.

"You know, there's something about you that bothers me," Kendall says as she grabs her wine. She takes a sip as I raise my eyebrow, waiting for the rest of her statement. "You're not like the other rich men I've met and yet you're exactly like them at the same time. It bothers me."

"What does that mean?"

She shrugs one shoulder, taking another sip of her wine. The smile that tugs at the corner of her mouth is mischievous. I want to cross the hot tub and kiss the little smile away but I keep myself where I am, sipping on my beer to distract myself.

"It means that you say things like *I try to educate myself* but what do you actually do for people?"

"Why do you assume that I do nothing?"

She gestures at the surrounding area with her glass. "Look at this place. You're telling me that you live a life of isolation

but you also actually get out and help people yourself?”

“I make donations.” I fidget slightly in my seat, hating that she’s able to guess something about me so accurately.

“But what do you *do*?” She pins me in place with that green gaze.

Attraction and irritation flow through me in equal parts as I struggle to come up with anything that I’ve done in person.

I hate that I can’t think of a single thing. It means that in some ways, she’s right about me.

I don’t want her to be right about me.

“Exactly.” She finishes the last of her glass.

Kendall rises from the water. Droplets roll down her sun-kissed skin and my mouth waters. I can’t keep my gaze from falling to her round ass as she turns and leans out of the hot tub, her back to me.

Once she has another full glass of white wine in hand, she turns back around and slips beneath the water, stretching her legs out on the seat.

“You think that you can read me that well based off maybe four interactions with me?”

“That’s the funny thing about growing up on the other side of the poverty line, you get good at reading people.”

“You were poor growing up?”

Kendall shrugs again. I’m starting to hate her noncommittal answers. My eyes narrow as I wait for her to elaborate while

that same mischievous smile crosses her face again. She enjoys making me work for her answers, though I suspect if my life were more similar to her own she would give the answers freely.

“My mom worked hard but it was just the two of us. I didn’t want for anything but I didn’t have anything extra either. There are definitely people who have it much worse than I did.”

I nod, not ready to dissect how I feel about Lydia being on her own. I’m glad that she provided the best life she could for Kendall, but their lives would have been so much different if she had stayed.

“What have you done for others?” I ask her.

“If you have to know, I work at a homeless shelter two weekends a month. Normally in the kitchens.”

“I didn’t see that on any of the background checks that I ran on you.”

Her eyes narrow slightly. “Why would I broadcast what I’m doing for others to the world? They don’t need to know. I’m volunteering to help people, not because I want people to think that I’m helping people.”

Maybe it’s the judgmental look she gives me for even suggesting that her volunteering could be performative that turns me on the most. The more I talk to her, the more it’s becoming clear that she is a good person.

My attraction to her can only be attraction. It has to stay a secret, and hopefully I can get over it before it becomes a problem. While she is attractive, she's irritating too. In the few meetings I've had with her, she's already made me question the worst parts of myself.

In that time, I've come to one conclusion.

She doesn't need me to drag her down and ruin her life.

KENDALL

The last four days spent walking around Evan's house, trying to keep it clean while he seems determined to make it messy, have done nothing but drive me insane. If it wasn't his house, I would think that he's been doing it purposefully just to bother me.

I've been spending time avoiding him because it's so much easier than seeing him and knowing that I can't have him.

No matter how much I want him.

Thankfully, it's Saturday night and I'm going out to have a good time with Zara. The shower is still running as I root through my closet, looking for one of the few dresses I own that's good for dancing.

Zara is singing loudly along with the music blaring through the speaker system that runs through my room. I laugh as I listen to her sing, finally finding the silk slip dress in the back of my closet. It's a deep green that brings out the color of my eyes.

It's perfect for luring in men who will buy me free drinks.

There's a knock at my door that pulls me away from my search for the right shoes. I head to the bedroom door, wrapping my black robe a little tighter around my waist. When I open the door, Evan's eyes drop straight to my legs.

When he looks up at me a second later, his cheeks are a slight shade of pink. He glances away from me and clears his throat.

"Blake said that he would be ready to take you and your friend to the club in an hour."

"Thanks. I'll make sure Zara is ready to go."

His gaze travels down my body again before he sighs and walks away. I ignore the heat rushing through me as I turn around. I jump back when I come face-to-face with Zara.

"If that's your boss, he's hot as hell." She grins and wiggles her eyebrows. "Please tell me that you have at least had a little bit of that. It would be so hot."

I roll my eyes, heat spreading through my body at the mention of doing anything with Evan. Though the thought continues to cross my mind, I know it would be a terrible idea.

This job is going to be the only way I can afford my next year of law school. I can't do anything to risk that.

"I'm not going to be doing anything with him. Now, hurry up and get dressed. He only came up here to tell me that Blake is going to drive us."

Zara smirks and grabs the dress she tossed on my bed earlier. “He came up here to tell you that instead of Blake because he wanted to see you naked.”

I roll my eyes and head into my closet to get changed. When I come back out, Zara is wearing a small black dress that barely covers her ass and her hair is slicked back in a ponytail.

“Shit, you’re going to be getting all the guys tonight,” I say, grinning as I turn to the mirror and pin back one side of my hair.

“Are you sure that *you* don’t want to pick up any guys?”

“I don’t want the first time I sleep with someone to be when I’m drunk. Tonight is about drinking and having fun, not letting some guy get his dick wet.”

Zara laughs and grabs her credit card and ID, tucking them into her bra. “Well, either way, I’m glad you’re ready to go out and have some fun tonight. You’ve been studying too much.”

“Some of us don’t have a photographic memory.”

She shrugs as she struts out of my room. I grab my own credit card and ID before hurrying after her. I got paid yesterday, which means for the first time in a long time, I have the money to go drinking and dancing.



Several hours later, I stumble through the front door of Evan’s home with Blake chasing behind me. He catches me around the waist as I nearly topple into the closet. I laugh as I cling to

him, letting him support me while my heels dangle from my finger.

Blake rolls his eyes, but I can see the corner of his mouth turning upward. Even though he gave me hell in the car for getting this drunk, I know he's enjoying it.

"You're the best, Blake, and one day, you know you're going to like me more than anyone else."

"I know no such thing, Miss Murdock."

"I already told you to call me Kendall." I turn to face him, putting both hands on his shoulders. "Say it with me. Kendall. Kendall."

He chuckles and shakes his head. "Miss Murdock, you need some rest and a lot of painkillers."

"You're laughing! I can't believe you're not a robot!"

Blake rolls his eyes and takes my hands off his shoulders. I take another step into the room, cackling when I stumble and he catches me again. Blake shakes his head but there's still a smile showing.

"Good night?" Evan asks as he appears in the living room, water droplets dripping from his hair and down his bare chest.

I squeeze my thighs together as heat rushes to my core. "Pretty good."

Blake sighs and stands upright, looping his arm around my waist. "When I walked in, she was on top of the bar, and she was taking a shot out of some woman's cleavage."

The way Evan's eyebrows shoot up his forehead has me laughing and nearly falling over again.

"Don't be so uptight," I say, wriggling my way out of Blake's grasp. "You might look like you have a stick up your ass most of the time, but I bet you used to have fun when you were younger."

Evan rolls his eyes and looks at Blake. "You can go home for the night. Thank you for taking care of her while I got work done."

"I don't need anyone taking care of me."

Evan sighs as Blake takes off before he's asked to do anything else. When Evan turns to me, I hold my head high and walk toward the stairs. I don't need him to take care of me and I'm going to prove it to him.

It feels like I'm walking across the deck of a ship on a rolling ocean. I hold my arms out for balance and I think it's working until I fall down.

"What was that about not needing anyone to take care of you?" Evan asks as he picks me up like I weigh nothing and sets me on my feet.

There's something hot about a man who can pick me up and throw me around.

"Kendall, if you keep looking at me like that, we're going to have a problem."

I smile and reach out to trace the swirling lines of black ink on his abs. His muscles flex beneath my hand as I trace the

skull that's tattooed there before moving on to the flowers that surround it.

Evan stands still as I trace my way around more skulls and flowers, trying to figure out which skulls are what animals. I focus hard on running my hands along the lines, tracing the pictures permanently etched onto his skin.

Just when I'm near the hem of his shorts again, Evan grabs my hands and holds them above my head. Excitement rolls through me as he pins me back against the wall, his body inches from mine.

Heat flows between us as his gaze drops to my mouth. It travels lower as he takes in the way the dress hugs my body. When he looks back up at me as I continue to run my hands along his body, I can see that he is toeing a very thin line.

I want to push him across that line. For just one moment, I want him to step across that line. The second that he does, I'm not going to hold back.

"Kendall, I know what you're thinking but nothing good can come of this," Evan says, his voice husky as he looks down at me, his face inches from mine.

"How would you know what I'm thinking?"

"Because I'm thinking the exact same thing."

I smile at him and get on my toes, not thinking twice about what I'm doing. When my mouth meets his, his groan is low as he pushes my body back against the wall. He keeps my

hands high above my head, his cock rubbing against me as he nips at my bottom lip.

Moaning, I hook one leg around his hip, drawing him closer to me. The skirt of my dress rides up until his cock is grinding against my pussy in a way that drives me insane.

His free hand slides down my body to grip the knee that's against his hip. His fingers move down my bare thigh, slipping just beneath the hem of my dress. Heat pools in my core as his hand trails slightly higher.

I rock my hips, rubbing against him. The single motion is enough to make him go completely stiff. He grips my thigh, unwinding it from around his hip.

“Nope.” Evan pulls back from the kiss and takes a step back, letting my wrists go. “That was wrong. You're drunk. I shouldn't have allowed it to get that far.”

“You didn't allow anything to get that far. I'm the one who kissed you. And I want to do it again.”

When I try to kiss him again, he takes another step back.

“Kendall, you're drunk. I don't want you doing anything that you're going to regret in the morning.”

“How do you know I'm going to regret this in the morning?”

“Kendall, why don't we go up to your room and you can sleep it off?”

I stare at him for a moment, trying to swallow down the sick feeling that rises at his rejection. Maybe I've been imagining all of his lingering looks. Maybe I made up the way he feels about me in my head.

He reaches for me, but I shake my head and swat his hands away. Evan sighs and runs his hand through his hair. His mouth opens like he wants to say something, but it snaps shut again.

As I stumble my way up the stairs, he doesn't bother trying to reach for me again, though he does stay only a couple steps behind me at all times.

When I get to my room, I don't bother to say anything to him before closing the door behind me.

The second the door is closed it feels like I can breathe again. I don't have to hold it together and pretend that his rejection doesn't hurt.

In my drunk and hazy mind, kissing him seemed like a good idea. There's tension between us that makes me think he wants it as much as I do.

But then again, maybe he doesn't. Maybe I'm reading too much into the way he looks at me.

I sigh and fall onto my bed, my heart aching slightly. In the grand scheme of things, his pulling away doesn't mean that much. In a couple days, I'll be over it and focusing on my studies again.

Maybe.

I hope the way I feel about him goes away. His rejection hurts too much to keep wanting him.

EVAN

I stare out at the lake, running over every single detail of last night for the millionth time. Kissing Kendall was a mistake. Allowing myself to lose control for even those few moments was a mistake.

What I need now is time away from her. I can't keep betraying her father this way. If Dave was alive, he would kill me for kissing her.

Hell, if he even knew the way I think about her, I would already be buried six feet under. There is no way that he would ever be okay with it.

Yet, I still can't get her out of my head, even as the guilt tries to consume me. I still think about the way my hands felt on her body, holding her against the wall as we kissed. She was pinned beneath me and at my mercy.

I should have stepped away from her sooner. I shouldn't be leading her on like this when there is nothing good that can come of it.

With a sigh, I take a sip of my coffee and lean against the deck railing. Birds flit through the sky and only the sound of the sweet spring breeze rustling the leaves on the trees fills the air.

I hear movement inside the house and turn to see Kendall striding through the kitchen. The door behind me opens and Kendall steps out onto the deck. She has earbuds in and her blonde hair slicked back into a ponytail. I try to keep my gaze from dropping to her black sports bra and tiny shorts, but I can't help it.

I need to get away from her. I need to get control again.

“Where are you going?” I ask, glancing back out over the lake.

“For a run.”

“You run?”

She sighs. “Yes.”

An awkward silence stretches between us. I take another sip of my coffee, trying to figure out how to say what I need to say to her. We have to talk about last night and how inappropriate it was.

“Well, I'm going to go now.”

“Kendall, wait. We need to talk about what happened last night.”

When I look at her, she sighs. Kendall takes out her earbuds and looks out at the mountains, her gaze turning toward the

sky as she avoids looking at me.

“We really don’t need to talk about last night.”

“Yes, we do. It shouldn’t have happened. You were drunk.”

“I was drunk but I knew what I was doing. It was a terrible idea that I can only blame on tequila. It won’t happen again. To be honest, you’re my boss and you’re old. I don’t know what I was thinking.”

Ouch. The *old* comment stings a little bit.

She isn’t wrong though. I’m both her boss and a lot older than her. Hell, I used to judge men like me when I saw them in public running around with younger women like Kendall.

I’m becoming one of the men I used to think were insane.

All it took was a petite blonde woman walking into my life.

“You’re right,” I say, though I wish she wasn’t.

Thinking about the way her body felt against mine last night has my cock straining against my jeans. Now that she’s sober, I want a repeat of last night but I know that I wouldn’t stop it. I would pick her up and carry her to my room, having my way with her.

If she knew what was going through my head right now, she would turn and run the other way. She *should* turn and run. I feel like a terrible person for wanting her, but that doesn’t change the fact that she is the most intriguing woman I’ve met in a long time.

“I would rather just forget it happened,” Kendall says as she puts her earbuds back in.

I don’t want to forget.

“I’ll be heading out of town for a couple weeks.”

“Yeah, I saw that on the calendar in your office when I was in there putting those files away the other day.”

I nod and take another sip of my coffee. It feels like the discussion between us isn’t over yet but I don’t know what else there is to say. Kendall has already said everything that’s on my mind.

She stares at me for a moment and I feel as if those green eyes are searching for something. When she looks away, I know she didn’t find what she was looking for. With a sharp nod, she spins on her heel and takes off down the stairs.

I watch as she jogs toward the lake before she starts working her way around one side of the lake. I keep watching her as she rises over a hill before disappearing beyond it.

Once she’s out of sight, the haziness starts to fade from my mind, replaced with clarity.

The sun is shining down, already hot though it’s early in the day. I run a hand through my hair, finishing my coffee before I go inside.

Blake is standing in the kitchen with a stack of papers in his hand. He looks at me, his lips folding into a thin line. I’ve known Blake a long time. Though he doesn’t say much, when

he does volunteer what he's thinking it usually makes an impact.

"You are leaving tomorrow, correct?" Blake asks, looking down at the papers in his hand.

"I was supposed to. I'm going to send the pilot a message and see if he's willing to leave tonight instead. I think a little time away from Colorado would be good."

Blake puts the papers down as I put my empty mug in the dishwasher. He clears his throat and I turn to him, waiting for whatever it is that he has to say.

"Perhaps it is best if you add a few days at the end of your trip as well," he says, his tone solemn. "I think that you need more time away than you anticipate."

"Blake, you have been working for me for a long time. If you have something to say, please just say it instead of beating around the bush."

He nods, his jaw tensing slightly. "Very well. I see the way you look at Kendall and it isn't healthy for either of you. She is an ambitious young woman, and you have a tendency to force people to bend to your will, even if your intentions are good."

I sigh. I know he's right. It's the same thing that I've been thinking for a long time.

"Kendall is not the kind of woman who is going to want to be kept in a pretty cage while you build a worldwide real estate empire. I have spoken to her several times over the last

week. Her dreams are bigger than you could imagine, and she has been through more than enough stress to last a lifetime.”

“Care to enlighten me on these conversations?”

Blake rolls his eyes and puts the papers down on the counter. “These are files that came off your printer this morning. Your father sent them regarding your trip overseas. Maybe you should focus on that.”

I don’t say anything as he walks out of the room. As soon as he’s gone, I pull out my phone and send a message to my pilot. I need to leave tonight and put as much distance between Kendall and me as possible.

This break is going to be good for us. It’s going to give me the space I need to remind myself why being attracted to her is such a terrible idea.

Although, I’m going to worry about her while I’m gone, even with Blake here. My house is isolated and quiet. There aren’t many people to talk to. Even the driver is taking time off while I’m out of town.

I know that she’s going to be fine with Blake watching over her, but there’s a part of me that feels like I’m trapping her here.

Taking a deep breath, I try to push all thoughts of Kendall from my mind. She is going to be fine while I’m gone.

Instead, I have to see what my father is sending over and try to deal with him.

Before I look at the papers, I take another deep breath. Dealing with my father is only going to stress me out more. Every time I try to tell him to back out of the business, he only pushes that much harder.

He and I are more alike than I care to admit.

When I look down at the papers, I see copies of my files for the waterfront property. Dad's writing is all over them, with suggestions of where to cut the budget for the redevelopment. He's written other comments about features he thinks are unnecessary.

I flip through each sheet, seeing more and more comments. Every single one of my plans has a snide remark beside it. This is only evidence that he doesn't believe in my plan for the future of Tucker Realty.

I already knew he didn't, but having physical proof in my hand only pisses me off more. Then I start to wonder who would have sent him the files when I gave the entire office instructions not to send my father anything.

Though I don't want to have to launch an investigation into my company, it's starting to look like I may have no other option.

If whoever gave my father those files is willing to feed him information, there's no telling who else they are giving information to.

As I look down at the comments again, I sigh. I don't need this right now.

There's no reason for me to need my father's approval. The company is in my name. I'm the one calling the shots. I can do whatever I want, and he doesn't get a say.

But somewhere buried deep inside me, there is still a man who craves his father's approval. I want him to support my choices and have faith that I'm working hard.

I toss the papers across the counter, only growing more frustrated when they all hit the ground.

"Fuck sake."

"I'll get those," Kendall says as she walks into the room.

A light sheen of sweat covers her skin. She looks more relaxed than when she left for her run. She takes out her earbuds and puts them into the pocket of her shorts before crossing the kitchen.

"No, don't worry about it," I say, rounding the kitchen island to grab the papers myself.

Kendall rolls her eyes and grabs a glass from the cupboard before pouring water into it. She leans against the counter and sips the water, watching me with those piercing green eyes.

"What are those?" she asks, nodding to the papers.

"Just my father commenting on everything I'm doing with a business that he handed over to me."

"Shitty." She finishes her glass of water and sets the empty cup to the side. "Parents can be hard to deal with."

"What about you and your parents?"

I know I'm toeing a dangerous line, trying not to let her know that I've known her parents longer than she's been alive.

"My mom and I have our problems and haven't spoken to each other in awhile." Kendall shrugs and crosses her arms. "My dad died when I was little."

I swallow hard, torn between telling her the truth and continuing to pretend that I know nothing about her parents.

"I'm sorry for that."

"It is what it is. I never got the chance to know him. As for my relationship with Mom, it'll get better one day. She and I just had a lot of shit to sift through when I was a teen and we didn't see eye to eye."

My phone starts ringing. I pull it out to see my dad is calling. With a sigh, I give Kendall an apologetic smile.

"I'm sorry. I have to take this and then I have to get packed for my flight."

Kendall nods. "Have a good trip."

I watch her walk away, counting to ten before I answer the phone.

As soon as my father starts talking, I know that it's going to be a long call.

Kendall glances at me over her shoulder before heading up the stairs. I sigh, barely paying attention to what my father is saying.

The sooner there's distance between Kendall and me, the better.

KENDALL

I get home after my last day of classes for the semester and nearly sink into the couch with relief. The first year of graduate school has been hell but I know that the second year is only going to be worse. Thankfully, I have a couple months off before I have to deal with going back.

Kicking my feet up on the table, I open up the banking app on my phone and check my accounts. It's the end of May and I'm nearly done saving for school. Although, I have to put money away for a new place to live and all of the other costs that go along with university as well.

By the end of the summer, I hope to have enough money tucked away to cover my tuition and my cost of living for the entire school year. It would be nice to not have to work and instead spend my time focusing solely on school.

After a moment, I get up and head to my room, changing into a pair of shorts and a baggy shirt before heading back downstairs. This morning, I got an email from Evan asking me

to sort through some of the files in his office and organize them.

When I walk into the office, my mouth nearly drops open at the piles of paperwork spread across his desk.

He's messy for someone who has to run a business.

I sigh and pull out my phone, connecting it to the speaker system that runs throughout the house. Within seconds, a heavy bass is pounding through the speakers and I'm singing along with the song as I work.

As I sort through the papers, I glance at the notes written on them. Most of the pages are photocopies with his father's writing on them.

I sigh and put everything with his father's writing on it into a pile. I might send Evan an email later and ask if he wants me to burn them.

It was clear before he left a week ago that he is frustrated by his father's input into his company. There isn't much I can do to help him on that front though.

Healthy family relationships haven't been my thing in a long time.

I often miss my mom but I don't know how to reconcile with her. Things were toxic when I was a teenager and both of us said a lot of things that we didn't mean.

With a sigh, I tuck the papers to the side and start working on another pile. I glance at the papers, noticing that the figures

on them are wrong. Those papers go into a separate pile that will have to be addressed later.

Spending days digging through spreadsheets to find the correct numbers is going to give me a headache, but at least it will keep me from thinking about Evan.

At this point, I'll welcome any distraction from him that I can get. "Who the hell are you and what are you doing in my son's house?" a sharp voice says.

I jump and spin around, my back pressed against the desk as I look at a woman in a flowing skirt and silk blouse. Her gray hair is pinned back in a low bun and her glare is icy enough to freeze the Caribbean.

"I'm Evan's housekeeper, Kendall."

She arches an eyebrow. "I heard that there was a housekeeper. I didn't expect you to be so young."

I bristle at the comment. The woman crosses her arms and taps her foot. Her gaze travels along my body and I have to bite my tongue.

"You look like the kind of woman who wants to use my son for his money."

"Excuse me?" I stand taller, holding my head high. "Who do you think you are?"

"Beatrice Tucker. Your name doesn't matter. What you should know is that your little tricks aren't going to work on my son. I don't know what you think you stand to gain from working for him, but I assure you it's nothing."

“Get out.”

She arches an eyebrow. “I will not leave. This is my son’s home and I’m here to make sure that the trash is not taking advantage of his kindness while he is gone.”

“Maybe I didn’t make myself clear,” I say, my voice steady as I take a couple steps toward her. “If you are going to stand here and insult me, then you can get the hell out.”

She scoffs. “You’re fired.”

Blake walks into the room, rolling his eyes as he stands behind Beatrice. He clears his throat and Beatrice spins to face him. Some of the color and indignation drains from her face when she sees him.

“Beatrice, you didn’t tell me that you would be stopping by today.”

She rolls her shoulders back. “Well, it’s a good thing that I did. This little gold digger is in Evan’s office and going through his paperwork.”

Blake sighs and crosses his arms. “Beatrice, she is doing her job.”

“Not well. She needs to be fired.”

“Well, luckily for her, Evan is the only one with the ability to fire her.” Blake shoots me a wink when Beatrice turns to glare at me. “Now, if you are going to continue overstepping your son’s boundaries, I’m going to ask you to leave. Kendall has a job to do and she can’t do it if you continue to distract her.”

Beatrice turns up her nose and brushes by Blake. A few seconds later, I hear the front door slam and I breathe a sigh of relief.

“So, she’s a delight.”

Blake chuckles. “Don’t worry about her. She tries to control everything, but she has no real power. Evan may love his parents, but he is also aware of their flaws.”

“Thank you.”

He nods and leaves the room. With a sigh, I sit down and run a hand through my hair. If that’s the kind of mother that’s going to be barging in whenever she feels like it, I might go insane.

After a few minutes, I get up and keep organizing, needing something to distract me. As much as I hate to admit it, seeing Evan’s mother only reminded me how much I miss him.

Everything I said to him before he left was for the sake of saving my own heart. Now that he’s gone, I’m not so sure that saving my heart is possible.

“Nope, we’re not going to sit around this big house wallowing until he gets back,” I say to the empty room as I pull out my phone.

I send a quick message to Zara, asking her if she wants to do movies and drinks tonight, before turning back to the cleaning.

“Okay, his mother is a bitch,” Zara says after I finish telling her what happened earlier in the afternoon. “Good on you for

not sinking to her level. You have a wicked tongue when you feel like it.”

“I wish that I had said something else to her.” I take a sip of my wine as I draw my knee to my chest. “I can’t believe that she walked in here and thought that it was fine to just talk to a complete stranger like that.”

Zara shakes her head. “Some women are just catty for the sake of being catty.”

“I just have to put up with it through the summer. After that, I should have enough saved for second year.”

“I don’t know,” Zara says, leaning back into the couch. “Is it really worth staying here if his mother is going to come and go as she pleases and treat you like that?”

I shrug and look at the television where two people are falling in love, even as their families try to stand in the way. By the end of the movie, when they die holding each other’s hands, I know that I’m going to be a wreck.

“I know that allowing her to treat me like that isn’t worth it, but this is my future, Zara. The money I’m making here is enough to set me up for the next year of grad school.”

“I know that this is life-changing for you, but there’s no reason to let that woman treat you like that.”

“I don’t have to worry about my last year of university if I just stick it out for another month.”

Zara sighs and nods, taking another sip of her wine. She glances at the movie before looking back at me.

“So, what does Evan think about the way his mother treated you today?”

“Don’t know. I haven’t thought about telling him. I don’t think it’s worth it.”

Zara smirks. “So, the crush on the hot boss is finally over then?”

My cheeks heat up and her eyes widen. Zara starts bouncing on her seat as she sets her wine on the table. She starts squealing as I look away, reaching for my hand.

“You’re telling me that the crush on the hot boss is still going strong? You have to tell me all the details. I need to know everything about your love life right now.”

“I don’t have a love life,” I say, my cheeks flaming. “There’s nothing there. Just some physical attraction that will lead to nothing.”

“I very much doubt that. When you talk about him, you get this look in your eyes that tells me you want to fuck him. I’m impressed. Swiping your v-card has taken long enough.”

I roll my eyes. “If I wanted to sleep with someone, I would have by now. I don’t have time for other people in my life. My assortment of vibrators handles things just fine, thank you.”

Zara laughs and shakes her head, wiggling her eyebrows at me. “Yeah, but think about what an older man like him would know about the female body. I bet he’s got tons of experience.”

“I don’t even know why we’re talking about this. I don’t need to go out and get my v-card swiped. I have more important things to focus on right now. Having a partner in my life just makes things more complicated. I don’t need that.”

“Nobody says he has to be your boyfriend. All you have to do is fuck him.”

Someone clears their throat behind us, and I nearly jump out of my skin. I spin around to look at Evan, my face turning an even darker shade of red.

His cheeks are a slight shade of pink, but his gaze is hiding, setting something inside me on fire. He raises an eyebrow as he slips out of his leather jacket and tosses it over the back of a chair before taking a seat.

“So,” he says, crossing his arms. “What are we talking about?”

“Just about how Kendall is coming to the club with me this weekend to find a hot guy to lose her v-card to,” Zara says, grinning as she reaches for her glass of wine.

I sigh and run my hand through my hair, looking away from Evan. I can feel his stare burning into the side of my head. When I finally do glance at him, I shrug.

“That’s not happening,” I say. “I already told you, Zara, I don’t have time for some guy right now. I have a hundred other things that I need to worry about. None of those things include getting laid.”

“You shouldn’t just go out to sleep with some random guy anyway,” Evan says, shifting slightly in his seat.

His eyes are narrowed and a muscle in his jaw twitches. I scoff and cross my arms, turning fully to look at him. His tone sounds like jealousy is coloring it, but I’m not going to allow anyone, least of all him, to tell me what I should and shouldn’t do.

“I will sleep with whoever I want, random guy or not, thank you.”

Evan’s mouth twitches. “That’s a terrible idea. Losing your virginity to someone you don’t even know usually ends in regret.”

Zara chuckles and leans back in her seat, sipping her drink. She looks between us like it’s a tennis match, clearly enjoying the tension.

“Since when are you the keeper of my crotch?”

“I’m just saying.” Evan looks at me, his tone stern. “You don’t want to regret it.”

“You’re acting like my virginity is some big thing that matters to me. It doesn’t. I could have had sex with dozens of men by now if I wanted to, but I don’t want to. I have more important things to focus on.”

“And yet, we’re going out this weekend to find you a dick to ride,” Zara says, smirking as she stirs the pot even more.

Evan grits his teeth together, his eyes flashing with anger. The jealousy is rolling off him in waves. At least, I think it is. I

could be wrong about that, but the way he looks at me tells me I'm not.

He wants me.

He might pretend that what happened between us was a mistake, but there's definitely a part of him that's thought about taking it further with me.

That thought excites me more than I want to admit.

"I'm not going out to find any dick to ride."

Evan shifts slightly, hiding what I suspect is a bulge in his pants. I smirk and raise an eyebrow.

"Now, if we're done discussing what I will and won't be doing with my time, I'm ready to go to bed."

Zara grins and takes off up the stairs to my room while I look at the wine glasses on the table. I get up and take them into the kitchen, putting the bottle back into the fridge. After quickly washing the glasses, I open the fridge and put away what's left of the pizza Zara and I ordered earlier.

"You don't have to run away just because I'm home," Evan says, appearing too close to me. "I can go to my own room if you two want to stay down here."

"It's fine. I'm tired. You're home early though."

"I heard about what happened with my mother."

I sigh and look up at him. "I don't want to talk about that right now. Zara is waiting upstairs to question me about our conversation. I can't leave her waiting and disappointed."

“Alright,” Evan says. “But for what it’s worth, I think that you should sleep with whoever you want, if that’s what you want. But I still think you’re going to regret it. You should sleep with someone who wants to be with you, not someone who just wants to move on to the next person.”

“I think I can make that decision for myself.”

I walk away from him and head to the stairs, my heart hammering in my chest. With each step I take away from him, I grow more irritated.

He doesn’t want me, at least, not enough to act on it.

That means that he gets no say in who I sleep with.

EVAN

The door to my office slams open early the next morning. Kendall stands in the doorway like an avenging angel, her green eyes narrowed and her hair streaming out around her like a golden halo.

Everything about the expression on her face is murderous. I don't know who's pissing her off, but given the way she's glaring at me I'm guessing I have something to do with it.

"Can I help you?" I ask, leaning back in my chair and looking up at her.

Kendall closes the door before storming across the room and dropping her phone on my desk. She takes one of the seats on the other side of the desk and crosses her arms, raising an eyebrow.

"Look at that shit."

I grab her phone and immediately my blood runs cold. There's a picture of Kendall beside a picture of me with a

caption about sleeping with the help. Anger flows through me as I scan the article.

Nothing written about us, other than our ages and my job, are written with any sort of accuracy. The article calls my character into question, saying that I'm sleeping with a woman seventeen years younger than me.

"Where the hell did this come from?" Kendall asks, her tone wavering slightly even though there's still fire blazing in her eyes.

She looks like she's going to wring the neck of whoever wrote this article if she ever finds them.

Not that I blame her. This is a blatant lie.

Have I thought about sleeping with Kendall? Absolutely. And I feel horrible every time I do, but I want her.

Have I acted on it? Absolutely not.

"This is fucking bullshit." Kendall gets up and starts pacing around the room. "Where the fuck would they even get anything like this? How the hell and why the hell do gossip magazines care that I'm living with you?"

"I can't answer any of that," I say, sliding the phone back across the desk as she marches by. "This is all just speculation though."

Except that someone knows that she's staying here and managing my household while she completes her schooling, which means that someone in my life leaked this to the press.

It's been a long time since I've been involved in a scandal and this is a piece of news that they will all eat up.

I can practically see the dollar signs floating through the air. If I go out in public with Kendall anytime soon, we're going to have to be careful. I don't want to expose her to the shit that goes along with being rich.

The entire reason I offered her a job here was to protect her.

Now, it feels like I'm doing the exact opposite of that.

"It's not all just speculation though. You might not think that this is a big deal, but do you know what's going to happen to me? I'm still in university, Evan. There is no way my classmates aren't going to see this."

"Do you really think that they'll even care?"

"High school doesn't fucking end, Evan. Just because you have enough money to make your problems disappear doesn't mean that the rest of the world works that way."

"What's your point?" Irritation has me sitting up a little straighter and crossing my arms.

"You are an older man with money. That solves the problem for you. People will look at you and think that you're just doing what other men with your status do. You're dating a younger woman. It's different for me."

"In what way?" I know the things people could say about her. I'm not naïve to the world, but I doubt that her peers would care about who she's sleeping with.

“I’m going to be labeled a gold digger by everyone who sees that article. They’re going to think that I’m sleeping with you for money when all I’m doing is working for you.”

I sigh and rub my temples as a headache starts to form. I know that this isn’t the ideal situation for either of us, but I think she’s starting to blow it out of proportion.

Sooner or later, this will all blow over. The damage is already done and all we can do is wait.

“Kendall, I need you to stop pacing. It’s going to make me sick.”

She glares at me and continues to pace. I’ve never seen her this worked up and I don’t know how to calm her down. Everything I say to her only seems to be making it worse.

“I don’t know what you want me to do here, Kendall. This is already out there, and people are seeing it. The only thing you can do now is keep your head high and ignore them.”

Kendall shakes her head and runs her hand through her hair. “I knew that coming here was a mistake. I should have figured out some other way to make the money I need.”

The words cut deep but I try not to let my emotions get involved. She is hurting right now and the last thing she needs is for me to make it worse. I thought that this was the way to get her the help she needed but after my mother and now this, I’m starting to wonder if I was right.

I promised her father that I would always take care of her but I’m not sure that this is what taking care of her looks like.

“Enough. You can be as upset about this as you want, but it doesn’t change the fact that the article is out there and a dozen more are going to be popping up that look nearly identical. Hell, people might start following you around to try to get more pictures.”

“Great.” Kendall looks at me and rolls her eyes. Her mouth slants into a frown. “This is only going to get worse. That’s exactly what I was hoping to hear.”

“It will all be over before you know it. You just need to take a step back and realize that this is the reality of working in my household.”

“I wish I had known that before!”

Me too.

Only a few people know she is with me, but the people on that list aren’t ones who would betray my trust. Although, my driver might. He is still new and he might not be familiar with my expectations yet.

I make a mental note to have Blake question him before focusing on Kendall.

She sighs, some of the anger leaving her. Her shoulders slump forward and she opens the door. She doesn’t say another word to me as she leaves the room.

I sigh and run my hand down my face. That could have gone a lot better than it did. I wish that there was more I could tell her about what happens now, but there isn’t.

The media will take the story and run with it. The only thing she can do is sit back and wait for it to blow over.

Although, I am going to find out who leaked the story in the first place.

Kendall is sitting in the middle of the living room floor with a couple textbooks and her laptop sitting in front of her. Her hair is piled on top of her head in a messy bun and there are two highlighters stuck through it.

“Having a good time?” I ask, looking at the coffee table resting against the fireplace instead of where it belongs.

Kendall looks up at me and shrugs. “I have a paper due in two days that I need to get written. Then once that’s done, I have some cleaning to do around here.”

I look around at the main floor of the house, trying to figure out what she has to clean. Everything is spotless and has been since the day she arrived. There is rarely anything out of place and even when there is, it’s not there for long.

“Why don’t you take a break for tonight? We can go get dinner and relax after the shit show this morning?”

The setting sun outside casts a golden glow into the room, bathing Kendall in the warm light. Even in the middle of studying like a madwoman, she manages to look more beautiful than she did this morning.

“I can’t. I just told you that even with the paper, I still have cleaning to get done.”

“Kendall, you keep the house spotless. I have no clue what cleaning you think you need to do, but I doubt there is any.”

She rolls her eyes and puts her pen down, turning to me. “The bathroom needs to be cleaned. That means the tub, the toilet, the sink, and the floor. Scrubbing every single inch. That takes time.”

I stare at her for a moment, wondering why she’s fighting so hard. Most women I know would be happy to go out to eat. Instead, she’s sitting here and trying to say that she has too much work to do.

“If I’m telling you to take the night off, then I expect you to take it off, Kendall. There’s nothing around here that needs to be cleaned that desperately. Come to dinner with me and then finish your paper when we get back.”

“You know that throwing money at me and trying to take me out isn’t going to make me any less pissed off about this morning?”

“Look, I’m pissed about it too but there’s nothing we can do about that.”

Kendall pulls the highlighters out of her hair. The blonde locks cascade down her back. For a second, I think about what it would look like to have her hair wrapped around my fist while she arches her back for me.

My cock strains against my pants even as I try to think about anything other than fucking her.

“Can we order in, instead?” she asks as she stands and stretches. Her shorts rise a little higher on her thighs and my gaze drifts down to her legs.

I pull my phone out of my pocket and toss it to her. “Order whatever you want and then order enough for both of us.”

Kendall sits on the couch, her books abandoned for the moment and her legs crossed beneath her. She hums to herself as she scrolls, so softly that I don’t think she even knows she’s doing it.

“Should be here in twenty,” she says, handing my phone back a few minutes later.

“Sushi. Not a bad choice.”

Kendall slides off the couch and nods, turning back to her books. Even though I know I shouldn’t, I sit on the couch and scroll through my phone.

Every now and then, I look over to see her lost in thought. She highlights things in the books, sighing as she flips a page and grabs a stack of sticky notes. Her tiny and precise writing fills a sticky note before the little note is slapped into the book.

“Do you like law school?” I ask, tucking my phone away.

“Yeah.” Kendall looks up at me with a small smile and I can see the excitement in her eyes. Her entire face is lighting up at just the mention of her studies. “It’s better than I ever imagined.”

“Do you think that it’s going to be worth it in the end? A lot of people never end up even using their degree.”

Kendall shrugs. “I’m going to use my degree. I worked my ass off to get it and it’s come at a stupidly high price. If I don’t use it, it will feel like a waste.”

She looks back at her papers before shoving things to the side. She drags the table back over and moves her books on top of it, then sits on the edge of one of the chairs, still leaning over her books.

When she looks up at me, she sighs. “Why did you tell me that I don’t need to worry about cleaning tonight? I don’t want to get paid for doing nothing.”

“You looked like you could use a night off to work on your paper. Either way, the house looks spotless. I couldn’t find a person who could do a better job, so enjoy getting paid to do nothing. You do more than enough to earn your pay through the rest of the week.”

Kendall bites her bottom lip, looking like she’s not quite sure about what I’m saying, but then nods and turns back to her work.

Once the food arrives a few minutes later, she slides her books to the side and turns on the television, picking some movie about a car that’s alive. I have no clue what’s going on, but she seems to enjoy it.

Even though I shouldn’t, I relax and eat dinner with her, thinking that maybe settling down will be alright if every night is like this.

KENDALL

The heat from the bubbling water eases the tension out of my body. I keep my case study high above the water, reading in the haze cast from the string lights overhead.

My glass of white wine sits to the side, the bottle still in a bucket of ice. The stars are shining high above me and not for the first time, I wonder how it's possible that this is my life.

There is no way that I should be sitting in a multi-million-dollar home and enjoying a glass of wine while going through law school.

And yet, I am.

It feels surreal. Like a dream.

Although, that dream turned into a nightmare when that article hit the internet a couple days ago. Thankfully, nobody I know has said anything about it yet.

I know that it's only a matter of time until someone has an opinion though. They always do.

Zara hasn't said much about it either, other than offering me her support when we talked on the phone before bed that night.

I sigh and flip the page, trying to focus on what I'm reading. The words all seem to blend together but I have another paper coming up that I have to write soon.

However, focusing becomes impossible when Evan walks out wearing nothing more than a pair of swim trunks. His muscled and tattooed body is on display, sending heat rushing straight to my core.

"It seems like we keep finding each other out here," Evan says before taking a long sip from the bottle of beer in his hand.

My gaze drifts down his body as he climbs the stairs and gets into the hot tub. There's no hesitation like there was the first time we were in here together. Now, he seems confident in his actions, raising an eyebrow when I finally look back at him.

I squeeze my thighs together, trying to relieve some of the tension building between them as I set my case study to the side and reach for my glass of wine.

"If this isn't alright," Evan says, eyeing the way I finish my drink, "then I can go back inside and you can enjoy your night."

"No," I say, a little too fast. My cheeks feel like they're on fire. "Stay. It's fine."

“Don’t you have something you need to finish?”

Desire runs through me at his words, sending a shiver down my spine. His voice is husky and there’s a heat to his look that makes me think he isn’t talking about my reading.

“Nope.” I watch him as he shifts in his spot before finishing his beer.

His entire body is tense, and he looks like he’s ready to snap at a moment’s notice. Evan stares out at the yard surrounding us, a muscle in his jaw ticking. I want to ask him what’s wrong, but I don’t know if I should.

What if he’s upset about another woman? One his age who can give him everything he wants?

He has been spending more of his nights out late, though I don’t know where he’s going or what he’s been up to. Not that it’s any of my business, but there is a small part of me that wonders.

There’s an even smaller part that gets jealous when I think about it.

“Are you okay?” I ask, leaning out of the hot tub long enough to refill my glass of wine.

“Fine.”

“That’s what people say when they aren’t fine.” I take a sip, giving him a smile over the edge of the glass.

Evan rolls his eyes and crosses to my side of the hot tub, taking the bottle, which is a little over half-empty, and sitting

down beside me.

His leg brushes against mine beneath the water as he turns slightly to face me. I move until I'm facing him, stretching my legs out in the space that's now between us.

"You don't have to talk about it, but it might make you feel better if you do."

Evan studies me for a moment, lifting the bottle to his lips. When he lowers it again, he sighs.

"My father is an overbearing asshole who wants to see me living my life the way he wants it and not the way I want to live it. I took the real estate business over from him and I keep trying to move us in a new direction but he won't hear of it."

"Maybe he just has a hard time letting go."

Evan rolls his eyes. "I let that be the excuse for the first two years. I don't know what the excuse has been for the last two."

"You should just go easy on him. I'm sure that this is hard on him. He went from running a billion-dollar company to watching his son want to change everything about it."

If I was in his father's position, I would have a hard time letting go of something like that. I would hate to have to sit back and watch as my son takes risks with the business I built.

I understand where his father is coming from.

When you're so used to being in control, it can be hard to loosen the reins even a little.

"Have you tried talking to him about backing off?"

Evan sighs. “Yes. I try to talk to him about that every time he’s around and brings up business, but he doesn’t want to listen. I don’t know what else I can say to him to prove that I’m capable of running the business.”

“I don’t know what to say that could help you.” I sip my wine. “I guess you might just have to be a little harsh and tell him to back off.”

He snorts and takes another swig from the bottle. “Parents aren’t that easy.”

“Yeah, I know.”

“You said that your dad died and things were difficult with your mom. Would you like to compare childhoods and see who has the worst one?” Evan’s grin is contagious and I find myself laughing.

“Mine was alright. Things were just tense when I was a teenager. Mom and I said a lot of things to each other that neither of us meant. Back then, I was a lot less willing to admit when I was wrong and I was a lot more stubborn.”

“You? More stubborn? Impossible.” His tone is teasing as he smiles at me, his hand slipping beneath the water.

I nearly jump a mile when I feel his fingers tracing the curve of my calf. His fingers dig into my flesh, massaging the muscle. Evan doesn’t acknowledge the touch, even as his hand creeps higher.

Sparks fly through my body and heat rushes to my core. Desire rushes through me as Evan sighs and leans back, his

eyes closing.

“I said a lot of things to my mom that I didn’t mean. At least, I didn’t mean them an hour later when I had time to think about what I’d said to her. Then, the day after high school I told her that I was done putting up with her and I moved out.”

“I’m sure that she’s forgotten all about the things you said by now.”

“Wouldn’t know. I haven’t talked to her since the day I left.”

“You should call her,” Evan says, opening his eyes. There’s a strange look on his face as he glances over at me. “I’m sure she’d love to hear from you.”

I roll my eyes. “I’m not going to do that. There’s too much shit that’s happened between us. I wouldn’t even know how to start the conversation.”

“Apologies normally work wonders.” His fingers dig deeper into my flesh, working the muscles until I let out a small moan. His hand stills on my leg, just below my knee.

After a second, his hand moves up to my thigh and I’m trying to will it to go higher. I’m aching and I know that if we weren’t in the water, I’d be soaked. His hands are strong and firm as he works his way higher up my leg.

“If you think feeling me up is going to get me to talk to my mother, you’re wrong. She and I need more time to think about if we really want a relationship or not.”

Evan looks at me with an eyebrow raised. “Kendall, there is no way that you don’t want a relationship with her and I’m sure that she wants one with you. Back then, you were a stupid kid saying shit to hurt her because you were hurting.”

“She said shit that hurt me too.”

“That’s the hardest lesson people have to learn when they grow up,” Evan says, his fingers grazing only inches below my bikini bottoms. “You want to think that your parent is perfect and has everything figured out but more often than not, the truth is so far from that.”

I moan as he grips the back of my thigh. It’s loud and I blush slightly, looking anywhere but Evan. He sighs, his hand squeezing my thigh. His thumb rubs lazy circles into my skin, driving me insane.

For a second, I consider straddling his lap and begging him to do whatever he wants with me. I want him more than I’ve ever wanted anybody else.

In that moment, I don’t care that he’s nearly two decades older than me or that he’s my boss. Instead, I move quickly, straddling him before he realizes I’ve moved.

“What are you doing?” he asks, his voice husky as he reaches up to brush a strand of hair away from my face.

I loop my arms over his shoulders, lightly raking my nails across his shoulder blades. He shudders beneath me, his hands settling on my hips in a hard grip.

“Kendall, this isn’t a good idea.”

“I’ve only had enough to drink to take the edge off. Perfectly sober.”

Evan looks at me and I can see the one excuse he had for holding back fly out the window. His fingers dig into the flesh of my hips a little harder, sending want through my body.

“I told you that you shouldn’t sleep with some random guy,” he says, his hands sliding over my hips and down my ass. He drags me against his hardened cock, groaning when I roll my hips.

“And I told you that I could sleep with whoever the fuck I want.”

His mouth captures mine in a searing kiss, his tongue sliding into my mouth and tangling with mine. I moan as I rock my hips, dragging my pussy along his cock and building friction through the thin layers of clothing that separate us.

Evan grips my ass with one hand while the other sinks into my hair, holding me in place. His hips lift upward to meet mine as he pulls back my head.

My back arches and my breasts push against his chest as he trails hot kisses down my neck. I moan as he runs his hand up my ass and along my spine. In seconds, my bikini top is falling away from my body.

“Fuck,” Evan says, his voice raspy as he kisses his way down my chest. He takes one nipple into his mouth, grazing his teeth across the sensitive skin before sucking hard.

My hips buck against him as his hands roam my body. One hand massages my other breast while the other continues down my body to my bottoms. He unties the strings and pulls the fabric away, tossing it out of the hot tub.

“You’ve got too much clothing on,” I say as he switches to the other nipple.

I run my hands through his soft hair, rolling my hips and grinding against him. My pussy aches as I move, needing him to do more than suck on my nipples.

“You know,” I say, my tone teasing as I pull his face back up to mine, “my vibrator does a better job than this at getting me off.”

Evan scowls and in the next second, he lifts me up and spins us around, sitting me on the edge of the hot tub. I lean back against one of the posts that holds up the structure surrounding the hot tub as Evan kneels in front of me.

“You’re fucking soaked for me.” He runs his fingers along my wet slit, teasing my clit before he pulls back slightly. “Too bad you don’t get to come until I say you do.”

My inner walls clench at his words. I want this man to take control. I’m tired of always being the one in control. The thought of him telling me what to do, withholding orgasms until I’m begging for them, turns me on more than anything else ever has.

Evan smirks at me as if he knows the hold he has over me. His shoulders press against my leg as his tongue slides out

against my clit. I moan as he flicks his tongue, his hands massaging my legs.

His tongue moves at a lazy pace as his hands inch higher. His fingers drift along the skin at the tops of my thighs, avoiding the place I want him to touch the most.

I moan and rock my hips when his fingers graze over my entrance. Evan chuckles, sending a shiver down my spine, as he finally pushes a finger into me. He groans as my pussy clenches around him.

It's the hottest sound I've ever heard.

“So fucking tight. You're going to take my cock like a good girl though, aren't you?”

“Yes,” I say, my voice breathy as he rocks his finger faster.

Evan's tongue moves faster against my clit as he adds a second finger, thrusting harder into me. At first it feels a little uncomfortable, but the more my orgasm builds the more I relax.

He pulls his fingers out of me and leans back to look up. “I told you that you're not going to come until I say you can. What do you think you're doing?”

“Please. I need more.”

“I don't think so.”

I look down at him, seeing the lust in his eyes as his fingers drift along my inner thighs, grazing my pussy before he continues his torturous trail.

“The first night we met, I went home and played with myself, thinking about you until I came.”

Evan raises an eyebrow, his fingers pressing inside me again. “Did you think about this? My fingers driving in and out of you as your pussy clenches around me?”

“Yes.”

“What about the way it will feel when I finally sink my cock into you? Did you think about how that would feel too?”

I moan, my legs starting to shake as he thrusts faster and harder. My inner walls start pulsating and I know that I’m on the edge of a mind-blowing orgasm when he pulls away from me again.

“Answer my question, Kendall. When you fucked yourself to the thought of me, were you thinking about my cock?”

“Yes.”

Evan stands up and slides his swim trunks off. His cock bobs free and he grabs it, stroking it slowly as his gaze travels over my body.

“Do you want me to fuck you?”

“Yes.”

“Not the answer I was looking for, Kendall.” He runs his thumb over the head of his cock and my pussy starts throbbing. I’ve never seen a man play with himself and I never thought I would want to.

However, watching Evan stroke his cock sends wetness pooling between my thighs.

“Please fuck me. I need you. Please.”

Evan smirks and picks me up, spinning around and sitting down. I straddle his lap, the head of his cock brushing against me.

“If you want to come, you’re going to ride my cock until it’s buried deep in that tight little pussy of yours.”

I moan as his hands grip my ass, guiding me down slowly onto him. He pulls me down inch by inch, giving me a second to get adjusted to him before sinking deeper into me.

Once he’s fully buried, he sinks one hand into my hair and pulls my face down to his. His tongue tangles with mine as I rock my hips, feeling his cock driving deeper into me.

Evan meets me with thrusts of his hips while our mouths slant against each other. My hands run along his shoulders and biceps, my nails digging into his skin.

He moans as I roll my hips, my inner walls pulsating around him. My orgasm is rushing forward fast as I move quicker, trying to feel that release that only my vibrator and my fingers have brought me.

“Do you want to come?” he asks as he kisses his way down my chest. He takes a nipple into his mouth and bites down on it before switching to the other side and doing the same.

My back arches as I roll my hips again. Evan groans and thrusts faster, his cock throbbing. As his grip on my body

tightens, waves of pleasure start to rush over me.

“Please let me come.”

He smirks and nips at my bottom lip. He pulls my hair back harder, the slight pain sending even more pleasure through my body. He is gentle, yet rough enough to excite me.

“Come all over my cock,” he says, his voice little more than a growl as he drives himself faster and harder into me from below.

He dips his head and sucks on my nipple, sending me over the edge. My pussy pulses around him as my wetness soaks his cock. His own release follows as he continues to plunge his cock in and out of me.

When he finally pulls out, I slump against him slightly. Evan pushes my hair behind my ears, cupping my face and pulling it to him for a kiss.

“It’s getting cold out here,” I whisper, looking down at him. “Why don’t we go have some more fun in my bedroom?”

“You’re doing okay?”

I smirk and get out of the hot tub, my legs feeling a little like jelly beneath me as I stride toward the house. When I turn around and look back at him, he’s still sitting in the bubbling water and staring after me.

“If I wasn’t doing fine, I wouldn’t be about to go bend over my bed so you can fuck me from behind.”

His gaze is nothing but lust as he climbs out of the hot tub and makes his way over to me. His mouth captures mine in another searing kiss before he tosses me over his shoulder and carries me up to my bedroom.

EVAN

The sun is streaming through the bedroom window and Kendall is still sleeping beside me. My gut twists and I feel like I'm going to be sick as I look down at her.

It isn't that last night wasn't great—it was—but the fact that she's Dave's daughter complicates everything.

I took the virginity of my best friend's daughter.

If that isn't enough to send me to a therapy session to confess everything wrong with my head, I don't know what is.

Sitting up in bed, I continue to look down at her for a few more minutes. I was surprised last night when the headstrong and stubborn woman I know was willing to listen to me. She did everything that I asked of her and it looked like she was more than happy to let go of her control.

Even now, thinking about last night, my cock is stiffening.

I want to wake her up and fuck her over and over again until both of us are too tired to keep going.

However, there is another part of me that wants to go to her father's grave and beg him to forgive me.

I don't know what to do with the emotions at war inside me.

Kendall sighs in her sleep and rolls over, clutching her pillow closer to her body. The sheet slides down her curves, falling away as she moves again. If she keeps this up, she's going to wake up.

I'm not sure that I want to be here when she does. It seems easier to disappear and not have to talk about it for now.

I don't even know where that conversation would lead.

As I slide out of bed, I'm careful not to disturb her. I want to be able to get down to my office and get to work without her realizing I'm gone. With any luck, she'll sleep for a few more hours and I can try to figure out what I'm going to say.

I want to tell her that it should never and will never happen again, but that would be a lie. I want to sleep with her again, even though we shouldn't.

There's no way I'm going to make her a promise I can't keep.

I feel like a coward as I creep out of her room and head down the stairs. Thankfully, Blake isn't due to arrive for another hour or two, leaving me time to collect our swimsuits and get dressed.

Once I'm done retrieving the evidence, I head to my own room to get showered and dressed. Even though I scrub at my skin, I can't wash away the feeling of her hands on my body.

When the water starts running cold, and I've fucked my fist while picturing the way I took her from behind, I head to my office.

I close the door behind me and walk across the room. It feels wrong to go straight for the picture of her father and me, but I hope there is a world in which Dave understands how I feel about his daughter.

As I look at the picture, for the first time in a long time, I feel like I'm going to fall apart.

I miss my best friend.

I've only been in my office building for a little under half an hour when Kendall comes waltzing in. I see her coming before she sees me. Several of my employees try to stop her to talk, but she brushes right past them like she doesn't have a care in the world.

She enters my office and closes the door behind her, dropping her backpack onto the chair.

Kendall looks down at me, her arms crossed over her chest and her eyebrow raised. I don't know what she wants me to say, but I get the sense anything I do say will be wrong.

Sneaking out of the house before she woke up was the only way to avoid the confrontation right away.

At least, that's what I thought.

If I had known that she would come down to my office, I would have stayed at home.

“What are you doing here?” I ask when it becomes clear she isn’t going to speak first.

“You know, I know it’s customary to hit it and quit it, but a warning would have been nice. We are adults. I don’t expect anything more than what happened to come out of last night.”

“Kendall, it’s more complicated than that.”

“Yeah, I know it is. You’re geriatric and my boss. Oh shit, wait, that wasn’t complicated at all. So why don’t you tell me what the fuck you think is so complicated about waking up and talking about what happened?”

“I didn’t want to get into this first thing in the morning.”

“And when would you like to get into it?” Kendall smiles sweetly as she braces herself on my desk, leaning forward slightly. “If you regret what happened last night, you should talk to me like an adult instead of sneaking out.”

“When did I say that I regret sleeping with you?”

She rolls her eyes. “Actions speak louder than words. Taking off without so much as a *good game, sport*, is equal to regret.”

I laugh and the tension in the room starts to fade. “Why the hell would I say *good game, sport*?”

“I assumed it went along with slapping my ass.” She gives me a cheeky smile before standing upright. “I’m serious. If you have a problem with what happened last night, then we need to talk about it.”

I sigh and weigh my options. I could argue with her and tell her that I don't regret it, but I don't think she'll believe me. I hope that she doesn't. I want her to move on with her life and treat our sleeping together as a one-time event.

At least then I won't keep betraying her father.

"It was a mistake, Kendall. You and I got a little carried away."

Her face falls and I can see her walls flying back up. I feel like I'm making another mistake, but this is what's best for us.

No matter how attracted to her I am, this has to come to an end. It's what's best for the both of us.

I don't want to do anything that's going to put her life on hold.

Not that I think she would let me stand in the way of her ambitions, but I know that she's young and impressionable. She might think that what's happening between us can be more than it is.

You're only telling yourself that because you want it to be more.

I push away the little voice in my head and lean forward on my desk. I link my fingers together and look up at her.

"Kendall, I think it's best that we carry on with our lives as if last night never happened. It can't happen again."

She nods once. "That's all you had to say before you left this morning."

Her expression is neutral as she picks up her backpack and walks out. It bothers me to see her so calm and unfazed.

Why isn't she as bothered as I am?

Bronson pops his head in the door, pulling me out of my thoughts. When I nod, he walks inside and shuts the door behind him.

“Wasn't that the woman you were pictured in that article with?”

“Yes.”

“Are you sure that it's a good idea to have her in your office? I'm sure that somebody out there took pictures of her if they recognized her.”

I sigh and pinch the bridge of my nose. “And if they did, I know who to fire.”

Bronson nods and pulls out his phone. “In other news, you have a meeting in ten minutes with Blue Ridge Realty.”

“You're not going to ask more about her? I figured you would be chomping at the bit to know anything.”

He shrugs. “You can tell me what you want. You know my lips are sealed when it comes to matters like that. But, to be quite honest, I don't have any interest in who you're sleeping with.”

Bronson gives me a shit-eating grin and sits down across from me. I can see the curiosity in his eyes but I know he's

telling the truth. He's not going to press me for any details I don't want to give.

“Are you staying for the meeting?”

He shrugs and grabs a notepad and a pen from my desk. “I have nothing better to do.”

I'm in the middle of my meeting with Blue Ridge Realty about a large commercial property I want to transform into a mall when my cell phone starts ringing.

Bronson grabs it from the corner of the desk and looks down at it while I keep my focus on my video call.

When he spins the phone around, my stomach twists. Kendall's name flashes across the screen before the ringing stops. It starts again, her name still flashing.

“I'm sorry, I have to cut this meeting short. I have a family emergency that I've just been informed of.”

I end the video call before taking my phone from Bronson. He chuckles as I slide my thumb across the screen.

“Kendall?”

“Took you long enough to answer. I have a problem.” Though she sounds like she's trying to stay calm, there is a slight hint of panic in her voice. “It's Blake's day off and your driver isn't answering me so I didn't know who else to call.”

“Kendall, it's fine. What's going on? Are you okay?”

“I'm fine,” she says, the panic leaving her voice.

My stomach drops as I realize she was worried about calling me, not whatever else is going on that prompted her to call me.

“Then what’s going on?” I sigh and lean back in my chair. I jerk my chin at Bronson and get his attention. “I’ll make sure that I talk to my driver about not answering when you call. That is unacceptable.”

Bronson scribbles down a note which I suspect has something to do with firing my driver. The man will be lucky to still have a job after I’m done with him.

He’s still new, so this is the first and last mistake he’ll make. I pay him to be available to me and my staff throughout the day. I will not tolerate him not answering his phone during work hours.

“Yeah, well, I wouldn’t have tried bothering any of you but I forgot my wallet at home so I can’t even call for a tow truck.”

“Why do you need a tow truck?”

My mind goes to the worst possible situations, imagining her car bashed up and in pieces on the side of the road.

“My car won’t start. I pulled over because I thought I heard a strange noise and then I turned it off when I got out to look. Got back in and tried to start it again and then the damn thing wouldn’t start.”

“Why didn’t you take one of the cars that works?”

“Are you going to come help me or are you going to lecture me? If I wanted a lecture about the state of my car, I could call

Zara.”

I sigh and roll my eyes as Bronson smirks. I don't know how much of our conversation he can hear, but I'm sure it's more than enough for him to know that Kendall delights in giving me hell.

“I'll be there soon. Send me your location.”

“Thank you.”

I hang up and wait until she's sent me her location before grabbing my things. Bronson follows me down to the parking lot, not saying a word until we're away from all the other employees.

“So,” Bronson says slowly, a smile spreading across his face, “should I expect you to come back for the rest of the day at the office, or are you done?”

“If my father shows up, please tell him that I had an important meeting and had to step out for a while.”

Bronson laughs and heads back inside the office building without another word. I roll my eyes and get in my car, speeding out of the parking lot.

It only takes me a few minutes to head onto the highway and find Kendall. As soon as I do, the tension that was curling through me throughout my entire drive starts to ease.

Kendall looks at me and her expression becomes pinched. She looks like she would have rather called anyone else and I can't blame her.

This morning didn't go how I wanted it to either.

"Thank you for coming," she says as she runs her hand through her hair. "I didn't know who else to call."

That's the moment when I know I did the right thing by telling her that we made a mistake.

"Call me whenever you need me, Kendall. I'll always be here for you."

I'm here to be her protector and nothing more.

KENDALL

For the last week, Evan has been in and out of town, barely saying a word to me when he is here.

Not that I mind. After sleeping together, everything seems a bit awkward. After all, I still want him, but he wants nothing to do with me.

I'm not surprised though. We're in different places of our lives. I can't blame him for regretting sleeping with me.

If I were him, I would regret it too.

He has so much to offer everyone, and I bring nothing to the table.

I sigh and duck my head under the water, kicking my legs harder as I swim from one end of the pool to the other.

Swimming is supposed to be relaxing, but the more time I spend in the water, the more I think about Evan. I know that I'm just using the pool as an excuse to avoid everything else in my life.

Right now, things in my life—other than Evan—are going a little too smoothly. I'm ahead in my schoolwork, even with two more papers coming up, and I'm close to being able to pay for my second year of school.

Things don't normally go this well for me.

Every single day, it feels like I'm holding my breath and waiting for this entire fantasy to blow up in my face.

When I wake up in the morning, it seems impossible that this is my life. There is no way that I can walk from my bedroom down to a pool in the backyard and spend the rest of the day avoiding my problems.

Except that I can, and I do.

Think positive. If you keep sending negative vibes out into the world, all you're going to get is negativity back.

I surface and take a deep breath, floating on my back and looking up at the sky. Fluffy white clouds drift overhead, and the sun shines down. It's a beautiful day, but sooner or later I'm going to have to go back inside and finish working on my papers.

Right now, though, I'm going to take a moment to enjoy life.

Things in my life are going well because I deserve it. I worked hard to get where I am. Everything is starting to look up because I've made the most out of shitty situation after shitty situation.

Thanks to Evan, I'm going to be able to pay for my second year of school and not have to worry about any living expenses while I'm there.

"You look like you're having a good time," Evan says, approaching the edge of the pool and pulling me out of my thoughts.

"It would be better if I was naked, but something about sunburned nipples doesn't scream *fun*. Especially if I end up going out with Zara this weekend."

I smirk as I look up at him, feeling satisfied when he tenses. Just because he thinks that sleeping together was a mistake, doesn't mean that I do. I may as well have a little fun with him if he's going to be a tight-ass.

"You're going out with Zara this weekend?" he asks, his voice terse.

"Thinking about it. She wants to go out and meet some guys. Thinks it could be good for me to go with her and find somebody who doesn't think it's a mistake to bend me over the foot of my bed and fuck me."

Evan sighs and his hand slides into his pocket. He subtly adjusts himself and I smirk with triumph. Even though he pretends like it was a mistake, there's no question that he wants to do it again.

I tread water in the middle of the pool, reaching up with one hand to undo my bikini top. Evan watches me, his eyes following my every motion.

I know that I'm playing with fire, but I don't know if I can stop.

The way he looks at me is addictive.

Those stolen glances and heated stare, they drive me wild. I crave them. I need them. I feel like I'm drowning without them.

And it scares the hell out of me.

"What do you think you're doing?" he asks as I hold the scrap of fabric to my chest.

I shrug and slowly drag the top away from my chest. His breath hitches slightly, fire in his eyes. Evan crouches by the side of the pool, crooking one finger to motion me over.

Slowly, I swim over to him, taking my time before stopping in front of him. He takes my face by the chin and tilts it up to him.

"If you think that teasing me is enough to get what you want, you're going to have to try harder. I told you that it shouldn't happen again and it's not going to."

"You can't even say what we did." My gaze locks onto his and a mischievous smile turns up the corners of my mouth. "How hard is it to say that we fucked, Evan?"

His grip on my chin tightens slightly, sending heat rushing straight to my core. "I have no problem talking about fucking you, Kendall. But I told you that it was a mistake. I don't make a habit of talking about my mistakes."

The words sting, but when I glance down I can see his cock straining against his pants. He may say that everything that happened between us was a mistake, but his body betrays him.

I can work with that.

“We spent a night together, Evan. It may have been a mistake, but I think you’re blowing it out of proportion. I mean, your dick wasn’t even that small.”

His stern look breaks, giving way to a smile and an eye roll. “Fucking hell, Kendall. You’re going to be the goddamn death of me.”

“You’re so old, you’re already on the brink anyway.” I take his hand away from my chin and clasp it. “Help me out of here.”

He goes to lift me out, but when he does, I brace my feet against the side of the pool and pull him. Evan flies over my head, landing in the pool with a loud splash.

I grab my bikini top and pull it on while he surfaces. He spits out water and slicks his hair back.

The way his soaked shirt molds to his body, turning transparent and showing off the tattoos beneath, sends waves of lust through me.

Instead of toying with him any longer, I haul myself out of the pool and head into the house for a cold shower.

Evan is in the kitchen making dinner when I come back downstairs later that evening. My stomach growls as I head toward the island, looking at the veggies he has spread out.

“What’s for dinner?”

“Stir fry.” He looks over at me, his eyes narrowing slightly. “I’m going to get you back for throwing me in the pool.”

“You looked like you needed to cool off.” I shrug and snatch a slice of bell pepper, popping it in my mouth. When I reach for a carrot, he swats my hand.

“If you’re going to keep stealing the dinner prep, you’re going to be chopping more.”

I roll my eyes and open the fridge, pulling out a handful of cherries before sitting down on one of the barstools. Evan doesn’t say much as he works and I don’t bother trying to start a conversation.

There’s something about having a man cook for me that makes me melt a little.

It had been years since someone last cooked dinner for me, and since moving in with Evan it’s happened more than once.

“What did you spend the rest of your day getting up to?” he asks as he pours some oil into a frying pan.

“I had two papers that I needed to do some research for and then I had to study for two upcoming tests.”

“Sounds like a long afternoon.”

I shrug and eat some of my cherries. “It wasn’t that bad, honestly. Normally there’s a lot more work to do.”

Evan shakes his head. “Business courses were more than enough work. I can’t imagine going through law school.”

“It’s not that bad. I like the challenge. And it makes you look at some things in a different way. Especially the criminal law classes.”

Evan stares at me for a moment. It looks like a thousand different thoughts are running through his mind. He looks away from me but the thoughtful expression is still on his face.

“You know, when I first saw you, I didn’t think that you would be a law student.”

I frown as I munch on the last of my snack. “I get that a lot. Blonde girl with a nose ring doesn’t translate into lawyer for most people. Especially once they hear that I worked as a bottle service girl.”

“You’re certainly not what I expected.”

“I’m not sure I want to know what you were expecting.”

Evan drops the vegetables into the pan and fries them. He looks at me and shrugs. “I was thinking of a different kind of woman entirely.”

We’re quiet for a few minutes as he focuses on dinner, frying the vegetables before boiling the rice noodles. He grabs some sort of sauce from the cupboard and pours it on top of everything.

A few minutes later, there’s a steaming bowl of vegetable stir fry in front of me and a handsome man sitting beside me.

There is no way that this is my life.

“So,” Evan says after a few minutes of silence. “I need a date for an upcoming charity gala and I was wondering if you wanted to go with me.”

I freeze beside him, images of fancy balls running through my mind. If I agree to go with him, I’ll feel entirely out of place. The night will be spent brushing elbows with the rich and watching them talk about things that mean nothing to me.

They all gather and act like they’re making a difference but most of them never actually interact with the people they’re supposedly helping.

“I don’t think that the gala is a good idea. Isn’t there normally media at these things?” I try to find any excuse I can, other than telling him that just the thought of going makes my skin crawl. “Are you sure that pictures of us plastered all over the internet are a good idea?”

Evan shrugs. “There won’t be any cameras there. The gala is going to be at a private estate.”

A private estate. Because why refer to it as a home?

“And people won’t take pictures of us and sell them to the highest bidder?”

“That’s a possibility no matter where we go together.”

“I don’t know.”

I don’t belong there.

“Come on, Kendall. It will be a good time. All you have to do is dress up and relax for one night of your life.”

“You don’t know what you’re asking,” I say with a crooked smile.

“One night. If you aren’t having fun, you say the word and we leave.”

“You promise?”

He nods. “Promise. I don’t even like most of those people anyway.”

“Then why bother going?”

He sighs. “When you make billions of dollars a year, it’s expected of you.”

“Ah, the harrowing life of the wealthy,” I say, my tone filled with sarcasm. I roll my eyes at him, even as I give him a small smile.

“It is a difficult one, but the night will be a lot more fun if you agree to go with me.”

“I don’t have the money to buy anything new to wear.”

Evan chuckles. “I will buy you something to wear. Don’t worry about it. We can go dress shopping in a couple days.”

“I don’t want you to spend your money on me.”

“Just agree to go with me, Kendall. I will buy you whatever you like and then you can give me hell about it for as long as you want.”

I laugh and nod, knowing that he isn’t going to give up. “Alright. I’ll go to the gala with you.”

EVAN

Kendall is restless in the back of the car beside me. She's barely spoken to me since she woke up, though I chalked that up to her being tired after spending most of last night studying.

Now, I'm wondering what's going through her head as she stares out the window.

When she looks over at me, I can finally see the worry on her face.

"You look like going dress shopping is the worst thing that could possibly happen to you," I say, my tone teasing as I reach over to squeeze her thigh.

She jumps a little and I withdraw my hand. "I'm just not used to this kind of life."

"It's not as bad as you like to make it seem. For the most part, at least."

Kendall looks at me, hesitancy in those bright green eyes as the car stops in front of a boutique. She sighs as she gets out of

the car. Her eyes go wide when she catches sight of the mannequins in the big window of the little white stone shop.

“This looks like an expensive store,” she says, looking over her shoulder at me as I approach.

I shrug. “You need something appropriate for a gala. It’s not going to be a cheap dress.”

“Evan, these dresses look like they cost multiple thousands of dollars. There is no fucking way that you are buying me something that expensive just to wear once.”

I run my hand through my hair, knowing what I’m about to say next is going to cast me in a negative light in her eyes.

“Kendall, ten thousand dollars is more like ten dollars to me. I have more than enough money to buy you the dress of your dreams. Just let me spoil you today, please.”

She rolls her eyes at me before taking a deep breath and striding toward the doors. When she pulls one open and walks inside, I follow closely behind her, knowing that the saleswomen in these places are sharks.

Sure enough, I watch as the women glance past her at me before looking back at her. Wide grins spread across their faces and the shorter brunette one walks over to us.

“How can I help you today?” she asks, her voice high and breathy.

Kendall scowls before she smiles and shrugs. Her gaze drifts around the room. “Can I just look on my own for a little bit?”

The saleswoman's smile falters but she nods. "Of course."

I watch as Kendall makes her way around the room. When she checks price tags, waves of irritation wash over me. I told her that I would buy her whatever she wants. Yet here she is checking the prices on everything.

Following her over to the rack, I take her hand when she tries to grab another price tag. Kendall looks at me, her eyes wide.

"This is all too much, Evan. Even a basic black dress costs three thousand dollars. That's insane."

"They're supposed to be expensive, Kendall. Now, if you aren't going to pick out some dresses to try on, I'm going to start picking some."

She scowls at me but takes my warning seriously.

Most of the dresses she pulls are designed to hug her figure. There's more transparent fabric than opaque.

She is going to be the death of me.

One of the women takes Kendall back to a dressing room. A few seconds later, the saleswoman comes out and heads to the front counter with the other woman.

I hover outside the dressing rooms, looking around at the wide variety of fabric everywhere. Very little of it looks like something Kendall would actually wear.

Inviting her to the gala was a spur of the moment decision. Normally, I would go on my own, but after seeing her topless

in the pool I was having a hard time staying away from her.

Hell, I was having a hard time staying away from her before that.

Nothing I do seems to work. I take cold shower after cold shower, fucking my fist just to try and keep myself under control.

It doesn't work though.

"Evan?" Kendall says softly from inside the dressing room.

"Yes?"

"Can you come help me?" Kendall asks.

I can already feel my cock stiffening with each step I take toward the dressing room. She opens the door for me before closing and locking it.

She turns her back to me, lifting her hair out of the way. She wears a nude dress with a black lace overlay. It hugs her figure to nearly her knees before flaring out. Every inch of her body is on display.

"You look beautiful," I say as I grab the zipper at the base of her spine.

My fingers trail along the small of her back as my cock throbs. She looks at me in the mirror, her gaze meeting mine. There is fire in her eyes and heat passes between us as I pull her zipper up.

I can hear the bell above the door ding, More people start talking, keeping the saleswomen distracted. Kendall keeps her

gaze locked on mine as my hands trail down the curves of her body.

“I don’t know if you’ve tried on any of the other dresses, but this is a winner.”

“Good,” Kendall says, turning this way and that to look at herself. “I think this is the winner then. Help me get out of it?”

I pull down her zipper but before I can step out of the room, her dress is pooling around her feet.

The only thing she’s wearing beneath the dress is a lace thong.

If my cock wasn’t already hard, it would be now. Kendall watches me in the mirror, her tongue darting out to lick her bottom lip. I’m throbbing as she turns around and sinks to her knees in front of me.

“What do you think you’re doing?” I ask her as she reaches for the button on my jeans.

Kendall flicks it open and pulls the zipper down. She pushes my jeans and underwear down until my cock bobs free.

“I’ve always wanted to try this.”

Her tongue darts out to lick my cock and I bite down hard on a moan. Glancing at the door, I make sure that it’s locked. She wraps a hand around me, squeezing as her tongue continues to flick against me.

“Kendall, this is a bad idea.”

“Yeah. It is.”

She takes me into her mouth, hollowing her cheeks and bobbing her head. Her tongue traces the underside of my cock as she swallows me deeper. Her hand works the base of my cock while she sucks harder.

My cock is throbbing as I sink my hands into her hair, holding back my moans as I hit the back of her throat. She moans softly, her other hand slipping between her legs.

Kendall plays with her clit as she sucks me, her fingers circling as her hips rock. I thrust faster into her, taking it easier than I want. She is still new to this and I don't want to give her more than she can handle.

That, and I don't know how much longer I'm going to last if she keeps sucking me.

"Fucking hell, Kendall," I hiss as she lightly drags her teeth against me. "Stand up and bend over the fucking bench."

Kendall looks up at me, sucking hard. It's that heated look that sends me over the edge. She swallows me as I fill her mouth, groaning when she continues to stroke hard.

When I finish, she licks her lips and stands up.

I'm in so fucking far over my head.

Kendall goes to the bench and bends over, bracing herself against it. I take a deep breath as her soaked pussy is exposed to me.

"Are you going to be able to keep your mouth shut?" I ask, leaning over her to nip her earlobe as my hand trails down her spine.

My hand slides over her ass and down to her pussy. When I slide two fingers inside her, she moans softly, rocking back against me.

“If you can’t be quiet, I’m not going to fuck you here. You’re going to ride back home, dripping wet and aching.”

I thrust my fingers harder and she bites down on her moan. Her inner walls pulsate around me as I grab her breast and roll her nipple between my fingers.

“Good girl,” I whisper as she keeps her moans to herself.

My cock hardens as she coats my hand with her wetness. She starts pulsating around me as I thrust faster, driving deeper into her. Kendall pushes back, meeting my thrusts until her orgasm runs through her.

I keep thrusting until her legs stop quaking. I replace my fingers with my cock, wrapping her hair around my fist and pulling her head back. Kendall hisses as I drive into her, trying to keep quiet.

The last thing I need is the saleswomen interrupting us.

Her back arches deeper as I pull her hair back harder. Her pussy milks my cock as another orgasm comes hard and fast. With her wetness coating me and her walls squeezing me hard, I know that I’m not going to last much longer.

I don’t want to hurry this along even though we could get caught.

“Sit on the bench.” I pull out of her and wait for her to do as I say.

The second she's sitting, I kneel on the ground in front of her. Kendall's fingers weave through my hair as she looks down at me with nothing but lust.

This is another one of those moments that I'm going to regret in the morning, but right now I don't care.

My tongue slides along her wet slit before I suck on her clit. She writhes against me, pulling my hair as she tries to keep quiet. Soft moans still escape her, urging me on.

I plunge my fingers back into her, rocking them against the spot that drives her wild. When she starts to pulsate around me, I stand up and pick her up. She moans as I press her against the wall and thrust into her.

Kendall's fingers dig into my shoulders as I capture her mouth in a kiss. I bite her bottom lip, driving into her harder as she moans. When I roll my hips, she comes apart around me. Her legs squeeze my hips hard as I throb inside her.

As soon as I finish, I pull out of her and set her on the ground.

There's a knock at the dressing room door and Kendall's eyes widen, though there is a mischievous smirk on her face.

"Is everything alright in there?" a woman asks.

"Just fine," Kendall says. "I think I found a dress so I should be out in a minute."

We listen to the woman's heels clack against the floor, the noise quickly fading.

When Kendall turns to me, there's a shit-eating grin on her face. She runs her fingers through her hair and hurries to get dressed.

"You better sneak out of here," Kendall says as she looks up at me. "Otherwise, they're going to know what we were doing in here."

Her lips are swollen and she looks like a woman who's been thoroughly fucked. There is no way that they aren't going to know what we were doing.

"I'll take the dress and go pay for it."

I grab the dress from the floor and slip out of the room before she has a chance to look at the price tag again.

Once we finish at the store and get back in the car, I'm quiet. I don't know what to think, but I know I can't keep away from her.

Not anymore.

KENDALL

The stars are hanging overhead as the car pulls up in front of a massive home made mostly of glass and black stone. A canopy of fairy lights lines the entire length of the driveway and the walk up to the front door.

It looks like something out of a fairy tale.

“How is this real life?” I ask as Evan opens the door and gets out of the car, reaching back inside to help me out.

“It’s something else. Now, come on. We have people to talk to.”

He grins down at me with warmth in his eyes. Over the last week, he’s been running hot and cold, but more often than not he settles for friendly. It’s been strange, but it’s better than hearing that he thinks sleeping together was a mistake.

I eye the way his suit hugs his body, picturing finding a dark corner of the gala to sneak off to.

“You look beautiful tonight,” Evan says, his gaze drifting down my curves.

“Are you going to be able to keep your hands to yourself?” I ask, my tone teasing as I reach up to adjust his tie.

Evan chuckles, his eyes meeting mine. “Maybe. Although, the last time you wore that dress it was damn near impossible.”

I smirk and loop my arm through his as we climb the stairs to the massive house.

People are milling about in suits and dresses, all looking like they spent more money on the way they look than what they’re prepared to donate tonight.

“This is unbelievable,” I say as we walk into a dimly lit room.

Tables surround the perimeter and there’s a band playing soft songs on stage. Lights are strung across the ceiling, making it look like a night sky. The middle of the room is empty except for a few couples dancing. They move like they’ve all taken professional dance classes.

There is no way that I’m going to look as effortless as they do when I dance.

That’s if Evan even wants to dance with me.

He leads me over to a table in the corner where little cards with our names are on the plates. Evan greets a couple people already sitting down, introducing me. As soon as he says their names and professions, I’ve already forgotten them.

This isn’t my world. I don’t belong here.

Still, I'm going to try to have the best night possible. I don't need to ruin my night.

I try to push everything negative from my mind, but it's hard. Every stare that I get is another reminder that I'm out of place. I sit down in my seat, smiling politely to one of the men before he starts talking to Evan about business.

"That dress is stunning," one of the women says, leaning closer to me. "I'm Aurora. If I'm right, you two were pictured in an article together, weren't you?"

My cheeks flame as I nod. "Yeah, that's right."

"It's just awful the way those people dragged you."

I smile, a little of the unease curling in my stomach backing off. "Thank you. I didn't know what to think when I first saw it. Evan and I are friendly because I work for him but anything more than that is a lie."

Even though you had sex with him in a changing room not that long ago.

Aurora nods. "The tabloids always have a way of making everything seem like a scandal. Just keep your head up and ignore what they say."

"I'll keep that in mind." I smile and reach for my glass of water, taking a long sip. "What do you do for a living?"

"I run a lingerie company. Nothing huge, but it gets me invitations to events like these. Although, if one more man tries to sleep with me tonight, I'm going to lose my shit. That's the downside of coming to these events alone."

“The event’s barely even started,” I say, my mouth nearly dropping open. “And most of the men in here look old enough to be your grandfather.”

Aurora laughs and waves a hand. “There are a few silver foxes that I wouldn’t mind, but I’m only twenty-four. I tap out at forty.”

I grin and take another sip of my water. “You own your own lingerie company at twenty-four? That’s impressive.”

Aurora shrugs, but I can see the look of pride on her face. “I started it when I was in my senior year of high school and then built it up through university. Turns out, people love a subscription box lingerie service. I have a couple stores too but the subscription service is by far more successful.”

“You have to show me your site,” I say, handing her my phone with the internet app open. Aurora grins as she types the website and hands it back to me. “Holy shit, this is impressive.”

I eye several of the pieces from one of her last boxes before going to check out the subscription pricing.

“Okay,” I say as I enter my information for a subscription box with two pieces a month. “You have a new subscriber.”

Aurora grins. “Give me that for a second. As my new friend at all boring parties going forward, you get my special discount code.”

“I couldn’t,” I say, shaking my head even as she snatches my phone.

“I insist,” Aurora says. “I expect you to come to all events going forward. I need a friend close to my age. Most of the other women here are twenty years older than I am and out searching for their fifth husband while they’re on the arm of their fourth.”

We burst out in laughter, drawing the attention of the men around us. Evan looks at me with a raised eyebrow.

“There you are,” a man says, approaching the table. His gaze fixes on Aurora’s face but she looks away from him. “Come on, please just talk to me. I want to explain everything to you.”

When his hand lands on the back of Aurora’s chair, she scowls and gets up, grabbing my hand after I slide my phone back into Evan’s pocket.

I give her a questioning look as she drags me to the dance floor. “Who was that?”

Aurora rolls her eyes. “Somebody I knew once. My older brother’s best friend. He and I used to hook up when I was nineteen but then he took off to join the army. We tried to keep in contact, and I started to think he could be the one, but then he wrote me a letter and told me it was over.”

“That’s awful.” I give her a sympathetic look as she leads me around the floor in a mockery of a waltz. “Did he ever say why?”

“Nope. He came back to town about a month ago. Apparently, he’s stationed back in Colorado now. He works in

the neighboring town, but he thinks that he needs to live here. Bastard bought the condo across from mine.”

“Sounds like he’s starting to regret his decision,” I say, laughing as we spin quickly in a tight circle, holding each other a little tighter as we stumble.

“He can keep regretting his decision.” Aurora smiles at me and shakes her head. “That ship sailed a long time ago.”

The song changes and Aurora and I stop spinning. From the corner of my eyes, I can see people looking at us and leaning together to whisper. I hold my head high and loop my arm through hers, walking back to the table.

Evan turns to face me as we sit back down. He grins and nods to Aurora. “Making some new friends?”

“Yeah.” I let go of Aurora’s arm and slide back into my seat. “But everyone is staring at us now.”

“Let them stare,” Aurora says loudly, smirking when the people at the tables around us make a point of ignoring us. “It’s awful that all of these stuffy people think that the worst thing that can happen is some people having a little fun.”

I laugh as plates of food start to circulate. The food smells amazing and it looks even better, making my mouth water as I see the roast chicken and the delicious vegetables on my plate. My stomach rumbles as a waiter pours me a glass of white wine.

Dinner is rather uneventful, most of the people around the table talking about their businesses. It seems like they have

nothing better to talk about than trying to make themselves sound more successful than the others.

The only two who don't bother to talk about how much money they're making are Evan and Aurora. The two of them chat about some place in Asia that they've both gone to for vacation.

I feel lost in a world I don't understand and can't possibly compete with.

By the time dinner is over and the dancing starts again, all I want to do is go home, but there are still speeches left to listen to. Evan spent most of the morning practicing his speech and I don't want him to miss it, but I still feel entirely out of place here.

I shift uncomfortably in my seat as Aurora walks to the stage to make her speech. Evan follows behind her. I watch until he disappears behind one of the curtains beside the stage. Aurora climbs up to the podium and puts on a bright smile.

"You know, I thought I made it clear that you need to stay away from my son," Evan's mother says as she sits down in Evan's empty chair. Evan's father takes the empty seat on my other side.

"I'm just here to support him." My heart hammers faster in my chest as I keep my gaze focused on the stage. Aurora steps to the side, grinning and clapping as Evan takes the center stage.

“Do you think we don’t know what you are?” Evan’s father says, leaning closer to me. “I know that you’re only involving yourself in his life for his money.”

“That’s generally the way a job works,” I say, my tone tight as I glance at him. “Your son pays me to manage his household. I do that job.”

“I have no doubt of the other things that you’re doing for Evan as well,” his mother says, her voice filled with venom. “I know women like you. You do whatever it takes to get as much money as possible.”

“You know nothing about me.” I clasp my hands together in my lap, trying not to make a scene.

“I know that you are just another girl in a pretty dress and all of this will end once my son wakes up and realizes what you really are.” His mother gives me a cold smile.

Evan’s parents get up and walk away as his speech concludes. I feel awful for not hearing any of it. His parents’ words keep circling through my head, playing over and over again.

I watch him step down from the stage, stopping to talk to people on his way back to the table. When he looks up after talking to another person, his eyes meet mine. My heart beats faster as he winks at me quickly before turning to talk to someone else.

“Are you alright?” Evan asks as he finally makes it back to our table. “You look like you’re not feeling well.”

“I’m fine,” I say, giving him a small smile. “This is all just a lot. It’s hard to believe that things like this exist.”

Music starts playing again and couples take to the floor. The song is instrumental and haunting yet beautiful. Evan holds out his hand.

“Dance with me.”

“People are watching. There are already people here who think we have a massive scandal going on. Do you really think it’s the best idea to dance together?”

“I think that this is a charity ball, and we came here to have fun tonight while you look stunning. Now, dance with me so we can give them all something to talk about.”

My cheeks warm as I take his hand, giving him a hesitant nod. Evan smiles and pulls me to my feet, leading me out to the dance floor. His hands land on my body as we start to dance, moving in a way that feels entirely foreign to me.

I can feel the eyes on us and I know that his parents are watching.

At the end of the day, his mother is right.

This is all just a dream. I’m just another girl in a pretty dress, waiting for my life to come crashing down around me.

EVAN

The door to my office opens and for the millionth time, I consider keeping the door always locked. However, when I see Alex, some of the tension eases from my shoulders.

Alex has been working with me for years and before that, we used to run around together after university, convinced that we could take on the world some day.

Since Dave's death, he's been one of my closest friends.

"You have some explaining to do," he says as he closes the door and sits down across the desk from me.

"What are you talking about?"

Alex shrugs and pulls out his phone. "Haven't you seen the news about that event you were at the other night?"

I freeze and look at him. "What do you mean? The charity event was private. There shouldn't be any news about it."

"Well, there is," he says, scrolling through his phone. "And it's not good news."

“What are you talking about?”

“Calm down and let me pull up one of the articles. You have to tell me about this girl though. She looks a little young for you.”

My cheeks warm as he passes me the phone. I see pictures of Kendall and me dancing at the top of the article. The photos aren't great—they look like they were taken on a phone—but they're clear enough to identify who's in the picture.

“Are you actually sleeping with her?” Alex asks, making himself comfortable as he leans back in his seat.

I glare at him before going back to skimming the article. It talks about how in love we look, while suggesting that Kendall is dating me to take advantage of my wealth. More than once, the article calls her a gold digger without using the word outright.

Anger flows through me as I find article after article about us.

Every gossip site that could have picked up on the news has. Stories are plastered all over the internet about how I'm robbing the cradle. More articles say that she's going to leave me the moment I marry her and give her access to my money.

“Where the fuck did a marriage come into this?” I ask, my tone sharp as I hand the phone back to Alex.

He shrugs and tucks his phone into his pocket. “Don't ask me. I'm not the one who wrote the articles, but if even half of this shit is true, you're in trouble.”

“The only thing that’s true is that she works for me.”

“And that you’re sleeping with her.” Alex gives me a challenging look, daring me to deny it. I keep my mouth shut and look away from him. “I don’t know what you’re going to do about this but both of you need to be more discreet if you don’t want this to get out.”

“This was supposed to be discreet.” I run my hand through my hair and take a deep breath. “Kendall is going to lose her shit when she sees this. It was hard enough convincing her to go out with me in the first place.”

“So, you’ve finally found the one woman who is capable of resisting you,” Alex says, his tone teasing. “I’m impressed.”

“Enough. She’s not interested in the money. I thought that I would be able to have a good night with her and get her to relax, but this is only going to ruin that night for her.”

Alex raises an eyebrow. “Is there more between the two of you than just sleeping together?”

I shrug. “I don’t know. Neither of us have really talked about that. She and I spend a lot of time together, but that doesn’t have to do with an actual relationship.”

His smile drops into a frown, and he shakes his head. “Look, I can’t say that this doesn’t surprise me, because it does. She is a lot younger than you. You’re both in very different places in your lives.”

“I know. And like I said, I don’t know what there is between us. I’m just trying to relax and enjoy life as it comes to me.”

“This enjoying life is going to bite you in the ass.” Alex sighs. “If she’s who you want, then I’m going to support you.”

“Thank you.” I smile at him and glance at my computer as an email comes in from my father. “Looks like Dad has seen some of the articles.”

“What does he think about it?” Alex asks as I open the email and skim through it. “I can’t imagine that he or your mother are happy about it.”

“They don’t even know what’s going on between us. I like Kendall a lot but subjecting her to my parents isn’t fair.” I delete the email, not wanting to read his opinion on the matter.

My phone rings, cutting off our conversation. For a moment I consider ignoring it, but then I see Kendall’s name flash across the screen.

“Hey,” I say, ignoring Alex making kissing faces on the other side of the desk. “Aren’t you in school right now?”

“I am,” she says, her voice raspy. “But have you seen the articles about us?”

“I have.” I lean back in my chair and flip Alex off as he wiggles his eyebrows. “Are you okay? You sound like you’ve been crying.”

“I was pissed off. Most of those comments call me a whore looking for a rich older man. That’s actually pretty mild compared to what most of them were saying.”

“Are you alright to stay at school? I can come get you.”

She scoffs. “Don’t worry about me. I was only calling to make sure you saw the articles. The last thing we need is to be seen together.”

Her words sting, but I’m not going to let her know that. She’s right. If I’m seen with her right now, people will only take it as confirmation that we’re together.

“I have a lecture that I have to get to but I should be home in a couple hours. Although, it might run late. They have a special lecturer coming in today. After that I have another class before I’m done for the day.”

“Alright, well, have a good lecture and I’ll see you when either of us get home.”

“Bye.”

She hangs up and I put my phone down on my desk. Though she says that she’s fine, I can’t shake the feeling that she isn’t.

If I was in her position, I would be pissed. I wouldn’t want to have to face everything alone.

At least, that’s what I tell myself as I say goodbye to Alex before heading to her school.

— e l e —

I walk around campus with my hands in my pockets, hovering outside the lecture hall where Kendall is. Some of the students wandering around give me passing glances though it doesn’t seem like any of them recognize me.

At least, I don't think they do until I hear the whispering.

The doors to the lecture hall open and Kendall walks down the stairs with her books balanced on one arm. Another student is chatting away beside her, but both of them freeze when they see me.

"What are you doing here?" Kendall asks, her voice barely more than a whisper as she hurries to my side.

"Look, her sugar daddy is here to pick her up from school," a man near us says, his friend laughing. "Isn't that cute?"

"Fuck off," Kendall says, spinning to glare at them. "Go back to playing with your tiny dick somewhere else."

"Fuck you, bitch," the guy says.

I take a step toward him, but Kendall gets in my way. Anger is rolling through me in waves as I look over her head at him. His eyes narrow like he's choosing between starting a fight and walking away.

The possessive part of me hopes that he starts a fight. If she won't let me hit him for calling her a bitch, then I'll hit him when he starts a fight.

Instead, he rolls his eyes and walks away, whispering to his friend. I keep my gaze glued to them until they round a corner. When I look back down at Kendall, she looks like she's ready to kill me.

"What?" I ask, rolling my shoulders and letting the tension ease from my body.

“What the fuck do you think you’re doing here? I told you that you shouldn’t show up and we shouldn’t be seen together right now, but here you are.”

“You sounded like you had been crying when you were on the phone. I just wanted to make sure that you were okay.”

She shakes her head, giving me a disbelieving look. “I told you that I was fine when I spoke to you on the phone. I sounded like shit because I was pissed off, but I told you that there was no need for you to come here.”

I shrug and tuck my hands into my pockets. “I was worried about you.”

“And I can appreciate that,” Kendall says, her tone dangerously low. “But this is fucked. I told you to stay away. I told you that I didn’t need you and that I was fine. You decided that you knew best and showed up anyway.”

“Kendall.”

She shakes her head. “No. You decided to disrespect me. You decided that you should make the decision for me because you didn’t like the answer I gave. Then you showed up here expecting to be rewarded for it.”

“I don’t know what you want me to say to that.” I rock slightly on my heels, watching as people stop long enough to snap a picture of us with their phones before continuing on with their day.

“I told you that this was a bad idea,” she says, looking at the people who took pictures of us. “Just leave, Evan. I can handle

myself. I don't need you rushing in here like some fucking white knight about to save the day. I can save myself."

She spins on her heels and walks away, joining up with her friend who chose to wait at the corner of the building. Her shoulders are stiff as she walks away and not once does she look back.

I want to go after her and make sure that she really is okay. She seems too stiff and angry to be okay.

"Look at that," someone says as they pass. "Isn't that the man Kendall's sleeping with for money? I have to ask her about that. I've always wanted to find a sugar daddy. Maybe she has some good tips."

The group of girls giggle to each other as they walk away, their heads bent together. I run my hand through my hair before turning to walk back to the parking lot.

I feel worse about showing up here, but I thought I was doing what was right.

Other women would be thrilled to have the man they're seeing show up when they're having a bad day.

At least, that was true in my past relationships.

Not Kendall though. She seems more than happy to tell me to leave her alone, even if her day is horrible.

She doesn't want my help, even if I know that I can protect and help her.

I sigh as I get in my car. I have no clue what's going to happen once she gets home. As I start the car, I get a message from Kendall.

Stop interfering in my life. I may want you, but I don't need you.

I run my hand down my face and send her a message of my own. The moment I hit send, I regret it, but I can't take it back.

There's a part of me that doesn't want to take it back. I'm older than her. Her father's best friend. There are a million different reasons why all of this is a mistake.

And yet, I can't help but think that I'm on the verge of ruining the best thing that's happened to me in a long time.

Telling her that this has all just been a mistake may be the worst mistake I've ever made.

KENDALL

In the week since the rumors about my sugar daddy started getting around town, everything has finally started to blow over. There are still some comments when I'm at school, but random people on the street aren't stopping to watch me.

I hate being fodder for the gossip rags.

This isn't the kind of life that I ever pictured for myself. I thought that I would finish school, become a lawyer, and then make my own living. I never thought that I would have to worry about being photographed while I stumble from one class to another in leggings and crop tops.

"I keep thinking that someone is going to take a picture," I say, looping my arm through Zara's as we walk down the street.

Zara laughs and pats my hand. "I don't know what to think about that. It sounds like you're becoming pretty popular in the world."

“I know that Evan has done a lot for me, but is it wrong to say that sometimes I dream about going back to the life I used to have? Everything was so much simpler then.”

“Everything was also a struggle then. Sure, getting blasted all over the internet for millions of strangers to see sucked ass, but at least you aren’t still working at the bar and getting hit on by creepy men.”

“There’s that. And I haven’t spoken to Evan for the last week.”

After our fight, I didn’t want to talk to him, and he didn’t seem to want to talk either. He left a room if I entered it and he wouldn’t look me in the eyes at all.

If that’s the way he wants things to be going forward, then I’m more than happy to comply.

At least, that’s what I told myself after I tried to talk to him every morning and he hurried out the door to work before I could even get a full sentence out.

“Why the hell aren’t you two talking?”

I shrug and look away from her. “He said that everything that’s happened between us was a mistake. And then he keeps avoiding me. There’s only so many hits that my ego can take.”

“Maybe one more hit wouldn’t be the worst. Men can be idiots.”

“I’m not going to keep trying to talk to him only to have him continue to ignore me. I have a bit more pride than that.”

Zara laughs and pulls me in the direction of a lingerie store. My eyes widen and I try to stop her but she keeps pulling.

“What do you think you’re doing?” I ask her, my cheeks turning red. Yes, I subscribed to a monthly lingerie subscription, but going into a store and trying to find something in person seems daunting.

“I think that we’re going to make him stop running from you.”

“It’s fine if he does.”

Zara stops and turns to face me. She yanks her arm out of mine and puts her hands on her hips. “Kendall, I’ve never seen you happier than I have in the last few months. If I can believe even a tiny portion of what I think is happening between the two of you, then I know you don’t mean that.”

“Look, he’s made his choice.”

Zara grabs my hand and starts pulling me toward the store again. “And we’re going to get him to unmake it. We just need to find you the perfect outfit.”

I look at the scraps of fabric as we walk in and shake my head. “I don’t think any of these can be considered an outfit.”

“Honey, slap on a pair of heels with whatever you pick and it’s an outfit that no man can resist,” a familiar voice says from behind me.

I spin around, grinning when I see Aurora. She immediately engulfs me in a tight hug.

“What are you doing here?” I ask her after introducing her to Zara.

“This is one of my stores,” Aurora says as she starts shifting through a rack of black lace. “Now, look through this stuff with me. You too, Zara. We need to find something that’s going to make Evan crawl on his knees and beg for forgiveness.”

“You don’t even know what he did,” I say as Aurora starts holding up two-piece sets against my body.

She shrugs. “If it’s anything like what Jordan did to me, then I can assume you need something that will make him crawl on his knees.”

I laugh and shake my head as my cheeks light on fire. “How is that entire situation going for you?”

“Oh, more gossip?” Zara is nearly bouncing up and down. “I need to know everything right now.”

Aurora gives Zara a brief history of her and Jordan before shrugging. “There’s nothing there anymore. I don’t even want to be his friend, but he keeps letting himself into my apartment every morning with the key my brother gave him in case of emergencies.”

“You know, you could always have the locks changed,” I say, moving to a rack with teal-colored lingerie. “And then he wouldn’t be able to break in.”

“And miss getting to see a shirtless soldier make me breakfast before I go out and make billions of dollars? Hell

no.” Aurora grins and winks at me.

After a few more minutes of searching through the racks, my arms are piled high with pieces to try on. Aurora and Zara follow me to the dressing room, insisting on a fashion show until I try on a dark green bodysuit with garters that brings out the color of my eyes.

“He’s going to lose his mind,” Aurora says, kissing my cheek before taking off to go deal with the rest of her business.

“She’s nice,” Zara says with a grin as the dressing room attendant takes everything I’m not buying. “Not like most of the people I’ve met who have money.”

“She’s great. I met her at the charity event the other night. It was a great time. I don’t know how I would’ve gotten through it without her.”

“You’re going to have to invite her to come with us the next time we go out. I bet she’s great to party with.”

“Honestly, the more you get to know her, the more you’re going to love her.” I pay for the lingerie and watch as the cashier wraps it in black tissue paper. “I’ve had breakfast with her twice since the event and we’ve had a great time.”

Zara nods, going silent for a minute as she looks at me. I raise an eyebrow, waiting for her to say whatever it is that’s on her mind.

“Kendall, is Evan really what you want?”

I freeze for a moment, not knowing how to answer that. The cashier puts the wrapped lingerie in the bag and passes it to

me. I consider Zara's question as we leave the store, trying to figure out what to say to her.

"He's the only person I've ever actually been interested in," I say once we're outside. I look at her and run my hand through my hair, my conflicting feelings at war inside my mind.

"Then why are you holding yourself back?"



As I stand in the kitchen, making dinner wearing nothing but lingerie and heels, I can't help but feel ridiculous. Evan isn't home, and when I sent Blake away for the night, even he didn't know when Evan would get back.

When I decided on this plan, Zara's words had been echoing through my mind. I know why I kept holding myself back. I've spent the last several years of my life not relying on anyone.

Evan waltzed into my life, acting like a knight in shining armor. He only wants to help me. He wants to save me from the life I've been so content living.

It terrifies me.

The door opens and that same terror takes hold of me, telling me that I'm stupid for doing this. I'm sure I look ridiculous.

When he walks into the room, it feels like all the air has been sucked out. I take a deep breath and keep my back to

him, focusing on the steak cooking in the pan.

“What are you wearing?” he asks, his low tone sending shivers down my spine.

My entire body stiffens and my stomach lurches.

I knew this was a stupid idea. That's what I get for listening to Zara.

However, when his big hands land on my hips, tracing the high cut of the bodysuit, every negative thought flies out of my head.

“I thought you said this was a mistake,” I say, keeping my tone light as he reaches around me and turns off the stove. “You’re going to ruin dinner. The steaks will overcook if we leave them like this.”

“Don’t care,” he says, his lips brushing against the shell of my ear.

“You don’t get anything from me until you tell me that you want this as much as I do,” I say, rolling my hips and rubbing my ass against his cock.

“I’d have to be dead not to want you.”

My core clenches as his fingers slide down my thighs before working their way back up my body. Evan kisses my shoulder, sucking and biting on the sensitive flesh until I’m leaning back into his embrace.

He spins me around and pushes me against the kitchen island, the edge digging into my hips. I moan softly as he rolls

my nipples between his fingers while his mouth continues to travel along my neck and shoulders.

I moan as he pinches my nipples harder as he bites down on my neck. He moves one hand down my body, slipping it beneath the fabric.

“Your pussy is soaking wet,” he says, his voice husky as he circles my clit. “Have you been getting wet, thinking about me coming home and fucking you? Thinking about the way you would come all over my cock while I fucked you?”

His words send a sharp wave of desire through my body as he presses harder against my clit, toying with it in slow circles.

“Yes or no, Kendall. I want to hear you use your words since you’re so good at running that smart fucking mouth of yours.”

His fingers slide inside me, rocking against the walls of my pussy until my legs feel like jelly. I can feel my wetness coating his hand and my thighs as he thrusts harder and faster into me.

“Yes,” I say, my voice breathy as his arm wraps around my chest, keeping me pinned against him when I try to lean forward. “Yes, I was thinking about coming all over your cock.”

He nips at my earlobe as his fingers drive harder into me. “I don’t think you deserve that yet.”

When he curls his fingers, my pussy pulsates around him. My body tenses as my orgasm rushes through me, making me

want him that much more.

Evan groans and lets go of me for a moment. His fingers pull out of me only long enough to release his cock from his pants. The head brushes against the thin layer of fabric separating us as he presses a hand between my shoulder blades.

“You’re going to lean over the counter and take this cock like a good girl until I tell you that you can come.”

His words only turn me on more as he slides the strip of lace to the side and plunges into me. Evan groans, his strokes long and slow at first, one hand gripping my hip and the other wrapping my hair around his fist.

He pulls my hair back, forcing my back to arch as he drives into me faster. The edge of the counter bites into my hips and I feel unsteady on my heels, but I love every minute of it.

Evan groans as he rolls his hips, slamming into me harder. I moan, another orgasm working through me as I take him deeper. My pussy is squeezing him hard as his cock throbs.

“You want to come all over my cock, don’t you?” he asks, his voice rough as he slows his pace, rolling his hips again.

“Yes. Please.”

He grips my hair a little harder, thrusting faster. “Come all over my cock, Kendall. Let me feel how much you fucking want me.”

His words trigger something inside me, my pussy pulsating as my wetness coats both of us, sliding down my thighs and all

over his cock. Evan groans, letting go of my hair to hold both of my hips, driving himself harder into me until he comes.

“Fucking hell, Kendall,” he says as he takes a step back and grabs my hand, spinning me around to face him. “You look amazing.”

“Is this the part where you tell me that it was all a mistake and should never happen again even though we both want it?”

Evan shakes his head, reaching out to tuck a strand of hair behind my ear.

“No,” he says as he moves quickly, picking me up and tossing me over his shoulder. “This is the part where I take you to the bedroom and worship your body the way I’ve been fantasizing about all week.”

EVAN

Kendall bobs her head along to the music playing through the speakers in the kitchen while I get dinner ready. For the last couple days, things have been going well between us.

It took a lot of talking, but I think we're in a place where we might actually be able to see where the feelings between us go.

At least, we could be if I tell her about the secret I'm hiding.

I've tried to tell her a couple times over the last few days, but every time I do I start to get choked up. There is no good way to bring up the conversation and the adult in me knows that I can't let her get into what we have without knowing who I am.

"Are you okay?" Kendall asks as she looks up from her essay. "The chicken is burning."

"Fuck!" I spin around and take the pan off the heat, shoving it to one of the other burners before turning the stove off.

“Guess we’re ordering in tonight,” Kendall says, doing a little happy dance in her seat.

I sigh and run a hand down my face.

It’s now or never.

“Kendall, there’s something I need to tell you and I know it’s only going to piss you off, but can you listen to the whole thing before you storm out?”

Her eyes narrow as she looks at me. “Maybe. What’s going on? You sound like you’re about to tell me that everyone I know is dead and that we’re the last two people on earth.”

Rolling my eyes, I lean against the counter. “No. It’s not that dramatic. It’s not good either. I’ll understand if you don’t want to stick around.”

“I don’t need your permission to stay or go,” she says, giving me a teasing smile. “Just spit it out. This beating around the bush is going to be the death of me.”

My stomach is tossing and turning as I look at her. I want her permanently burned into my mind in case this is the last time I see her.

If she chooses to leave, I wouldn’t blame her. This is a massive secret I’ve been keeping from her since the moment we met. She would have every right to be mad at me.

“Evan,” she says slowly, pulling out her phone and turning off the music, “you’re starting to make me worry.”

“I knew your father.”

All emotion drains from her face. She looks pale, her eyes wide. “What do you mean?”

“Your father, Dave, and I were best friends for most of our lives. During the time that he was alive, I have very few memories without him in them.”

She shakes her head, her eyes glistening. “Is that what this has all been about? You approached me at the club and brought me into your life because you knew my father? Is this some sick sense of duty? You need to protect his daughter because she doesn’t have a man to look after her?”

“Yes,” I say before shaking my head. “No. It might have started off that way. I don’t know if there’s a good enough way to describe it.”

“Well, start fucking trying because right now, it seems like you’ve done nothing but manipulate me from the start.”

I take a deep breath and try to figure out the best way to explain it to her. However, I quickly come to the conclusion that no matter which way I explain it, this looks bad.

“I saw you in the club and I had to find an excuse to talk to you. That’s why I bumped into you. Before your dad died, he made me promise that I would always take care of you, but your mom took off before that could happen. She never answered any of my calls.”

“You’ve known who I was this entire time.” She shakes her head, scoffing. “I knew there had to be something wrong with you. Just a bunch of fucking men sitting around and deciding

that I needed to be taken care of. Has this been your plan from the beginning?”

“No. I saw you at the club a few weeks before that night. I found out about your schooling and I thought that I would try to make life easier for you in any way I could, to make up for the years I couldn’t.”

The barstool screeches against the floor as Kendall pushes back from the island and starts pacing.

“Please,” I say as she heads for the front door. “Just hear me out.”

“I’m hearing what you’re saying,” she says, venom in her words. “But you tricked me. You interfered with my life again.”

“I did what I had to do so you could keep chasing after your dreams.”

She shakes her head as she pulls her shoes on. “This is all some sort of sick sense of duty to your dead best friend’s daughter.”

“I only wanted to help you.”

“I didn’t ask you to help me!” She grabs a set of keys from the table and spins to face me. “That’s the part you never seem to be able to wrap your head around! I didn’t ask for any of this.”

“Kendall, please, just calm down for a moment so we can talk about this rationally.”

“What the hell did you just say to me?”

For a second, I think her head is about to explode. Her hands clench into fists at her sides and her chest is heaving. I’ve never seen her this angry and I know that I don’t want to ever see her this way again.

I wish that I could go back in time and tell her the truth from the start, but I can’t.

“I just want to talk about this.”

She holds up a hand as I take a step toward her. “There is no talking about this. For my entire life, my well-being has been dependent on me! I took care of myself when nobody else could. I don’t need you stepping into my life because it’s what my father would want. News flash—he isn’t fucking here, but I’m sure if he was, he wouldn’t want his best friend fucking his daughter!”

“You’re not telling me anything that I don’t already know.”

She scoffs, her upper lip curling. “No, but apparently you have a lot to tell me that I don’t know.”

“That’s fair. I understand you’re angry, but standing here and arguing isn’t going to fix anything.” I sigh and look at her, trying to silently plead with her to take a moment to breathe.

“I didn’t ask for this,” Kendall says while I make the mistake of thinking her anger is running out of steam.

I take a step toward her, but she takes another one back. “I know you didn’t.”

“And yet, you keep making decisions for me and then lying to me about who you are.” She shakes her head again and runs her hand through her hair. Tears streak down her cheeks. “It’s fucking funny, you know, your parents think I’m the problem, but I don’t think they have a clue who their son is.”

I raise an eyebrow. “Did they bother you again?”

“It doesn’t matter now,” she says, opening the door to the garage. “I’m fucking done with this shit.”

The door slams behind her and I slump against the counter, totally defeated.

That could have gone better.

For a moment, I consider calling Blake and asking him to follow her, but I know that if she sees him following her she’s only going to be more pissed off.

Maybe it is time that I stop interfering with her life. None of this is what she wanted.

I run my hands down my face as I stand up, groaning. I was hoping that this conversation would go better, but it didn’t go as bad as it could have.

In time, she might calm down and hopefully she’ll come back. I don’t know if she’ll stay long enough to talk to me or just pack her things and leave, but I can’t believe that this is the end of us.

Sighing, I grab another set of car keys and head for the garage.

There's someone else I owe the truth.



I stand in front of Dave's tombstone, trying to figure out how to tell him that I love his daughter.

The words don't seem to come easily, even though they are the truth.

In the time that I've known her, the little spitfire has captured my heart, even if she's stomping all over it right now.

It's nothing that I don't deserve.

"You would be proud of her." I kneel in front of the grave and pick away the moss that's starting to grow over his name. "She's hell on wheels. I've never seen someone so small so angry with me."

I chuckle to myself, though the pit in the bottom of my stomach only grows larger.

"If you were here, I never would have fallen for her the way I did."

I take a deep breath and run my hand through my hair as the sky turns gray with clouds drifting in front of the sun.

"At least, I like to pretend that I wouldn't have, but I love her. It feels like there's this thread drawn between us, tethering us to each other."

Loving Kendall is inevitable, in this world and all others.

KENDALL

My heart feels like it's being ripped from my chest as I park the car at an empty park. I slam my hand on the wheel, anger flowing through me.

I can't believe that he lied to me all this time. I can't believe that he let me fall in love with him.

He broke my heart. That stupid, frail little thing that I was foolish enough to hand over to him willingly.

Evan is the first person I have ever given the power to break me, and break me he did.

That's the last time I make that mistake.

I should have known better by now. The only person that I've ever been able to fully depend on is myself. Even leaning on him a little, allowing him to see the parts of me that very few get to see, only led to more hurt.

It's times like these when another girl would have her mother to lean on. For a second, I consider calling Mom and

apologizing for everything. I don't know if she would answer though.

There's so much to tell her about my life and I'm not sure if we can ever have a normal relationship.

That cuts me nearly as deep as Evan's betrayal.

Mom and I may not have had the perfect relationship when I was growing up. We fought a lot and we were often unable to see where the other person was coming from. Right now though, she would be the one who would know what to do. She would have some advice or insight to offer that might make this whole situation make sense.

I would have a family member to share my pain with.

But I don't, and it's partially my own fault.

One of these days I need to think about fixing things with Mom.

After taking a deep breath and screaming wordlessly to relieve some of the tension and rage in my body, I reach for my phone. I listen to the rings, hoping that Zara will pick up.

"Hey," Zara says as soon as the call connects. "I was thinking about going out on Friday night. Do you think Aurora would want to go with us?"

"Zara, I need help." My mind flashes back to the pregnancy test I took earlier this morning after throwing up for the third day in a row. "I need a lot of help."

“Did he hurt you? I’ll kill him. There’s no way that he hurts my best friend and gets away with it.”

I laugh as the tears start to roll down my cheeks. “Yes, he hurt me, but no you can’t kill him. It’s a long story and I would rather talk to you in person instead of dealing with this over the phone.”

“Alright, when and where do you want to meet?”

“Actually, I was wondering if you were looking for a roommate, and if you are, can you help me move?” I take a shuddering breath and bite back another round of tears.

He isn’t worth them.

Zara sighs. “Of course. You can move in with me for as long as you like. You’re going to love the new little apartment I rented. There’s even a second bedroom waiting for you.”

“Thank you.”

“Do you want me to meet you at the house?”

“Actually, I’d rather pick you up. If Evan is still there, I don’t think that I can handle walking into that house alone right now. I might get arrested for murder.”

She laughs. “I’ll be ready to go in ten.”



“You know, his being your father’s best friend adds an entire layer to this illicit romance that I wasn’t expecting,” Zara says, her tone teasing, as I finish telling her everything that happened.

I turn the car onto Evan's street and sigh. "I know. The worst part is that I could forgive him for everything but I don't know how. It seems like the kind of thing I need to be angry about."

"Then let yourself be angry." Zara rubs my shoulder. "I've been friends with you for a while now. I've never seen you let your emotions loose. You always make sure to keep everything under a tight lock. You never let people see the real you."

"You see me."

"I'm the only one, and even then you don't show all of your emotions. You have to let yourself feel this. If you don't, it's going to eat you alive and turn you into a shell of a person."

"Why do you have to be so much smarter than me?" I ask, trying to veer away from the subject. "I'll feel the emotions when I have time to feel them."

"Make time for them now," she says as we near Evan's house. "Let him see how much you're hurting. Let him know that what he did is fucked up and if you're ever going to forgive him, he needs to work for it."

I make a noise but keep my mouth shut. If I want to forgive him—and I think that I might after I've had more time to think about everything—then he needs to know what he did to me.

Evan needs to know that this isn't something that can be easily fixed.

“He’s here,” Zara says, eyeing the car parked outside the garage as we pull up at the house. Do you want to confront him? If you do, I can be backup. My brothers always say that I throw a mean right hook.”

“That depends,” I say as I park the car and we get out. “Are you still teaching boxing to rich idiots who could use a little beating?”

“How else would I pay my way?” she asks with a smirk while she cracks her knuckles. “Let’s do this.”

Despite my shitty mood, I laugh. “We’re not going to be hurting anyone. I’m going to tell him that I’m moving out. Can you head up to my room and start packing?”

Zara nods as we walk into the house. She heads straight upstairs while I take a final look around. I’m going to miss living here, but somehow Evan’s lie seems like one that I can’t overlook right now.

He’s known who I was and yet he let me believe that he was just a man I had the luck of meeting.

In reality, he orchestrated this entire thing. I don’t even know if he feels the same way about me that I feel about him.

With a sigh, I pull myself together. I can hear his voice faintly, coming from his office. I stand outside the door for a moment as he talks to someone who I assume is on the phone.

“Kendall is too young to understand what life is. I don’t regret the way I took care of her.”

I scowl, anger flooding through my body as I push open his door. Evan looks up, the color leaving his face as his eyes widen. He whispers a quick goodbye before hanging up the phone.

“You know, I might be young, but I understand a lot more about life than you give me credit for,” I say, standing across his desk from him. “After finding out the truth about you, I know without a doubt that you never gave me a real chance.”

“Kendall, please, let’s just talk about this.” He groans as his phone dings with a notification. “I have to get on a plane in a couple hours and I’ll be gone for a few days. Can’t we just sort this out before I leave?”

I shake my head. “You had weeks to talk to me about this. You could have done it well before I fucking fell for you but you didn’t. You picked the moment when it would hurt me the most.”

Evan sighs and runs his hand through his hair. He looks defeated as he leans back in his chair. “I still don’t know what you want me to say about this.”

“Nothing. I want you to say nothing.”

“Kendall.”

“Nothing.” I take a deep breath. “I’m going to stay with Zara. Congratulations on becoming a father, by the way, we can talk about custody later.”

I leave the room and slam the door behind me. Moments later, I hear glass shattering against the wall. I don’t bother to

open the door or go back inside. Instead, I head up to my rooms and tell Zara that we'll finish packing later.

"I heard everything," she says as she hands me a duffel bag on her way down the stairs. I stop on the landing and smile at her, my eyes becoming glassy with unshed tears.

I'm done crying.

"We can get everything while he's out of town. I don't want to stay in this house any longer than I have to."

"Going somewhere?" Blake asks, entering the kitchen with a sympathetic look on his face. "Do you want me to pack the rest of your things and have them brought over to you tomorrow?"

I throw myself at Blake, wrapping him in a hug. "I love you, you old fossil."

Blake chuckles and smooths his hand over my hair. "I love you too, you little hellion. Even if you two can't find a way to make it work, you better visit me every now and then."

My mouth drops open as I pull back to look at him. "You knew?"

Blake smirks and shrugs before hugging me a little tighter. "Of course I knew. There isn't much that goes on in this house that I don't know about."

I sigh as I step away from him. "Are you sure that you're okay with packing up my belongings? I can come tomorrow after class but I have to be quick about it since I have a massive paper I have to write."

Blake shakes his head, the corner of his mouth still curling upward. “Focus on school, little hellion. I can handle the packing.”

My eyes water as I hug him one last time. “I have your number. I’ll text you the address and sometime soon I’ll come visit.”

Zara loops her arm through mine as I let go of Blake. His gaze meets mine, his eyes glassy. I take a deep breath and smile before allowing Zara to lead me out of the house.

“Are you going to be okay?” she asks, taking the keys from me and heading to the driver’s side.

I look back at the house, take a deep breath, and nod. “I’m going to be just fine.”

I always am. I just have to add another layer around my heart when it starts to heal.

If that’s possible.

What Evan and I had was special. It was the kind of attraction that I’ve never felt for anyone else. He made me believe that everything I’ve ever wanted was well within my grasp.

And then I found out that he ruined us before we ever had a chance to truly get started. Before the first *I love yous* could be traded.

Maybe that is a small mercy.

As I walk out of his life, all I can hear is the sound of my thudding pulse and the last few strings that hold my heart together finally snapping.

EVAN

The house is too quiet as I walk in. Normally, Blake would be here, organizing something about my life while Kendall waits for me with a big smile.

However, when I walk back in after two days away—three days after I told Kendall the truth—everything is too quiet.

My first thought is that she's at school. When I look at the time, I see that school ended several hours ago for her.

She should be here.

I know that she said she was going to stay with Zara while I was gone, but she should be back now.

While I was away, I gave her space. I didn't call or send her any messages. I gave her room to think about everything that I said, hoping that we could talk about it when I got back.

Now that I'm home, I want to talk about things more. If she has questions, I want to try to answer them.

I really want to talk about the pregnancy news that she unleashed on me before she walked out.

At the time, I was too stunned to even think of asking her anything about it. I should have stopped her then and insisted that we spoke, but at the same time, she was already enraged about me controlling her life.

Trying to force her into a conversation that she clearly didn't want to have at that moment wouldn't have done either of us any good.

Still, my stomach twists when I think about being a father. For a long time, I didn't know if it was ever going to happen. Now, a woman I love is going to have my baby.

I sigh and head up the stairs to her rooms. Whether she likes it or not, we have to talk about the baby.

I might tell her that I love her, but I don't want her to think that I'm trying to use a statement like that to manipulate her.

Running my hands through my hair, I groan.

When did life get so complicated?

If only Dave was here to see the mess that I've made of his daughter's life.

Guilt curls through me, tearing everything to shreds as I head for her bedroom. He would hate me now if he could see the way I feel for his daughter.

"Kendall?" I knock on her door lightly, leaning close to it to listen for her response.

When none comes, I get a sickening feeling in my stomach. For the first time, I look around her little living room and see that everything that belonged to her is gone.

There are no books and notebooks scattered around. Pens don't rest wherever she happened to drop them. There's nothing to make it look like Kendall even lives here.

Everything looks like it did the day before she moved in and changed my life forever.

My heart is beating rapidly as I open her bedroom door and look around. Though the room still smells like her perfume, none of her little trinkets or clothes are still here. I open every drawer, looking for something of hers.

In the end, all I find is a little note.

Evan,

I hope you don't mind, but I had Blake pack up my things. Well, he offered and I took him up on it. After knowing everything, it's too hard to walk in that house again.

You broke me.

I let you in. You were the first person I've let see past the walls I built up since I met Zara.

You broke that trust and then you expected me to be here, waiting for you. Do you really think that I would want to sit around, pining after you, waiting for you to come home so you could try and tell me how you were doing what was best for me?

I've done what's best for me for many years. I don't need you walking into my life and deciding that you know what best is.

The truth is, you may know a lot of things about me, but you've never taken the time to get to know me.

It took me a long time to see it at first, but this whole time you've been subtly shaping me into the woman you want me to be. The kind of woman who blends into your life. Who rubs elbows with the rich and thinks that it's as good as life can possibly get.

You tried to force me into a life that isn't mine.

I fell for it at first.

I fell for you at first.

Falling in love with you is the easiest thing that I've ever done and walking away from you is the hardest.

But I know that it's what's best for me.

I can't hold a place for you in my heart right now. Not when you've seen to its destruction.

After you told me that you knew my father, everything became clear.

You stepped into the caretaker role because you thought you had to. It was his dying wish. I don't know that I would have done differently in your position.

That doesn't mean that I forgive you for lying to me, just that I understand why you did.

I don't need a caretaker though. I need an equal. Someone who won't rob me of my independence.

For a moment, I thought that was you.

I guess we can all be wrong about things every now and then. You don't know how much I wish that I wasn't wrong.

I had a pregnancy test at my doctor's office and it's been confirmed that we're having a baby. I'll keep you up to date on the details, and in a few months, once I've had time to heal, we can talk about a custody arrangement.

I'm sorry that it had to be this way.

One day, maybe we can get past this. I want to forgive you, but right now I don't know how.

I love you.

I put down the letter and wipe away the tears rolling down my cheeks. My chest constricts and I take a deep breath, trying to think of a way to fix this.

Everything that's happened is my fault. I should have told her who I was from the moment I met her. Maybe then we wouldn't be where we are right now.

What a better man would do is let her move on.

However, I've always heard that you know when a relationship is worth fighting for.

I'm not going to walk away from Kendall without trying to talk this through with her.

Even if she isn't ready to fight for us right now, I am.

At least then I can say that we tried.



Zara opens the front door and raises an eyebrow. I can tell from the thin set of her lips that she is less than thrilled to see me. Aurora stands just beyond her, her arms crossed as she glares at me.

“What do you think you’re doing here?” she asks, her tone sharp.

“I just want to talk to her. If she doesn’t want to talk to me, then I’ll go away.”

“I think you should go now,” Aurora says, shaking her head like a disapproving mother. “I don’t know what you did to hurt her, but the only time she comes out of her room is to go to school.”

My heart slams against my chest. I never meant to hurt her this bad. I knew that telling her the truth would hurt her, but I never thought it would be like this.

“Please. I just want to talk to her. I just found out that we’re having a baby.”

“You could have stayed and talked to her. Or called while you were away.” Zara looks at me like she can’t believe I would have the audacity to show up at her door. “I don’t know what the hell you think you’re doing with my friend, but she doesn’t deserve to be hurt by the likes of you.”

“Let him in,” Kendall says, appearing behind her friends. “I’ll talk to him and then he’ll leave, and we can go back to our ice cream and movies.”

“Alright,” Zara says as she and Aurora brush by me out of the apartment. “I’m going to head to the store and pick up something for dinner. By the time we get back, you should be gone.”

The look she gives me is enough to turn my blood to ice in my veins. She seems like the kind of woman I wouldn’t want to piss off any more than I already have.

I enter the apartment once they’re gone and shut the door behind me. Kendall crosses her arms and shifts her weight to one side, looking at me with bloodshot eyes. There are dark circles beneath those eyes. She looks like she hasn’t slept in days.

“I got your letter,” I say, tucking my hands in my pockets as I look at her. “And I don’t know if this is the last thing I should be saying to you right now, but I love you too. I’m sorry that I hurt you the way I did.”

Kendall’s lips press into a thin line. “Is that all you have to say after everything that happened?”

“No. I want to tell you that you’re right. When I offered you the job, it was out of a sense of duty to your father. Taking care of you was Dave’s dying wish. Even years later, I couldn’t break that promise.”

She nods. “I understand.”

Some of the tension and guilt eases from me. I look around the apartment, trying to figure out what I want to say next. There's so much that needs to be said, but I know our time is limited. It's only a matter of half an hour at most before Zara comes storming back in here and demands that I leave.

"I never should have dragged you into my life the way I did. I just wanted to show you what the world was like—the parts of it that I knew you hadn't seen—but I didn't stop to think for a moment about whether or not you wanted to see them."

"All you had to do was ask me," she says, her voice soft. It's lacking the anger that I expected to receive from her. "If you had asked me, I would have followed you anywhere."

"I know that now."

"You fucked up."

"I know that too." I run my hand through my hair and shrug. "I'm sorry, Kendall. Please come back home."

She shakes her head and I feel my heart being ripped from my chest. I know that an apology isn't enough, but I hoped that it would be a step in the right direction. I want her at home with me where we can work on this together.

"I want you to come back home but it's your choice whether you do or not."

"I'm not working for you anymore," she says, her gaze flitting up to meet mine. I can see steel behind her eyes. "If I come back home, I'm not working for you. I don't want to have to feel obligated to do anything I don't want to do."

“Did you ever feel obligated?” I ask, waves of guilt rolling through me.

“Sometimes.”

“Alright. If you come back home, you don’t work for me.”

“I’m living on my own floor again too. I’m not going to be spending nights in your bed while we try to figure this shit out. I need personal space. I need time to think and process. I can’t do that if I’m getting into bed with you every night.”

“Done,” I say, starting to feel hopeful.

“And another thing, you have to actually work at this. You can’t just throw money and a lavish lifestyle at the problem and hope that it goes away. I deserve to be treated as your equal and I’m not going to settle for anything less.”

“Kendall, you’ve always been my equal.”

Her eyes glisten as she shakes her head. “Not all the time. Sometimes, I feel like I’m just some pretty doll you’re keeping around to show off to your friends. And then, in those moments when you aren’t around, your parents never fail to remind me that I don’t belong in your life.”

“I’ll deal with them.”

She gives me a sympathetic smile. “How can you deal with them when you can’t even stand up to them for yourself?”

As much as I hate to admit it, I know that Kendall’s right. My father still has his nose in every aspect of the business and I can’t bring myself to force him out fully.

Maybe it's time I start making some changes in my life.

“I don't need you to deal with your parents on my behalf either. I can handle them.”

I shake my head, frowning at her. “That's where I draw the line, Kendall. Just because you can handle yourself with them, shouldn't mean that you have to. They're my parents and I will deal with them.”

“Okay,” she says, though I can see it bothers her to concede on this point.

“Now,” I say, taking a step closer to her and smiling slightly, “we're going to be having a baby. You know, I didn't think that was something that would ever happen for me.”

“Well,” she says, her hand drifting down to her stomach as a small smile crosses her face. “It's happening.”

“I thought you were on the pill though. From the moment you moved in, you left your birth control wherever you happened to drop it that night. I know you were taking it.”

Kendall shrugs. “I was stressed when we first started sleeping together. It makes birth control less effective. Some days, I forgot to take it altogether.”

I nod. “Well, either way, we're going to be parents and I'm terrified.”

“I am too.” She looks up at me with wide eyes. “Aurora and Zara are here for me, but neither of them seem that interested in talking about a baby. I don't have anyone I can talk to.”

“Have you thought about talking to your mother? I know that you two haven’t spoken in a long time, but she might be able to talk to you about it in a way that your friends can’t. She has been through it after all.”

Kendall looks thoughtful for a moment but I don’t miss the flash of fear across her face. Even if she wants to talk to her mom, I suspect it won’t be easy for her.

There’s a part of me that wants to be angry with Lydia for allowing her daughter to walk away, but I don’t fully know what happened between them. It’s not for me to get involved in, even though I could.

“Please come home,” I say, stepping toward Kendall again. “I love you and I miss you. I’m more than happy to take this as slow as you want, but I don’t want to keep going home without you.”

Kendall’s eyes glisten with tears as she nods. “I’ll come home, but this is going to be slow. I need time to heal and both of us need time to figure out what a relationship looks like for us.”

“We can take as long as you need.”

She bites her bottom lip before closing the distance between us and giving me a tentative hug.

It isn’t much, but it’s the first step toward healing us.

KENDALL

The sun is shining and the house smells like bacon. For the last few nights—since moving in with Evan again—I’ve slept better than I have in ages.

I yawn as I toss back the covers and stretch. My joints creak and crack slightly as I stand and rub the sleep from my eyes.

Weekends are my favorite part of the week. Even though I have schoolwork to do later, there’s nothing better than waking up on a Saturday morning and knowing that there isn’t a hurry to get anything done.

It’s an even better feeling to know that all the money I need to pay for my next round of tuition is sitting safely in my account. Part of my severance package with Evan was a clause I had forgotten about in the contracts I signed.

Wages and living expenses for the next year had been deposited into my account. When I tried to insist yesterday that Evan take it back, he showed me the page I signed, stating that the money was mine.

I groan as I pull open the curtains and sunlight shines bright into my eyes. It's going to be a beautiful day out. Dew is glistening on the leaves, and everything looks bright and happy.

After spending a few minutes getting cleaned up and dressed, I head downstairs. Evan is humming to himself as he works in the kitchen, putting little containers of something into an insulated bag.

“What’s all this?” I ask as Blake shoves a plate of pancakes across the kitchen island to me.

“Breakfast, and then I was thinking that we could head up into the mountains for a hike,” Evan says as I dig into breakfast, dumping syrup over the pancakes. “It’s going to be a nice day out and I have a surprise for you to go with our picnic.”

I raise an eyebrow as I look at him. He seems to be in a better mood than he’s been in the last few days. Although, since I moved back in, he’s been spending more time at home.

He took a couple days off so we could really talk. In that time, he told me things about my father that I never would have known otherwise. Mom always said that it was too painful to talk about him.

In a way, it’s nice to have a connection to my father, but it’s still weird.

I try not to think about Evan’s friendship with my dad too much.

“A hike and a picnic? I must be a lucky woman.”

“This arrived for you,” Blake says, reaching beneath the counter to grab a sleek black box and shoving it toward me. “Aurora delivered it herself before you woke up this morning. She also told me to tell you to call her later as she might murder someone named Jordan.”

My eyebrows shoot up my forehead as I look over at Evan. “Before we go anywhere, I’m going to have to talk to Aurora about what he’s done now.”

Evan waves a hand and puts another container—this one filled with strawberries—into his bag. “Take as long as you need. What’s in the box though?”

“Lingerie subscription,” I say before taking my plate of pancakes and my box to go.

I pause at the stairs to look over my shoulder at Evan. I can see the fire blazing in his eyes and it makes me wonder what he would do if I wore lingerie for him again.

The last time is burned into my brain, and I find myself wanting a repeat.

Not yet. I need to be patient.

That, and I need to find out why Aurora might kill Jordan this time.

— e l e —

An hour later, after getting all of the gossip, I change into a pair of leggings and a shirt that will be good for hiking before

heading back downstairs. Evan is sitting on the couch, ready to go and scrolling through his phone.

“You look nice,” he says with a smile as he tucks the phone away. “I’ve packed a bunch of water but the hike is going to be a couple hours long. There’s this really beautiful spot I want to show you once we get to the trailhead. It takes nearly two hours to get there.”

I grin and nod, following him to the front door after sticking my dirty plate in the dishwasher. “If you’re going to have me walking two hours up there, you better have prepared one hell of a picnic.”

He smirks, grabbing a backpack and hefting it over his shoulder. “I have all of your favorites.”

“I’ll be the judge of that.”

Evan leads the way to the car, humming to himself. There’s something light and relaxed about him, as if the burden that’s been weighing on him is no longer there.

Although, I know it isn’t, since I learned the biggest secret he was hiding.

I take a deep breath as I get in the car, trying to push those thoughts away. Today is going to be a good day. Evan went to the trouble of planning it for us and I want to make the most of the experience.

As he drives to the trailhead, I can’t remember the last time that someone put in this much effort for me.

It’s nice to feel special every now and then.

As soon as we're parked, Evan is out of the car and grabbing the bag from the back. He hauls it on as I get out and tighten my shoes.

We walk up the trail together, leaves rustling in the breeze and twigs crunching beneath our feet. Evan takes my hand and twirls me in a circle beneath his arm. I laugh and shake my head.

"You seem like you're in a good mood."

"Well," he says, looping an arm around my waist and pulling me against his side. "I finally get to spend some time with you after all the shit that's been going on lately. You don't know how nice it is to finally relax."

"I might have an idea. Now that school is done for the summer, it feels like I finally have a chance to breathe."

"Only a few months until you go back. Are you ready for your second year?"

I bite my bottom lip and look away from him. "I don't know how I'm going to go to school while we have a baby."

Evan looks at me. "What are you talking about? I have more than enough money to hire a nanny if we need one. Or, I do own my own business. The baby could come to work with me."

"You would really bring our child to work with you every single day? How would you get anything done?"

He shrugs and stoops to pick a flower, handing it to me. "I don't think it really matters. I have people who do most of the

work for me. I have more than enough time to take off to take care of the baby.”

“And then I’m going to be the pregnant girl at school. Do you know what a nightmare that is going to be?”

“It’ll only be a few months,” he says as he takes the flower from between my pinched fingers and tucks it behind my ear.

I sigh and run my hand over my stomach. “It’s a lot easier to be a man when you’re having a baby. Plus, you’re a lot older. Nobody is going to judge you for having a baby while you’re still in school.”

Evan kisses my forehead, sending shivers down my spine. “I know that it’s a lot to deal with, but you’re going to do great. If there’s anyone who can handle this, it’s you.”

“I wish I had that same level of confidence in myself.” I roll my shoulders, trying to loosen up. “I’m sorry. I’m ruining our day together.”

“Nope. You’re not. You’re telling me about your fears and what’s bothering you. That will never ruin my day, Kendall.”

I nod, taking a deep breath. “I’m going to meet with my mom tomorrow. I don’t really want to get into it more than that, but I thought you would want to know.”

His gaze locks onto mine for a moment but he doesn’t say anything. I’m glad that he doesn’t. I’ve been having enough of a struggle thinking about it since I sent her a message the other day and asked her to meet.

Instead of dwelling on my fear, I focus on Evan, laughing with him beneath the sun until it's time to head home.



Evan looks at me sprawled across the bed a few hours after our hike and smiles. “I have something for you.”

I prop myself up on my forearms, one eyebrow raising. “Oh yeah?”

He reaches into his pocket and pulls out a small box wrapped in silver paper. I sit up fully and take the little present from him, careful as I pull away the paper.

When I lift the lid off the little box, there's a key nestled against some tissue paper. I pull out the key and look at Evan.

“What is this?”

“Well, I know you've already moved back home, and you had your own key before, but this is a new key with your initial engraved in it. This house is yours as much as it is mine. I want you to feel like you can come and go whenever you want. I won't hold you captive here.”

I put the key back in the box and set it on the bed before getting up and pulling him into a tight hug. “Thank you. This means a lot to me.”

“How are you feeling after the hike?” he asks as I pull away from him and take my hair down from its messy bun.

“A little sore. That was a lot longer than I'm used to.”

He chuckles. “Well then, you sit down and relax while I get us a bath ready.”

“You don’t need to ask me twice,” I say, falling back onto the bed and staring at the ceiling.

A few minutes later, I hear the water running and grin. The last time somebody got a bath ready for me was when I was a little girl. My mom used to create spa days for me, pampering me even after she had a long day at work.

“Bath’s ready,” Evan says, standing in the doorway and wearing nothing.

Heat floods to my core as I get up and follow him to the bathroom. Evan’s burning gaze follows me as I undress before stepping into the tub and sinking beneath the bubbles.

He climbs in behind me, his legs stretching out on either side of my body as he leans back against the tub. His hands move over my body, sliding along my curves and down to my thighs.

Everywhere he touches ignites a fire in my body as wetness pools between my legs. Evan’s mouth descends on my shoulder, sucking on the sensitive skin as his hands travel back up my body.

I moan as I lean back into him, feeling his hardened cock pressing against my back. He rolls my nipples between his fingers as his mouth moves along the length of my neck.

My legs spread a little as one of his hands leaves my breast and travels down my sternum. His fingers graze across my

stomach, desire flooding through me as his fingers find my clit.

As he circles my clit my hips buck against him. His arm tightens around my torso, keeping me pinned in place as he continues to toy with my clit, changing his pace every time my orgasm starts to build.

“Do you want to come?” he asks, his tone husky. He nips my earlobe before switching to the other side of my neck. “Do you want me to play with your clit? Fuck you with my fingers until you soak my hand?”

“Yes,” I say, my voice breathy as I lean my head back against his shoulder and spread my legs as much as I can with his bracketing mine.

He chuckles, sending a shudder through my body as his fingers push into my pussy. My inner walls clench around him as he thrusts slowly, twisting his fingers and pressing them against me until I’m writhing against his hand.

“Be a good girl and come for me,” he says, his teeth grazing against my skin again. “I want you to come all over my hand.”

His thrusts faster, driving his fingers deeper into me as my pussy pulsates around him. With his other hand, he teases my nipples, alternating between the two, pinching and rolling as my orgasm comes hard and fast.

“Fuck yes,” Evan says, his tone husky. “Fucking come all over my hand.”

He keeps thrusting until my legs stop shaking. I turn around and straddle his lap, sinking down onto his cock as his fingers weave through my hair.

Evan pulls my face to his, our mouths slanting together. He nips at my bottom lip as his grip on my hair tightens. When his tongue tangles with mine as I roll my hips, taking him deeper, my pussy squeezes him tighter.

One of his hands trails down my back. His fingers dig into the flesh of my ass, urging me to move faster. I smirk into the kiss, continuing to move slow and teasing him the way he teased me.

“Fuck me like you mean it, Kendall.” He pulls back long enough to fix me with a stern look.

“I don’t know about that,” I say, my tone soft and sultry as I run my fingers through his hair. I raise up onto my knees, hovering above him until just the head of his cock is still inside me.

He groans and tilts his head back, looking at me through hooded eyes. I smirk at him, rolling my hips but not sinking down any further on him.

“You want it, fucking take it.” My nails dig into his shoulders as he lifts his head and raises an eyebrow.

Evan chuckles and grabs my hips with both hands, pulling me back down onto him when I hover above him. “Wrong fucking answer.”

I moan as he thrusts harder and deeper from beneath me, water splashing over the edge of the tub and onto the ground below. I rock my hips in time with the way he moves, meeting him thrust for thrust.

He dips his head, taking one of my nipples in his mouth. One of his hands leaves my hip to reach between us, rolling my clit between his fingers until my pussy clenches him hard.

“That’s right, fucking come all over my cock. Fucking milk it with your pussy as I come inside you.”

His words send me over the edge as he drives himself faster into me. Evan keeps thrusting as my body tenses with my orgasm. My nails rake across his shoulders as I hold on, my back arching as he pulls my hair.

Evan’s own release comes hard and fast, his cock throbbing and stiffening inside me. His fingers dig harder into my flesh, holding me in place until he pulls out.

“I think we’re going to need a shower now,” I say, running my hands through his hair and pushing the loose strands back from his face.

He laughs and grabs my chin, pulling me in for a tender kiss. “A shower and a nap sound great.”

For the rest of the night, I allow myself to get lost in him, not worrying about the future or what will become of us and our baby if we can’t make this work.

— e l e —

My heart is pounding in my chest the next morning as I sit at a little table outside the café, waiting for my mom. Part of me wants to run away. I don't know how this meeting with her is going to go. We could end up fighting like we always did.

I want the baby to know their grandmother.

Looking back, she was a great mom when I was growing up. She did whatever she had to for us. She kept me from growing too wild even when I tried my hardest to do everything I knew would piss her off.

“Hi,” a soft voice says from behind me.

I turn around slowly, taking a deep breath. When I look at Mom, the years of not talking seem to fall away. She looks older than I remember her, with streaks of gray running through her hair and fine lines at the corners of her eyes and mouth.

“Hi.”

Her eyes water as my heart races. My stomach is tossing and turning as I stand up, not knowing what else to say to her.

“I'm sorry,” she whispers as she looks at me. Her bottom lip quivers and tears slip down her cheeks. “I never should have let you walk away. I should have called you so many times over the years, but I didn't.”

“I'm sorry. I could have been a better daughter.”

She closes the distance between us, pulling me into a tight hug. “You were the child. It wasn't on you to keep our

relationship together. I should have acted like your mother and stepped up when you pushed me away.”

I hold onto her a little tighter, and in that moment I realize just how much I missed her. The last several years without her have been hard.

“Alright,” Mom says as she steps away from me and wipes her eyes. “Tell me about your life. What are you doing now? How have things been?”

“Well, I’m about to head into my second year of graduate school to become a lawyer. And I’m having a baby.”

Mom’s eyes widen and a new round of tears start. “Law school? A baby? That’s amazing. Congratulations.”

I nod and take a deep breath. Since she agreed to meet with me, I’ve been going back and forth over telling her about Evan. I don’t know what she’ll think about me being with an older man.

Especially since that older man is Dad’s best friend.

“Thanks. There’s something I should tell you though.” I swallow hard as we sit down at the table. I don’t know if there’s any good way to tell your mom that you’re dating a man she knew in high school.

“Are you alright? Is the baby alright? Is there anything I can do for either of you?”

“No,” I say with a smile as the waiter drops off glasses of water at our table. “Evan is taking good care of us. You don’t have to worry about that.”

“Evan?” Though she’s smiling, I can see the sadness behind her eyes.

I hate that we’ve missed out on each other’s lives. My gaze drifts down to her hand where an engagement ring sits. “Yeah. As in Dad’s best friend, Evan.”

Mom stiffens and fidgets with her ring, twisting it around her finger. “Is he good to you?”

Smiling, I nod. “Yes. He is.”

She sighs and runs her hand through her hair. “I’m going to be honest, that’s going to take some time to get used to, but as long as he treats you well, that’s all I care about.”

“What about that?” I ask, nodding to the ring on her finger. “Who’s he?”

“Noah. I think you’d really like him. We’ve been waiting to get married until you could be at the wedding too.”

I clear my throat, trying not to cry. “It looks like we have a lot to catch up on.”

Mom reaches across the table and takes my hand. “We have all the time in the world to do that.”

EVAN

For the last few weeks—in Kendall’s mission to take things slow—she has been living at my house and Zara’s, alternating between the two of us every few nights. Even though she agreed to come home, she thinks that the distance is good for us.

I’m getting more work done than I would if she was here, but I still miss her on the nights she’s not.

I hate going home to be alone.

Tonight is one of the nights that Kendall’s staying with me, which is definitely why I leave work an hour early to go home and see her.

As I drive home, my phone blows up with calls from my dad, but I ignore them. The purchase of the waterfront property went through and I start renovations within the next two weeks.

He’s been calling me to yell at me all day since he found out.

I sigh and run my hand through my hair, happy that I get to go home to Kendall instead of sitting around and taking more calls from him. I don't know how much more of this I can deal with before I explode.

Having him hover around Tucker Realty the way he does is starting to interfere with business.

Last week, I found out that he had taken a meeting with a client and promised to sell their building within two weeks. The property is one that I never would have chosen to sell myself.

There is no value to it, beyond the sentimental aspect to the owner.

I don't know what Dad was thinking, but I now have no choice but to deal with the ramifications. The contract has been signed and there's no getting out of it.

Sooner or later, I might have to get a lawyer involved if Dad isn't willing to step away. I don't want to do that to my own father. Not unless there's no other option left.

When I pull into the driveway, I try to release all of the stress my dad is causing. I park the car and roll my shoulders, drumming my fingers on the wheel along with the song until I no longer feel like I'm going to snap.

As soon as I'm in a better mood, I get out of the car and head to the house. But as I round the corner, I see my parents car parked just out of sight. Tension floods through my body in waves and I don't know what I'm walking into.

My mother's voice greets me the second I open the door. I can't make out exactly what she's saying—her voice is too soft—but I don't trust it. Especially not after what happened the first time she paid Kendall a visit.

If she thinks that she's going to get away with that shit again, she has another thing coming.

"Mom, Dad," I say, walking into the kitchen and looking between the two of them. "What are you doing here?"

"Kendall, if you keep ignoring the sauce, it's going to burn. You need to stir it and stop adding spices. Nobody wants a sauce that tastes too much like garlic," Mom says, her voice shrill.

My mouth drops open as she storms around the island and leans over Kendall's shoulder, looking at the sauce she's making.

"I can't believe you eat this." Mom puts her hands on her hips and looks around the kitchen. "And look at this mess. I don't know how you can call yourself a woman when you allow the place to be this messy."

"Enough!" I say, my voice booming through the room as I look at Mom. "Leave her alone."

Mom spins around and looks at me, her cheeks red and her eyes wide. Kendall glances at me over her shoulder and gives a slight shake of her head.

I know that she doesn't want me to get in a fight with my parents, but I'm not going to let them sit here and treat her this

way.

“Don’t you use that tone with your mother,” Dad says, standing up and pulling himself to his full height. “She is trying to teach Kendall how she should take care of your home.”

My eyebrows shoot up my forehead. “That’s not Kendall’s fucking job.”

“I thought it was as your house manager,” Mom says, smirking as she crosses her arms and looks at Kendall. “Unless she is a useless little gold digger like we all think she is.”

Kendall’s eyes water as she looks at me, but she holds her head a little higher and grabs the garlic salt, dumping more into the sauce.

“Insolent girl.” Dad shakes his head. “You really ought to do better. I already told you once that I could get a recommendation for you. Someone who might do their job the way they’re supposed to.”

“I thought I told you to stop adding garlic to that sauce?” Mom turns to scowl at Kendall.

I smother a laugh when Kendall rips off the top of the container before dumping the entire bottle of garlic powder into the sauce, her gaze locked on my mother’s.

“You don’t have a clue,” Mom says, shaking her head. She purses her lips and looks around. “This place is a mess. Go get a mop and clean the floor while I fix the mess you made of dinner.”

Kendall spins around, the wooden spoon in her hand, dripping red sauce onto the white tile.

I sigh and pinch the bridge of my nose. Hopefully, Kendall doesn't throw the spoon at my mother, but I wouldn't blame her if she did.

"Mom, you do not get to come into my home and tell Kendall what to do."

Mom rolls her eyes and crosses her arms. "If she is here to manage your house, then she can at least make herself useful. Instead, she's making more of a mess."

"The house isn't clean because *I* didn't clean up last night. It has nothing to do with Kendall. But, since you insist on speaking to her like that, you can leave."

I walk to the front door and open it, looking at them. Mom gasps and Dad crosses his arms.

"What part of *please leave* did you miss?" I ask, my tone stern as I look at the two of them.

Mom sniffs and storms over to me. "You're going to regret treating your family like this when this little whore takes your money and runs."

"Get out now!" I look at Dad who is still standing in the kitchen and glaring at Kendall. "If you don't leave, I swear I will call the police right now."

My parents stare at me for a moment, looking at me as if I'm a stranger to them, before walking out the door. I slam it behind them before looking up at Kendall.

“Are you alright?”

She shrugs. “It wasn’t anything that they haven’t done before.”

Her mouth snaps shut as if she’s realized what she just said. Kendall turns off the stove and moves the pot of sauce to one of the empty burners.

“Kendall, has something like this happened before?”

When she looks at me, her lips pressed tight together, I sigh.

Of course. Why wouldn’t my mother and father try to run her out of my life?

“What happened?” I ask, needing to know what I’m up against so I can fix the problem.

“It’s nothing. They’ve just made it clear a couple times now that they want me out of your life.” She chuckles but I don’t miss the shine to her eyes. “Look, just leave it. I can handle some parents who don’t like me.”

I cross the room and pull her into my arms, kissing her forehead. “You don’t have to handle it. There’s no reason for them to treat you like this and I’m not going to sit by and let it happen.”

Her arms wrap around my waist as she melts into my embrace.

“You don’t need to fight with your parents over me. It’s not worth it. *I’m* not worth it.”

I pull back slightly to look down at her. “Kendall, you are worth so much more than that.”

She rolls her eyes, the corner of her mouth tilting upward. “It’s not worth driving your parents away.”

“I’m not driving them away.” I reach up to tuck a strand of her hair behind her ear. “I’m setting healthy boundaries with them so they know that they can’t disrespect you.”

“What was my dad like?” she asks, pulling away from me and grabbing a pack of burgers out of the freezer.

I follow her to the back deck and try to think about the best way to describe Dave while she starts up the grill.

“Your dad was the kind of man who was friends with everybody. He made it a point to be friends with everybody, actually. There are very few people who would ever have anything bad to say about him.”

She nods as I bump her out of the way with my hip. “Did he love Mom?”

“I’ve never seen two people more in love with each other. Your mom was devastated when he died. I know people were thinking that she would never recover. It hurt when she took off with you, but I don’t think she knew what else to do. Everything here was tainted with memories of your father.”

She keeps asking questions about Dave as we put on some music and cook dinner. As we eat I tell her more about the days we spent together in high school and some of the wild things her father got up to.

By the time the sun is setting, our dinner is long gone and her favorite song is playing.

I get up from my chair and hold out my hand. “Dance with me?”

Her cheeks tinge a light shade of pink as she smiles, her hand in mine. When she stands, I spin her before pulling her into my embrace as the stars start to wink overhead.

“You know,” she says softly as she leans her head on my shoulder, “there are times when this all feels like a dream. Sometimes I think that tomorrow I’m going to wake up and it will all be over.”

“Is that one of the things that my mom told you?”

She shrugs and loops her arms around my neck as we sway to the music. “It might be. I was feeling that way before she ever said it to me though. None of this seems real.”

I take her hand and put it on my chest, just above my heart. Her fingers curl slightly as she looks up at me.

“If this wasn’t real, you couldn’t feel the fact that my heart only beats for you.”

She smiles and the world around me slows down. One song blends into the next as we dance beneath the stars, entirely lost in each other.

KENDALL

Mom smiles as she leans back, bracing herself on her forearms and tilting her face to the sun. Her eyes close and she looks more at peace than I've ever seen her.

It's almost as if being back in her hometown has been good for her.

We've seen each other a bit in the last week since she's been here, and each time it's less awkward than the last.

It's odd how much can change with just a little time.

"I'm going to miss you when you go back home," I say, looking over at her from where I sit on the other side of our picnic blanket. "It's been nice getting caught up with each other."

"We're never going to go that long without seeing each other again," Mom says, opening her eyes and glancing at me.

"No. I don't know when I'm going to be able to come back and visit. With what I made from working and my severance package, I can afford to live through the next year of law

school, and the baby is going to be here. But I'm going to have to spend the summer preparing for all that."

Mom shrugs. "I can come back. And you know that you're always welcome to come for a visit."

I bite my bottom lip and look at the children running around the park with their parents chasing after them. There's a group of older kids playing soccer. I watch as a mother pushes her daughter on the swing.

"What do you think about coming back around the baby's due date? I could really use someone around who's been through it."

Mom's eyes get misty as she nods. "I would love to be there."

"I don't know if Evan's mom will be around much yet or not." I haven't seen her since the debacle in the kitchen and I hope that I won't see her again for awhile.

Every single time his mother is around me, she makes me feel tiny. Like I'm a bug that she could crush with one step.

Mom makes a face. "That woman is horrible. She might have changed since we were younger but whenever I hung out with your dad and Evan at Evan's house, she had a way of making me feel like shit."

"She did?" I ask, glad to know that I'm not alone.

"I was the girl from the wrong side of the tracks hanging around Dave and her precious Evan. She thought that I was nothing but trouble."

“You never told me that Dad came from money.” I knew things were tight when I was younger, but I also never wanted for anything either.

“Oh yes. Your dad did. But his parents disowned him as soon as they found out that I was pregnant. They never liked me and thought that I got knocked up to trap their son.”

I sigh and run my hand through my hair. “Is that why you ran after Dad died?”

Mom shrugs. “I know I had some support here but I couldn’t stay here and get trapped in the memories that your dad and I made. It was easier to go to a new place and start over than live with a ghost.”

I nod and study her for a moment. When I was younger, I used to be mad at her for taking us away from family. I never knew either of my grandparents, but knowing what I know now, it seems like there’s a good reason for that.

“You’re still here for a few more days. Do you want to go shopping with me next week? I need to start getting things ready for a nursery.”

Mom’s smile could light up the entire world. “I would love to go shopping with you. Text me when you want to go and I’ll make sure that I’m ready.”

I grin and reach for the container of fries between us, opening it and popping a few in my mouth.

“Can you tell me more about what it was like growing up here? And about Dad? You never talked about him much when

I was younger.”

“What do you want to know?”

“Everything.”



When I get home a few hours later, Evan is sprawled across our bed and reading. I stand in the doorway for a moment, leaning against the frame and admiring the sight. The early evening sunlight streams through the window, illuminating his tanned skin.

“Are you having fun staring at me?” Evan asks, his tone teasing.

“Yeah. It’s not fair that you get to be so effortlessly attractive. Some of us have to work for it.”

He laughs and puts his book to the side. “How’re you doing? How’s the baby?”

Before I can answer him, he crosses the room and kneels in front of me. His hands go to my stomach and his face is inches from it.

“Hi baby, it’s your dad, how are you doing today?”

I laugh and run my hands through his soft hair as he puts his ear to my stomach. It’s these moments when he’s in a playful mood that make me fall for him even harder.

“I was thinking that we could go out to dinner tonight,” Evan says as he stands.

He kisses me softly, his hands sinking into my hair and holding me closer to him. I moan softly into the kiss, grinning when he spins and pins me against the wall. Heat floods through me even as he pulls away.

“Dinner?”

My stomach growls and I shrug. “I could do with some dinner. Where were you thinking of going?”

“There’s a nice little Italian place. It’s the kind of place you have to dress up for though.”

I raise an eyebrow. “We don’t have to do that. Going out for burgers and having a good time is fine with me.”

He chuckles and loops his arms around my waist. “Let me spoil you. Get dressed. Wear something nice. Feel like a princess for another night of your life.”

“Evan, I really am happy just going out to get burgers.”

His smile falters slightly and I immediately feel bad. The only reason I don’t want to go out to a nice dinner is because I know that I’ll feel out of place. Restaurants with dress codes seem so unfamiliar to me that the thought of going to one already has my stomach turning.

“No,” I say, shaking my head because I know this is important to him. “I want to go for Italian food. I just have no clue what I should wear.”

“Clothing is usually a good place to start unless you want to have some fun in the middle of the restaurant.”

My cheeks warm as I roll my eyes and dodge his grabbing hands.

I head into the closet, looking for something that would be good enough to wear out. There's not much in my closet that would do for the kind of place he wants to take me to.

The dress I wore to the charity event is a little too much for dinner. However, all of my sundresses aren't enough.

Finally, I find a black cocktail dress buried in the back of my closet. The draping will disguise the baby bump that's starting to form. It's still small, but if we're getting dressed up and going out, I want to hide the bump.

People give me dirty looks when they see me on the arm of an older man with a baby bump.

For just one night, I want to pretend that we are a normal couple, going out and having a good time.

With that in mind, I get dressed before touching up my hair and makeup. Evan waits for me in a pair of dark jeans with a dress shirt, his sport jacket draped over one arm.

"You look stunning," he says as I use his arm to balance while I pull on heels. "Are you ready to go?"

"As ready as I'll ever be." I smile at him, kissing his cheek before leading the way out of the house.

Butterflies beat against my stomach as we drive to the restaurant. Even though Evan is doing everything he can to make me feel comfortable, I can't help the feeling that something is going to go wrong.

Evan sings along with the radio, his singing off-key and loud. I laugh as he cranks the music louder, putting down the top of his car and drawing strange looks from those around.

I laugh, some of the nerves leaving my body as he looks over at me and grins. He keeps up the goofy act until we get to the restaurant and pull up out front.

My heart sinks to my feet as the reporters surrounding the restaurant turn, their cameras snapping away.

“Deep breaths,” Evan says softly as he gets out of the car. He walks around the front of it to my side and opens the door. “Everything is going to be okay. I don’t know why they’re here, but we’re going to get through this. Just keep focused on the restaurant door and you don’t have to say anything if you don’t want to.”

“They’re going to write a whole bunch of bullshit about us,” I say, my voice barely more than a whisper as I loop my arm through his.

“Kendall, I love you. They can say whatever they like about us, but the love I have for you is the only thing I care about.”

My heart skips a beat as I look up at him. A slow smile spreads across my face as he kisses me softly.

“I love you too,” I whisper when he pulls away.

The cameras are still snapping away but I don’t let them bother me as I hold my head higher. Evan’s hand is warm against my hip as he wraps his arm around my waist.

As he leads me to the table, all I can think about is his warm gaze and soft smile when he said he loves me.



Evan's fingers trace patterns on my skin, the zipper on my dress only half-down. Sparks fly along my skin where he touches. Heat pools between my legs as he kisses my shoulder.

"I love you," I say, leaning my head back against his shoulder, tilting it to the side slightly to give him a better angle.

He chuckles and sucks on the sensitive flesh a little longer as he works my dress down my torso, the fabric pooling around my hips. His big hands cup my breasts, his thumbs brushing against my nipples until they're stiffened peaks.

"I love you too," he says, his voice husky as he pinches my nipples hard, sending rushes of desire straight to my core.

He keeps kissing my neck, his mouth hot and wet against my skin. My breasts ache as he massages them. Wetness coats my thighs as he works the dress the rest of the way down my body.

Evan spins me around, pressing my back against the wall as he kneels in front of me. His hand works up my leg, pausing when his fingers are behind my knee.

My nerves feel like they're on fire as he teases the soft skin behind my knee before lifting my leg over his shoulder. His tongue traces along my wet slit as I lean back against the wall.

His fingers tease my pussy as his tongue circles my clit. I weave my fingers into his soft hair, holding him against me as he pushes his fingers into me.

As I moan, he thrusts faster. He sucks my clit hard, his fingers crooking to press against my inner walls as they move harder and faster. When his teeth graze against my clit, I come apart around him.

He drives his fingers deeper into me, drawing out my orgasm until I feel like I'm about to fall over. Then he stands and kisses me, the taste of my orgasm still on his lips.

Evan grabs my hips, turning us around and guiding us back toward the bed as our mouths move together. Our tongues tangle as I sit on the edge of the bed. He pulls away, looking down at me through hooded eyes.

When my hand wraps around his cock, he groans and his head tilts back. His gaze locks with mine as I flick my tongue over the head. His hands sink into my hair as I take him deeper in my mouth.

"I'm not going to last long with my cock in your hot little mouth." Evan groans as I drag my tongue along the length of his cock from base to tip.

I lick away the salty drop at the end before taking him into my mouth again. I hollow my cheeks and suck his tip, my hand working the base of his cock.

Evan's hips rock, picking up the pace. He scoops my hair back from my face, holding it in one hand as he drives himself

deeper into my mouth. I moan around him, wetness slick against my thighs as his cock throbs in my mouth.

As he comes, I swallow him, sucking and licking until he pulls out. I lick the last salty drop from my lip as I get to my feet.

“Bend over the bed and put your ass in the air,” Evan says, heat in his eyes as he grabs my chin and pulls my face to his. He kisses me deeply, nipping at my bottom lip as he pulls away.

I do as he says, bending over and arching my back. Evan’s fingers trail down my spine before he brushes my hair over my shoulder. He kisses my spine, making a path from my neck down to the small of my back.

His mouth leaves my body as he lines up his cock with my pussy, thrusting deep into me. Evan’s hands grip my hips, dragging me back hard onto him as his hips rock hard and fast.

My hands curl, fisting the sheets as my inner walls pulsate around him. I push back, meeting him thrust for thrust. His hand comes down on my ass, stinging even as he soothes the sharp pain away.

“Fucking yes, Kendall.” Evan groans, thrusting faster, his cock stiffening. “Holy fuck your pussy feels so good when it milks my cock.”

When his hand comes down on the other side of my ass, my orgasm rocks through me. Evan comes hard and fast, driving himself into me.

We collapse on the bed together, covered in a sheen of sweat and grinning. Evan pulls me into his arms, and I lean my head on his shoulder.

“Have I told you yet today that I love you?” he asks. He kisses my shoulder.

I nestle back against him, closing my eyes and enjoying the feeling of his warm body pressed against mine.

“It’s been a couple hours,” I say, my tone teasing.

He kisses my shoulder. “I love you so damn much, Kendall.”

If every moment could be like this, life would be perfect.

However, life has a nasty habit of disappointing me.

EVAN

I sigh and look down at the papers on the waterfront property, trying to figure out why the bank is now blocking the funding. I've made every call that I can but nobody is telling me anything useful.

The money is in the account allocated to the project, but the account itself has been frozen.

I glare down at the papers, trying to figure out how the account could be frozen. No transactions—other than a hefty deposit I now can't access—have been made in that account.

“Having troubles?” Dad asks as he walks into my office without warning and drops down in the seat across from me. “You look like you're having a hell of a time.”

“It's not going great.”

I close the folder for the waterfront project, not wanting to get into an argument with him about it. It feels like most of what I've done for the last several weeks is argue with him.

It's exhausting.

“You’re not supposed to be here,” I say, trying to keep my tone even. “I thought that we agreed you were only going to come to the office once a week.”

“And I thought that we agreed that you were going to start coming over for dinner once a week. Your mom misses you. We haven’t seen you since that disaster at your house a few weeks ago.”

I lean back in my chair, my body tense as I look at him. “Well, I would come over to dinner, except the last time I was going to, you told me that Kendall would never be welcome in your home.”

Dad shrugs. “We loved Dave. I’m sure Kendall is a nice enough young woman, but your mother doesn’t want her around. I’m going to stand with my wife on this matter.”

“Then you understand my position.” I cross my arms and look at him. “I have no problem coming over for dinner with you and Mom every few weeks on my own.”

“I’m sure Kendall does.”

“No. She doesn’t. In fact, she’s the one encouraging me to do a weekly dinner with you two. Even though you’re trying to exclude her.”

“Then I fail to see the problem.”

I raise an eyebrow. “I’m not going to be leaving the mother of my child—the woman I love—alone one night a week to go over to your house and listen to you and Mom shit all over her.”

“That’s not what we do.” Dad pauses and looks at me before shaking his head. “I can’t believe that you’re having a child with her. You’re old enough to be her father.”

“Come on then,” I say, my tone sharp as I sit up straight. “You seem to have a lot to say about Kendall despite not having a problem with her. You may as well get it all out now.”

Dad shakes his head. “I’m not going to do this with you.”

“Funny.” I take a deep breath. “You always have something to say about what I’m doing with my life, the company, or Kendall. I’m not going to keep tolerating it.”

“Tolerating it?” Dad’s face turns a bright red as he leans forward in his seat. “In what way is kicking your parents out of your home and kicking me out of the company I’ve built *tolerating it?*”

I take a moment to calm down before I speak. If we’re going to hash this out right now, then I don’t want to say anything I’m going to regret later.

“Dad, I’m not going to tolerate you and Mom treating Kendall like shit or saying horrible things about her. She doesn’t deserve that, and quite frankly, neither do I. You are welcome to have your opinions behind closed doors, but I don’t want her to think that she has no place in my life.”

“She doesn’t.”

“That’s not for you to say.”

Dad's scowl deepens. "We have worked hard to provide you the very best in life. You have been given a career that will last you a lifetime. You have more money than you know what to do with."

"And now I have a woman I love and we're going to have a baby together."

"Just because you're having a baby together doesn't mean that you need to make your life about her. Being with her is a bad idea. Have you even seen what the media says about the pair of you?"

"I've seen plenty of the stories."

None of those stories paint a very flattering image of Kendall and me, but it doesn't matter to me. I can see those stories getting to her though. Reporters have been tracking us everywhere, even if nobody is supposed to know where we're going.

"I thought that sending the reporters after you would be enough to get this relationship to end, but you clearly don't seem to care."

I freeze, trying to process what he just said to me, but anger is clouding my mind. After taking a deep breath, I get up and start pacing the room. I pull open my door for a minute, nodding to my assistant, before heading back to sit behind my desk.

"You told the reporters where I like to go. You made Kendall miserable by having her trashed across the internet.

And you think that's okay?"

Dad rolls his eyes. "Don't be dramatic. You know that I do what I have to for my family. It seemed like it would be the best way to get Kendall out of your life."

"Why the hell would you want to get rid of the first woman I've been happy with in a very long time?"

"You'll understand when your own child starts bringing home people that you don't approve of."

I shake my head, not believing how he could do this to his own child. He's been trying to tear apart my relationship with Kendall since the start.

The knowledge makes my stomach churn.

I reach forward and hit a button on my phone. "Send security in please."

Dad's eyes narrow as he stands up and plants his hands on my desk. "You don't want to do this. You're making a massive mistake. This girl is nothing but trouble."

"You don't even know her, and based on everything you've done, it sounds like you have no interest in getting to know her or our child."

Dad's shoulders stiffen. "You never should have had a child with her. She is going to take you for everything you're worth."

There's a knock on my door before it opens. Two security guards enter, both of them standing behind my father.

“It’s time to leave,” I say, as I nod to the security guards. “You can either walk out of here on your own or I can have them drag you out.”

“You’re going to do this to your own father?” He shakes his head. “You’ll run this company to the ground. As of now, I am taking it back.”

“This business is in my name. You will do nothing. As for how I could do this to you, you did this to yourself when you decided to fuck with my family.”

Dad shakes his head and turns around, leaving the office. The security guards follow behind him. I pull up the camera feed on my computer and watch as they escort him out of the building and to the parking lot.

As soon as his car drives away, I slump in my seat and run a hand down my face.

I didn’t want to do that to my own father, but there’s nothing else I could have done.

He’s crossing lines left and right. While I may allow him to walk into the business and make my life more difficult, it’s not happening with Kendall. She doesn’t deserve that shit from him.

I sigh and reach for my phone, dialing her number.

“Hey,” she says, her sweet voice easing away some of the anger flowing through me. “I thought you were going to be busy with work today. Is something wrong?”

“I just had an enlightening conversation with my father.” I spin in my chair to look out the window. “It turns out that he’s been the one sending reporters after us.”

There’s a small part of me that thinks I should keep the conversation with Dad hidden from her. I don’t want to hurt her. She needs to know the truth though, even if it is going to upset her.

“Oh?” Her voice is tight. “Is that so? Why would he do that?”

“Another tactic to try and make you leave me.” My heart slams against my ribcage at her silence. “I kicked him out of my office. Had him escorted out, actually.”

“And how did that go?”

“Not well, but he fucked with my family. You and our baby matter more to me than anything else. I want him and Mom to be part of our lives, but if they aren’t going to treat you with respect then they aren’t welcome.”

Kendall sighs. “I don’t want to drive a wedge between you and your family. I know what it’s like to not have your parents in your life. I don’t want that for you.”

“I’ll talk to them about it eventually and see if there’s a way that we can all get along, but right now this is the way it is.”

“I’m sorry that this is happening. Is there anything you need?”

I watch the clouds floating across the blue sky. “Some time with you would be great. You want to get lunch together?”

“Why don’t I pick something up and meet you at your office?”

“Sounds perfect to me. See you around noon?”

“Works for me.” She shuffles something around on the other end of the line. “I love you.”

“I love you too. Drive safe.”

Kendall hangs up and I’m left staring out the window and wondering how to move forward with my family from here.

I want my parents to be in their grandchild’s life, but I’m not going to settle for anything less than them respecting Kendall as she deserves.

She is the woman I plan to spend the rest of my life with, and if they can’t get over their prejudice then they will miss out on a lot.

I hate how much it bothers me.



“Here’s lunch,” Kendall says as she walks into my office a few hours later with a bright smile. She dangles a paper bag with one hand and the scent of burgers fills the room.

She closes the door behind her before rounding the desk and leaning down to kiss me. I grin and grab her by the waist, sitting her in my lap.

“What do you think you’re doing?” she asks as I shift her to face the desk, running my hands up and down her thighs. I

nudge her skirt a little higher, grinning when she wiggles against my hardening cock.

“Having an appetizer.”

She leans back into me as I spread her legs, hiking that flowing skirt even higher up her body. Her soft moan is breathy as I trail my fingers along her inner thighs.

“You know, this isn’t the time or place for this,” she says as I brush my fingers against her silky underwear.

“Funny,” I say as I kiss her bare shoulder. “Because your pussy is soaking your panties.”

I slip my fingers beneath the thin material, circling her clit slowly as she moans. She tilts her head back against my shoulder, her mouth finding mine as I plunge my fingers into her.

Her hips buck against my hand as I groan. I move my fingers faster, feeling her pussy pulsating around me. My mouth leaves hers, traveling down her neck. She writhes against my hardened cock as I push her closer and closer to the edge.

When my phone starts ringing, I groan and pull away from her.

“Fuck,” I say, my fingers slowing in her, my thumb pressing against her clit. I glance at the caller ID. “I forgot I have a meeting right now. I have to take this call. I’ve been trying to get in contact with them all week.”

Kendall gives me a smile before sliding off my lap and sinking to the ground. She turns to kneel in front of me, undoing my belt and pulling down my zipper.

“What do you think you’re doing?” I ask her.

“Take the call,” she says, pulling out my cock. She runs her hand up and down it in long strokes. “Take the call while I have my appetizer.”

I grab the phone before it can stop ringing, giving her a warning look. “Hello, Mr. Paperny, how are you doing?”

Kendall runs her thumb over the head of my cock, and I can’t focus on a single thing the man is saying. Her tongue darts out and she licks the head, her hand still working the base.

“Yes, I know,” I say, hoping my voice sounds normal as she pulls her hair back, looping it into a low bun, before she hollows her cheeks and takes my cock in her mouth.

My hips rock as her fingers dig into my thighs. She sucks harder, taking my cock deeper. I lean back in my chair, looking down at her and trying to focus on the call.

“Yes, that is all agreeable to me. You’ll be here in a week then?”

Kendall smiles around the head of my cock as she pulls back. Her tongue slides over the head before she stands and lets her skirt fall to the floor.

She straddles my legs, sinking down onto my cock. I bite back a groan, grabbing her hip and urging her faster as I lift

my hips. She takes me deeper, rolling her hips as her hand slips between us.

My cock is throbbing as she rubs her clit. Her wetness coats my cock as she moves faster. She bites down on her moans, but her eyes are blazing with lust.

I finish the call as quickly as possible, leaning forward to hang up the phone.

Kendall moans at the new angle, her back arching. I groan and pull her shirt and bra down, taking one of her nipples into my mouth while I roll the other between my fingers.

“You’re going to have to be quiet,” I say, switching to the other side and flattening my tongue against her hardened peak. “You’re not going to want someone to walk in here and see you taking my cock like a good girl.”

Her pussy clenches hard around me as her orgasm comes hard and fast. I clamp a hand over her mouth to stifle her moans, smirking when it only makes her wetter.

“You like being gagged? My hand over your mouth so the office can’t hear your horny moans?”

She nods, her eyes hooded as she rolls her hips. I groan as her wetness coats my cock and I know when she gets off the telltale sign of what we’ve been doing is going to be on my pants.

It only makes me harder.

I thrust up into her, burying myself to the hilt. She moves with me, moaning as we move faster until her pussy is milking

me as I finish. I keep thrusting, letting her ride out her orgasm before pulling out.

When I take my hand off her mouth, her tongue darts out to lick her lips. Smiling, I take hold of her chin and pull her face down to mine for a kiss.

“Best appetizer ever,” I say, smirking up at her as she gets off me and yanks her skirt on.

Her cheeks are red as she smiles and opens the bag to pull out our lunch. “That’s not happening again.”

I laugh and put my cock away, zipping up my pants. “I don’t know about that. I think that might be my favorite way to have lunch.”

Kendall rolls her eyes but her smile is wide as she bites into her burger.

I know that wasn’t the last time we’re doing this.

Now that I know the truth about my parents and how they’ve been treating her, the only direction to go from here is up.

I’m sure that our relationship is only going to be better than ever.

KENDALL

I look through the empty rooms in Evan's house—our house —trying to pick out the perfect room for the nursery.

There's a sense of disconnect as I look through the rooms though. This is a beautiful house, but it isn't one that we created together. Evan bought it and I just moved in, inserting myself into his life.

Though I don't want to talk to him about moving until I can contribute to a down payment, I don't think that this is going to be our forever home. Every single time I walk through the halls, I can't help but think that I didn't do anything to deserve this lifestyle.

I didn't work for anything I have now and it bothers me.

Growing up, I always thought that if I settled down with someone we would start in a tiny apartment we could barely afford. I thought that we would work on growing our lives together.

Now, I've stepped into a life that was already made and it feels like I've got nothing to show for myself.

I sigh and move on to the last spare bedroom. I don't know how many times I've looked at the rooms, knowing that we need to get ready for the baby. None of them seem right.

"Everything is going to be fine," I say to the empty house as I stand in the middle of the room.

Turning slowly, I try to picture a nursery in here, but it doesn't have the right vibe.

"You know, you'd think you would have heard me knocking on the door," Evan's mother says from behind me.

I spin around to look at her, trying to keep my expression neutral as she and her husband stand in the doorway.

I'm trapped and they know it. I have no choice but to listen to them.

"The front door is on the other end of the house."

Blake appears behind them and raises an eyebrow. "Is everything alright in here, Kendall? Or would you like me to escort them out?"

"Fucking try it, Blake," Evan's mother says, venom in her voice. "You seem to forget that my son pays you."

"I didn't forget that. However, he also pays me to ensure that Kendall is comfortable and safe here. Neither of which she has seemed to be throughout every interaction with you."

I give him a grateful smile over her shoulder. “It’s fine, Blake. Thank you. I can handle them myself.”

Blake nods and leaves but I have no doubt he’s hiding around a corner and listening, waiting to step in if I need him to.

In some ways, he’s the grandfather figure I’ve never had.

“I’ve had enough of seeing you at my son’s side,” Evan’s mom says as her gaze travels up and down my body. Her nose wrinkles. “He deserves someone his own age and with far more class.”

“I think that’s up for Evan to decide, not you.” My tone is strong, though internally I’m still looking for a way out of this entire situation.

“You look like a smart girl,” his father says. His beady eyes seem to stare right through me. “You can see that there is no future here.”

“I wouldn’t still be around and having our child if I thought there was no future with him.”

His mom shakes her head. “You poor, pathetic girl. You cannot possibly see a future here. Stop with the act. I know that you only want my son for his money. Getting pregnant is a way to ensure that he never leaves you. He’s too blind with infatuation to see the truth.”

I snort. “I wish my pussy were that powerful. I wouldn’t have had to fight tooth and nail for everything I have in my life.”

Her face turns bright red and her hands clench into fists at her side. “You will watch the way that you speak to me.”

“I have done nothing but treat you with respect since I met you, yet you continue to insult me at every turn. If you think that I’m going to stand here and let you continue to treat me like shit, you’ve got another thing coming.”

“Oh, I’m not here to treat you like shit,” she says, reaching into her pocket and pulling out a checkbook. “I’m here to find out how much it’s going to take to get you to leave my son.”

I stare at her, not believing what I’m hearing.

They came here, not to fix anything but to try and buy me off. They have no interest in having a relationship with their grandchild. Or, maybe they do but they think it will be easier to do if they offer me money to go away.

“Not going to happen. I love Evan and you can shove your bribe up your ass.”

She arches an eyebrow, a haughty smile crossing her face. She is yet another person who thinks that the answer to all of life’s problems is money. She thinks that playing with people’s lives is as easy as handing them a sum of money and waiting for them to disappear.

Evan’s dad takes a step forward. “You’re too young to go through with this kind of life. You aren’t ready to be a mother. You haven’t even finished school. Just take the money with the promise of giving Evan sole custody once the baby is born and then leave.”

My nails dig into my palms as my hands clench into fists. “I’m not going anywhere, despite the disgust you people make me feel. You think it’s alright to play with people’s lives like this? Buy whatever you want and just fuck over whoever might stand in your way?”

“I think that you are too young to know what you really want out of life. Everything would be better for you this way,” he says, while his wife flips open the little book.

She pulls a pen from her other pocket and starts filling out a check. “How much? Name your price.”

“I might be young, but I know that I love your son. I know that there’s no way I’m going to give him up because you think some money can make me leave. Most importantly, I know that I’m never going to give up custody of our child.”

“Think of it this way,” she says, looking up from the check. “You would be able to finish law school. Make a career for yourself. Start a life of your own instead of wedging yourself into Evan’s.”

I freeze as I look at her, not knowing what else to say. It’s as if she has guessed my every fear and knows exactly what to say to exploit them.

It’s as obvious to others as it is to me that I don’t belong here.

“One million dollars,” his mother says. “That should be enough to take care of the rest of your schooling and set you

up to live comfortably for the first few years your career is developing.”

I shake my head. “No. I already told you; you can’t buy me.”

“It’s really nothing,” Evan’s dad says as he crosses his arms. “Two million. That way you know for a fact that there is more than enough money to take care of you while you start your own life.”

“Get the fuck out of my house.”

“You know, Evan has changed since he met you,” his dad says, a grim smile on his face. “He used to be the kind of man you could depend on to do what was right. I never had to worry about him. However, since you came around he seems more determined than ever to destroy his life.”

His mother nods and finishes filling out the check. She pulls it out of the little book and holds it out to me.

I take the check and rip it into a dozen tiny pieces. “I said *get the fuck out of my house.*”

“You’re going to regret this. If you have to make this difficult, we will take you to court to prove that you’re an unfit parent.”

“Fucking try it,” I say, brushing by both of them. I look at Blake who is standing in the living room. “Please escort them out.”

“Gladly,” he says before charging into the room with Evan’s parents.

My heart is hammering in my chest and my hands are shaking as I make my way up to my room. I don't stop to think about what I'm doing, I just act on instinct.

I drag my suitcases out of the storage closet and toss them onto the bed. When I open them, I take a deep breath and try not to cry.

This is the last thing I want to be doing, but I'm not going to keep putting up with this. I have more respect for myself than that.

I also don't want Evan's relationship with his parents to continue suffering.

There was a part of me that hoped his parents would come to their senses and see that we are happy together. I thought that they would want to be in their grandchild's life.

Now, I can see how wrong I was about all of that.

They want to control the lives of the people around them. They think that they can use money to do that.

It's one of the things I hate most about the rich. It's also something I allowed myself to forget the more I fell for Evan.

Never again.

I head to my closet and start pulling clothing off the hangers and draping it over my arm. When I head back to my bed, I stuff everything into one of the suitcases.

As tears roll down my cheeks, I keep going back and forth, filling the suitcases with clothing until they can't hold

anymore.

Though I know that this will look like I'm running away, there's nothing else I can do. I love Evan too much to let him lose his family over this.

I won't take their money, but I will step back and allow them to heal their relationship with their son.

I'll end it so he doesn't have to.



“What are you doing here?” Evan asks as I walk into his office a couple hours later. “I'm not heading home for a little while yet. There's a big project I have to close out on before I can go.”

I take a deep breath and for a moment I consider backing out of what I know I have to do.

“No amount of money is worth the loss of my independence,” I say, looking at him even as my vision blurs.

“What are you talking about?” he asks, getting up from his desk and coming to stand in front of me. “I don't understand.”

“Your parents just visited the house.”

“I don't know why they would do that after what happened last week,” he says, a thin line forming between his eyebrows.

Evan perches himself on the edge of the desk. He reaches for my hand but I pull it out of reach and take a step back. Hurt flashes through his eyes, but I know the second he touches me I won't be able to say what I need to.

I'll melt back into him and forget everything horrible that's happened in the last several weeks.

I can't allow myself to forget. I need to be strong for myself and for our baby. I need to make the decision that he is never going to make for himself.

“They came over today to offer me money to leave you.”

The expression on his face shifts, becoming something much darker. I can see the suspicion in his eyes, and it feels like a knife to the chest.

To know that he thinks I would allow myself to be bought—especially after knowing me this long—disgusts me.

You allowed yourself to be bought once by him. He offered you money and a better life and you took it without considering everything that could come of it.

“And what did you have to say to them?”

“You really have to ask me that?” I look at him, my chest constricting. “After everything that we've been through and how much I love you, you really have to ask me?”

Evan shrugs, his jaw tightening. “I don't know what I have to ask you, Kendall. I want to say that I know you would never take money from them, but I know you need the money.”

I shake my head, tears fully blurring my vision. “They offered me two million dollars and I said no. It doesn't surprise me that you would think I would say yes though.”

“And why's that?”

“Because that’s what people do in your world. It’s what you did to me. You bought me with a promise that I’d be working for my money, though we both knew you were wildly overpaying me.”

Evan runs a hand through his hair. “I was just trying to take care of you.”

“Did it ever occur to you that I would be able to figure it out on my own?” I wipe my eyes and bite back the rest of the tears that threaten to fall. “No. It didn’t. Because even after months, here you are thinking that I would take the money.”

“I would want you to take the money. I promised your father that I would take care of you. Two million dollars is a lot of money. I don’t doubt that it would have been enough to take care of you for a few years.”

“And we’re back to my father.” I shake my head and pace across the room. “How the fuck do we always end up back at my father’s dying wish? It doesn’t matter what he wanted! He’s dead! I never really knew him!”

“It does matter. It matters more than you know.”

“Is that all this has been this entire time then?” I hate the way my voice breaks as he looks away from me. “Just you trying to uphold my father’s dying wish? That’s why you fucked me? Got me knocked up? “

“The pregnancy was an accident.”

I shake my head, my stomach tossing and turning. “You know the best part of their offer was the fact that I should hand

you sole custody. Sign away my parental rights. I suppose I should have seen this coming from a mile away. It's what people with more money than brains do."

His head snaps back to me. "They did what?"

"They told me that to get the money I would have to give up my child. And then, when I refused the money, they told me that they would take me to court over being an unfit parent."

"They can't do that."

"It doesn't matter. I'm done with this, Evan. I want our relationship to work, but I don't want it to work at the cost of your family."

"I'll talk to them."

I throw my hands up in the air. "And what good has that been doing so far? They don't want to see reason. I don't know if they ever will. I don't want to be the reason that your family falls apart."

"I love you, Kendall. Don't do this."

"I love you too. So damn much. That's why I'm doing this." I swallow the lump in my throat that threatens to choke me. "I'm going to make this right for everyone. You shouldn't have to lose your family over me. I'm not worth it."

"Kendall."

"No, Evan. I'm not going to sit around and have money thrown at me by people who want to control me. Especially

not if it means the loss of my independence or the ability to be a good mom to our baby.”

He nods, squeezing his eyes shut. When he tilts his head back and looks at the lights, I don’t know what to say.

I want to tell him that everything is going to be alright, but we both know it isn’t.

I’ve made up my mind.

“I want our child to have the best relationship with their grandparents. I don’t want to be a point of stress between the baby and the grandparents. The easiest thing to do is quit seeing each other.”

“I don’t want sole custody,” he says, his voice wavering slightly. “And I don’t want this relationship to end.”

“You are never going to get full custody. I’m going to be a part of the baby’s life. A better mother than the one I had. Not that Mom isn’t great, but I don’t want to fight with our child the way she and I fought.”

“And you think that us staying together is going to lead to that?”

I shrug, my heart pounding in my chest. “I don’t know if it is or isn’t, but I know that not being together will make your parents happy. It will keep them in our child’s life.”

“I don’t know why this is a major concern for you.”

I pause and stare at him for a moment. “You grew up with a family. You take that for granted. It was just Mom and me

growing up. She did the best that she could, but I grew up wondering why my family didn't love me enough to be around. I don't want that for our baby."

"I'll fix this," he says, his voice so even and sure. It's as if he knows without a doubt that there's a solution to the problem.

As if his parents haven't been making it clear that they want me gone for as long as we've been together.

"There is no fixing this, Evan. If there was a way to fix this, it would have been done already. This is the only solution."

He looks at me, his eyes watery. "I don't want to lose you. Fuck, Kendall, I'm supposed to be able to take care of my family."

"Are you saying that because you owe it to me or because you think you owe it to my father?"

His silence is all the answer I need.

"Great. Well, I'm going to be moving back in with Zara for a bit. It's what makes the most sense. Where I'm going to go from there, I don't know yet."

"You don't have to do this."

I pace over to the window and look down at the people walking around below. From up here, everything down there seems so small and insignificant. It's the same way too much money makes the rich look down on the poor.

It's the way I've been looked down on since I entered his life.

“This relationship seems like you have some sense of duty to my father rolled into it. I can't keep questioning whether you love me for me, or if you love me for him. My leaving is what's best for both of us.”

I step closer to him and stand on my toes, brushing my lips against his in a final kiss that shatters my heart. When I look at him, the pain I feel is reflected in his eyes.

“Please let me go.”

EVAN

The house is empty without Kendall. It seems darker and dreary. I don't come home to a smiling face dancing around the living room and having a good time.

Instead, I come home to Blake's disapproving stare and pursed lips. He makes sure that he's never in the same room as me for very long.

I don't know what Kendall did to win his loyalty, but it's mildly impressive.

Just mildly.

However, the fact that even Blake isn't speaking to me is another reminder of how fucked up my entire life has become.

A week without the love of my life seems to bring nothing but misery. I want her back in my life, but I don't know what to say or do to get her back.

She doesn't want me to ruin my relationship with my parents while I don't want to ruin my relationship with her.

Kendall and our baby matter more to me than anything else. She still thinks that it has something to do with her father.

As much as I hate to admit it, in a way it does.

I told him that I would always be there for her. I was supposed to be the one protecting her. Instead, I let the people I loved the most hurt her.

I let them accuse her of horrible things. I allowed them to think it would be alright to step into my home and try to kick her out.

Then, for just a moment, I allowed myself to believe that she would have taken the money.

I run my hands through my hair, feeling the wave of self-loathing rush through me again. I don't know how I could think that about her when she's done nothing but refuse my money.

Kendall is nothing like the other women I've dated.

That's why I grab my keys and head over to my parents' house. It's time that we end this shit now. I'm not going to let them keep scaring away Kendall.

I love my parents and I don't want to lose them, but if it comes down to a choice between them, and Kendall and our baby, I'm going to choose Kendall and the baby every single time.

They need to know that they can no longer control my life.

elle

“What are you doing here?” Mom asks as I walk into the living room with my hands tucked into my pockets.

My heart is hammering in my chest and I have no clue how this conversation is going to go. I know what I want to say to my parents but they both have a way of twisting things to fit their needs.

“I need to talk to you and Dad.”

Dad looks up from the recliner he’s sitting in. “What about?”

“I’m going to lose Kendall and our child if you keep threatening her and treating her like shit. I heard about the money you offered her to leave me and I’ve never been more disgusted with either of you in my life.”

“She asked for the money,” Mom says, her voice high-pitched and filled with indignation.

“Don’t lie to me.” I hover near the doorway, knowing that I have no problem walking out of here if they’re going to continue acting like children.

“Who are you going to believe?” Dad asks, arching an eyebrow. “Some tramp who’s just after your money, or your family?”

“I’m going to believe Kendall, the woman I love and the mother of my child.”

Mom shakes her head, tutting to herself. “You’re making a mistake, Evan. We did not raise you to make mistakes like this.”

“I’m not making a mistake,” I say, my tone harsh. “I’m choosing the life I want to live.”

“You don’t know what kind of life you want to live. One day, you’re going to look back at this and see that we are right.” Dad leans back in his recliner and crosses one leg over the other. “In regard to the business, I will be taking over. I’ve talked to several of the board members.”

“You mean you intimidated several of the board members.” I sigh and shake my head. Disappointment flows through me. “You’re not going to be taking back control. I met with the board members early this morning. We have voted to ban you from the business. Effective immediately, if I find you with any documentation relating to current business, I will be taking legal action.”

Dad’s mouth drops open and his face turns a bright shade of red. “You would do that to your own father?”

“I would do that to the man who’s going to sink the business if he doesn’t back off.”

“You’ve changed since Kendall came into your life. She’s influencing you to act in ways that you never would have.” Mom’s eyes are watery, but I know it’s all for show. She uses her emotions like a weapon.

“She’s influencing me to be the kind of man who can take care of my family. I’m not going to apologize for that.”

“And now look at what you’re doing to your family!” Dad’s voice booms through the room as he stands.

“I’m doing the best thing I can for my family. If you would like to be a part of that family, then I would love to have you. You don’t need to change overnight, but I want you to start giving Kendall a chance.”

“There is no world in which that is going to happen,” Mom says, her nose turning upward.

“Well then, I’m sorry, but there is no world in which you are going to be allowed into our lives. To be quiet honest, you’re lucky that I’m even offering you a chance after she told me about your threat.”

Mom’s eyes widen slightly. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Don’t lie to me.” I grit my teeth and take a deep breath. As much as I want to scream and shout the way I would have when I was a child, I’m not going to give in to those urges.

“She’s going to be a terrible mother.”

“She can’t be any worse than the way you’ve been acting since the moment she walked into my life.”

Tears roll down Mom’s cheeks and she makes a show of reaching for the tissues. I sigh and look up at the ceiling, trying not to let my temper get out of control.

“My child is not going to be around the two of you and learn that it’s okay to treat their mother like a piece of shit. It’s not okay. Kendall is an amazing woman and I wish that the two of you could see that.”

I look between the two of them, hoping for some sign that I'm getting through to them. Mom continues to sob into a handful of tissues while Dad glares at me. I glance around the room, wondering what will happen when I'm gone.

If they choose to alienate themselves, I won't be coming around. They will have to rely on their staff to see to their every need—especially as they get older.

“I want you two to be in our lives. I want you to see your grandchild grow up. What I don't want is to have to keep getting in the middle of you guys and Kendall when you decide to attack her.”

“You want to keep your parents out of your life.”

“I'm going to be having a dinner next Wednesday,” I say, continuing on as if Dad hadn't said anything. “You are both invited but Kendall is going to be there. If that's going to be a problem for you, don't come. I'll take your absence as confirmation that you want no part in our lives.”

I spin on my heel and walk out before either of them can say anything.

With each step I take, it feels like a little more weight is lifted from my shoulders.

I don't expect my parents to change right away, but I want to see them make an effort. I need to know that they're trying to get past their prejudice.

This is the first step but I know it will be a long process.

If I can even get Kendall to talk to me. The only messages I send her that she answers are the ones about the baby. Other than that, she ignores me.

Hurting her was something I never planned to do. I should have stopped her from leaving last week, but she looked like she needed to go.

I don't think there's anything I could have said that would have changed her mind.

I get in the car and send Kendall a message, inviting her to dinner next week. Three dots bounce on the screen for a few seconds before they disappear.

After sending her another message, telling her that I love and miss her, I try to figure out how to get her to respond to me.

I could drive over to Zara's and try to convince her friend to let me inside. Although, if Zara and Aurora are guarding her, there's no hope in hell of me being able to talk to her.

Instead, I send Aurora a message, begging for her help. After she agrees, it feels like a little more of that weight on my shoulders is slowly lifting.

Now all I have to do is figure out how I'm going to get Kendall to come over for dinner.

KENDALL

“Please come to the dinner with me,” I say as I sit across from my mom for our last coffee before she heads back home. “I don’t know if I can do this alone. Aurora said that his parents are going to be there and neither of them like me very much.”

“Are you sure you even want to go to this dinner? From everything you said about what happened between you and Evan the other week, it sounds like dinner could be a nightmare.”

I sigh and sip my coffee. “I know but I really love him. I don’t want to walk away from him.”

“You were pretty upset about him knowing your father.”

“I know.” I drum my fingers on the table and look across the street at the park. There are dads pushing their children on the swings or chasing them around the playground.

“Do you think you’re going to be able to move past the issues you keep having?”

“I want to try. I know that it could all end up horribly, but at least after the dinner with his parents we’ll know where everybody stands. I think it will make it a little easier for us.”

“Alright.” Mom takes a long sip of her coffee before nodding. “I’ll come to dinner. My flight isn’t until tomorrow morning so I could use a little more time with you before I go.”

I smile. “Thank you.”

“I’m sure everything is going to be okay between the two of you. I see the way your face lights up when you talk about him. It’s the same way I used to look when I talked about your dad.”

My cheeks warm and I finish the last of my coffee. “I’ve got to get going. I volunteered to make the dinner and there’s a bit of shopping I need to do before I head over there. I’ll text you his address.”

“Try to relax a little,” Mom says as I stand up and toss my cup in the trash. I hug her before grabbing my purse. “Just focus on loving him and the rest will all fall into place.”

I smile and kiss her cheek before taking off. As much as I hope Mom is right, I don’t know what to expect from dinner tonight, but I hope it goes well.

I really want this to work.

elle

“Thank you for giving this a chance,” Evan says as he plates the pasta we’re having for dinner. “I know that Mom and Dad have been nothing short of horrible to you, but since they’re coming tonight, it does mean that they want to try and fix this.”

“I hope so. I don’t think they’re ever going to like me though.”

Mom smiles as she hurries into the kitchen and grabs the bottles of wine. “They may never like you. I still think you’re pretty great though.”

She leaves the room with the bottle of wine as I sigh and look at Evan. We haven’t talked about what happened between us yet. We have a lot to figure out when it comes to our future.

Then there’s the matter of his parents too.

Regardless of whether they are in our lives or not, I love Evan. I want us to have the best future that we can. We’ve been avoiding planning that future, instead living in the moment and enjoying our relationship as it is.

There is no pressure to do anything other than love each other and figure it out as we go.

The doorbell rings and seconds later I hear Evan’s parents walking down the hall. I take a deep breath and put on my best smile, preparing for a night I’m sure I’ll never forget.

“Hello,” I say politely as they walk into the room. His parents both give me a strained smile before walking over to greet their son.

“Off to a great start, I see,” Mom says as she walks into the room, giving Evan’s parents a pointed look.

“We heard that you were back in town,” Evan’s mom says as she gives my mom a once over.

Here goes something.



“That could have been a lot worse,” I say late that night as Evan and I float in the pool beneath the stars.

Evan laughs and glances over at me. “I thought your mom was about to jump across the table at one point.”

I grin. “She and I may not always get along, but she will be the first one in line to start a fight if someone is making shitty comments about me.”

“I don’t know if they’re ever going to get their shit together.”

I reach out and take his hand, lacing my fingers through his. “It’s only the first night. We have time to figure it out.”

“Does that mean you’re going to stay?” he asks, moving to tread water beside me. Our hands are still linked as he looks at me.

“We have a lot we have to work on,” I say before taking a deep breath. “But I love you and I don’t know how I would be able to do all of this without you.”

He chuckles and pulls me to him. “You are the most capable woman I’ve ever met. You would have no problem doing it

without me.”

“It’s not that I couldn’t do it without you. It’s that I don’t want to. I know that we’re an unconventional couple and we have our fair share of problems, but I want to make this work.”

“We’re going to make this work then.”

He tows me to the shallow water before wrapping his arms around me and carrying me out of the pool. Our gazes are locked together as he carries me inside and straight to his bedroom.

When he sets me down at the foot of his bed, he takes his time looking at me. His warm gaze travels up and down the length of my body. Everywhere he looks, I feel like I’ve been set on fire.

“I love you,” he says, his voice husky as he reaches out to pull one of my bikini strings. He pulls the one on my other hip, a small smile on his face as my bottoms fall away.

“I love you too.”

I reach behind my back and pull the strings of the top. The thin fabric falls away, the cold air making my nipples pebble.

Heat floods between my thighs as his hungry gaze consumes me. Evan’s shorts fall to the floor, his cock hard as he approaches me. His hands settle on my hips, pulling me flush against his body as his mouth descends on mine.

I moan into the kiss, my fingers weaving through his hair. Evan’s hands roam up my body, his fingers drifting along the sides of my breasts before he works his way back down.

He nudges me back to the bed, our tongues tangling. I sit down on the edge of the bed and he sinks to his knees in front of me. My hands run along his shoulders before I cup his face and kiss him again.

He pulls away from me, his hands running up and down my thighs before he spreads my legs. He groans as he slides his tongue along my wet slit. When he circles my clit, I lean back, bracing myself on my forearms.

His shoulders press my legs open wider as his fingers slip inside me. I roll my hips in time with his thrusts. Evan flattens his tongue against my clit before sucking on it hard. His fingers move faster as my pussy clenches around him.

“Come for me,” he says, his voice husky as his fingers thrust harder.

My inner walls pulsate around him as he flicks his tongue over my clit. I come apart around him, my wetness soaking his hand. He keeps licking and sucking, his fingers moving until my legs stop shaking.

When he stands up, he grabs the back of my knees and pulls my legs over his hips. He doesn't hesitate to bury his cock fully, rolling his hips until I'm writhing against him.

He pulls out and slams back into me. I lock my ankles around his back, keeping him pressed against me. His hips rock faster, his cock throbbing as my pussy squeezes him.

“I want you to ride me,” he says, flipping our position quickly.

He moves up the bed, propping himself up against the pillows while I straddle his lap. I sink down on his cock, moaning as he thrusts his hips upward.

I run my hands along my body, massaging my breasts and rolling my nipples between my fingers as our hips rock together.

“I want you to play with your clit until you come all over my cock,” Evan says, grabbing my hips and thrusting faster.

I play with my nipples with one hand while the other drifts down to my clit. As I circle it with my fingers in time with his thrusts, I feel the orgasm building. My pussy squeezes his cock as my back arches.

Evan groans, driving into me faster as my orgasm comes hard and fast. His own release follows quickly.

I slide off him and curl against his side, sighing when his arm wraps around me.

“Did you ever think when we met that this is where we would end up?” I ask as I look up at him.

Evan rolls onto his side to face me, his arm still around me. “Not even a little bit. I thought that I was just going to be around to help you out. I never thought that you would worm your way into my life like this.”

I laugh and kiss him. “We still have a lot to work on.”

“Lucky for us, we have the rest of our lives.” He kisses the tip of my nose. “We’re going to fight and there are going to be

days when we don't like each other very much, but I promise that I'm going to love you through it all."

EVAN

The sun is setting as Kendall and I walk along the path that winds through the forest. Her fingers are twined with mine and she stops to look at every flower she sees.

One of the things that I love the most about her is her ability to just be present. She doesn't get lost in all her other problems when she's walking in the forest.

It's only me and her, nothing else standing between us. No other matters that need to be dealt with. When we go on walks together, it's just the two of us.

She reminds me to take time and enjoy life, instead of spending my time focusing on the things that won't matter at the end of my life.

I smile as she picks a flower and reaches up to tuck it behind my ear, smirking once it's in place.

"You look so pretty," she says. "I can't believe that we're going to be parents. It seems crazy to think about. I'm glad

that we're taking this time away together before we start trying to figure out the nursery."

I twirl her in a circle before pulling her to my chest. "I wanted some time alone with you before we begin the next crazy adventure in our lives."

"Having a baby is going to be something else. Your mom wants to take me shopping for the nursery. I've only seen her twice in the last two weeks since the dinner. I'm not sure that I'm ready for that yet."

I shrug. "I'll tell her that I want to come with you guys too. I don't want to miss out on decorating our kid's room."

The more we talk about the baby, the more excited I feel. Sometimes, I still wonder if I'm too old to be the kind of father I want to be. I don't want my child to feel like they're missing out on anything. I want to be the dad who has time to coach sports and go to the movies with them.

I want to make sure our child knows how loved they are.

Kendall runs her hand over her small baby bump. There's a soft smile on her face, and I know she's already hopelessly in love with our baby.

"You're going to be an amazing mom."

She blushes and rolls her eyes. "I don't know how I'm going to handle it all. I go back to school soon and I'm still pregnant. Then once I have the baby, I'm going to have to find a way to be a new mom and still go to classes."

I kiss the top of her head. “Don’t worry about it. I’m going to take care of everything.”

“I’m going to keep worrying. I don’t think there’s a way that you can handle *everything*.”

“Your career and our child come first. Everything else can fall on the back burner for a little while.”

“You have a career.” She bites her bottom lip. “I feel bad about asking you to put everything on hold.”

I shake my head and kiss her temple. “Kendall, I want to do this for our child and for you. What part of spending as much time as possible with our baby wouldn’t excite me?”

“Do you really mean that?” She sighs and shakes her head. “I keep worrying that you’re going to need to go back to work and then we’re left trying to figure out what to do again.”

“I have a business that runs itself just fine when I take time off. I have skilled employees who work for me to keep everything running. It will be fine, Kendall. You can’t hold yourself back and lose yourself in being a mom. You have to be yourself, chase your dreams, and be a mom.”

“That seems like an impossible task.”

“If there’s anyone in the world who’s capable of doing it, it’s you.”

She stops and looks up at me. “How do you know?”

“Because I’m your biggest fan. I know what you can do when you put your mind to it, and you never fail to amaze

me.”

Her cheeks turn a darker shade of red and her stomach growls. “I think it’s time to go get some food.”

I laugh and turn in the direction of our cabin. “Come on. We’ll go get you some food, then I think we should put on a movie and just hang out.”

“Sounds perfect to me.”

“Kendall, you sound perfect to me.”

Her blush darkens as I grin down at her. When I look at her, I know that there’s a lifetime of happiness waiting for me.

My heart thuds against my chest as I think about the surprise I have for her tomorrow morning.

Something tells me that she is going to love it, even though there’s a nervous part of me that worries about what she’ll think.

It’s going to be one of the biggest moments in our lives and I don’t want to mess it up.



The sky is just starting to become a dark blue when I wake Kendall up. She groans and rolls over, clutching a pillow to her chest. I chuckle and kiss her neck, grinning as she tries to swat me away.

“It’s too early. Sky’s still dark,” she says, her voice raspy with sleep.

“Come on, I have something that I have to show you.”

“Sleep first. Show later.”

Kendall pulls the blankets up higher around her, cutting herself off from the rest of the world. I laugh and gently peel the blanket back from her, my heart hammering in my chest.

“It’s important. But I can’t show you later. It has to be done now.”

Kendall rolls over to look at me, one of her eyebrows arching. Despite how tired she is, I can see the curiosity burning in her eyes.

“What kind of thing do I need to see this early in the morning?”

I grin and get out of bed. “Guess you’re just going to have to get up and come with me.”

After a moment, she gets out of bed and wraps the blanket around her shoulders. She’s swallowed up by the fabric as she yawns and shuffles out of the bedroom behind me.

She follows me through the house and out onto the deck, barely saying anything. When she wraps her blanket a little tighter around her shoulders, I smile.

“What are we doing out here?” she asks. “The sun isn’t even up yet.”

“It’s coming,” I say as the first rays of orange start to creep over the horizon. “You just have to be patient. I want this to be

our first sunrise together as an engaged couple. I didn't think it was right that we miss it."

I loop my arm over her shoulder as she hums. She shuffles around a little, nestled in her blanket and tired.

It takes her a moment, but finally she looks up at me with wide eyes.

"What did you just say to me?" she asks. She pulls her blanket a little tighter.

"You know, I thought about taking you away on a vacation for the proposal. Somewhere with stunning beaches or soaring cliffsides. Something that would look dramatic in the pictures."

Kendall shakes her head though there's a small smile spreading across her face. "This is perfect. After all the mornings we've spent talking while the sun rises, this is perfect."

I lean down to kiss her softly. "I'm glad you think so. I wanted to make this as special for you as possible."

In the grass down below, fake candles begin to flicker. Kendall gasps, her hand flying to her mouth as they illuminate, spelling out the question I've been waiting to ask her for far too long now.

She nods as she looks at me, tears in her eyes. I grin and shake my head.

"You have to listen to my whole speech before you agree to anything. I worked hard on it."

My heart is hammering in my chest as I look at her. She is everything that I've ever wanted and more. Kendall is the piece of me that I didn't know was missing for so long.

Life is better with her in it.

"I don't want to spend another day without knowing that someday you'll be my wife."

I get to my knee in front of her and pull a diamond ring out of my pocket. It's small, but when I picked it I knew she would love it. Kendall would hate anything that's too big or flashy. She likes simple and understated.

As tears flood her eyes, I know I chose the right ring.

"Kendall, I know that nothing with us is ever easy. You and I butt heads and we make each other angry. But I'd rather fight with you then spend another day not fighting with anyone else. Since the moment I met you, I knew there was something different about you. I want you in my life as my wife and my partner for the rest of our lives. Will you marry me?"

Tears are streaming down her cheeks, and she wears a smile that stretches from ear to ear. She nods and holds out her shaking hand. I laugh and slide the ring on her finger before standing up.

She throws her arms around me and hugs me. I can feel her tears soaking through my shirt as she leans her head on my shoulder.

When she pulls back, her eyes are dry, but her smile is still in place.

Our family and friends start popping out of the bushes. Kendall looks up at me and the tears start falling again as her mom's fiancé snaps pictures of us.

She drops the blanket and reaches up to smooth down her hair. I laugh and kiss her temple.

“You look stunning.”

Her eyes are narrowed when she looks up at me. “I have a massive case of bedhead.”

“Then I'll correct myself.” I kiss her quickly as the camera snaps away. “Your bedhead is stunning.”

Kendall shakes her head before taking off to go hug her mom. I smile and watch as she shows off the ring to her mom and her friends. The shock of my life comes when my mom pulls her into a hug and whispers something in her ear.

I head down to the yard with everyone, grinning as congratulations are passed around.

When I reach my parents, Dad is scowling but Mom wears a soft smile. I don't know if Dad will ever forgive Kendall for what he views as the destruction of his life, but it looks like Mom might be ready to move on.

“I think I have a lot of apologizing to do,” Mom says as she looks at me. “I'm sorry that I tried to stand in your way.”

“Thank you for coming today. I didn't know if you would,” I say as I pull her into a hug.

When we step away from each other, her eyes are watery. Dad says nothing as he reaches out to shake my hand.

“Alright,” Kendall’s mom says, looking around at everyone. “Why don’t we head inside and get the coffee going? I’ve got all the supplies we need for a pancake bar in my car, so if some people are willing to help me carry things, we’ll get breakfast going.”

“I’ll help.”

“No, you will not.” Her mom gives me a smile. “You two enjoy some time together. The rest of the day is going to be a bit wild with all of us here.”

“You’re the boss,” I say before heading over to Kendall.

She throws her arms around my shoulders and balances on her toes to kiss me.

“This is amazing. I can’t believe you put so much time and thought into this.” Kendall’s eyes start welling up. “How did you even manage to get everyone out here without me knowing?”

“I booked out a hotel in town. Everyone is going to be staying up here for the weekend to celebrate.”

In the distance, I can hear the sounds of our mothers bickering. Kendall laughs and takes my hand, leading the way up onto the deck. She peeks inside the house for a second, making sure that everyone is okay, before coming back out to stand with me.

“I couldn’t have asked for a better proposal,” she says as she looks down at the fake candles still in the grass. “I love you.”

I stand behind her and wrap my arms around her waist as I rest my chin on her shoulder, the scent of her citrus shampoo wrapping around me.

“I love you too.”

Kendall and I stay out on the deck for a little while longer, wrapped in each other. I can’t stop smiling as I look down at her, completely in love.

This isn’t the way I thought my life would go but I’m glad to see what has come of everything. I have the woman I love by my side and we’re going to have a baby in a few short months.

Our families may not get along well, but they’re both here and making an effort. It’s all I can ask for.

This moment is perfect.

“I can’t believe you proposed to me while I was wearing a blanket!” Kendall narrows her eyes.

I laugh and look out at the sunrise, holding her close. “Think of the story we’ll be able to tell our children one day.”

“I’m not sure the story of Mom and Dad falling in love is one they’re going to want to hear.”

“They’ll want to hear it.”

She raises an eyebrow. “And how do you know that?”

“A love story like ours happens once in a lifetime.”

EPILOGUE - KENDALL

Ten Months Later

Soft music plays as Mom straightens the long veil over the train of my white dress. My heart is hammering against my ribcage as my bridesmaids start to walk out with the groomsmen.

In a few short minutes, I'm going to be marrying the man of my dreams.

Mom smiles as she stands in front of me, tears in her eyes. "I can't believe that my little girl is getting married."

"I can't believe it either." I reach up to catch a tear before it falls. "I'm happy you could be here for this. I was worried that you and I might not make up until after I was married. I was terrified of walking down the aisle alone."

Mom pulls me into a tight hug. "That never would have happened. I've missed a lot of moments in your life since you moved out, but I'm not going to miss any more of them. It's always been you and me against the world, kid. Now we just have Evan to add into that mix."

Zara looks over at us as she loops her arm through Alex's. "You two need to get ready. You're next."

I take a deep breath and grab my bouquet from the chair in the corner. Mom smooths out my dress and veil one last time as Zara and Alex walk out.

"Are you ready?" Mom asks as the wedding coordinator nods to us and pulls the door open.

"Absolutely."

I smile as I see Evan waiting at the end of the aisle for me. His mouth falls open slightly and there are tears in his eyes. A large smile spreads across his face as I take the first step down the aisle.

This is the moment that I've been waiting for. Over the last six months, we pored over every detail of our wedding, planning everything down to the minute.

The flowers are pale shades of pink and sage, gold accents weaved throughout. The guests are standing to either side of the flower-lined aisle, waiting to take their seats.

I look over at Evan's mother in the front row, smiling when I see our sleeping son in her arms. He's still tiny and it's hard to believe that he's going to get older.

If he could stay this way forever, tiny and perfect, I would be happy.

Although, there is excitement running through me every time I think about getting to see him grow up.

I look back up at Evan, my heart skipping a beat as he smiles at me.

“Hi,” I whisper as Mom kisses my cheek before going to her seat. She takes my bouquet with her, leaving my hands free.

Evan smiles down at me as he takes my hands. “Hi.”



The ceremony passes in a blur but the reception is wild. Music is pounding through the speakers and people jump off the dock into the lake. I traded my dress for a pair of shorts and a tank top hours ago, but Evan is still wearing a dress shirt and slacks.

“A shot of tequila as requested for my beautiful wife,” he says, handing me the little shot glass.

I grin and take the shot, throwing it back before setting the glass on a nearby table. When I make my way back to him, he catches me around the waist and spins me in a circle.

Giggling, I lean my head against his chest and sway with him to the song the band is playing.

“I’m glad we got married at the house,” I say as I tilt my head back to look up at him.

“As long as nobody drowns in the lake, I’ll agree with you on that.” Evan laughs and kisses me. “This has been the perfect night.”

“Well, I was thinking that there is one way this night could get a bit better.”

Evan arches an eyebrow. “What’s that?”

“Last one in the lake has to give the other a back massage.”

Evan gently shoves me away from him before he takes off running toward the lake. I laugh and take off after him, trying to beat him down to the water.

It might not be the most traditional wedding, but nothing about our relationship has ever been traditional.

I grin as I jump into the water behind him, knowing that I would follow my husband to the ends of the earth if he asked me.

With him is where I’m meant to be.

EXTENDED EPILOGUE - KENDALL

Two Years Later

I roll my hips, sinking onto his cock with my hands planted on his chest. Evan's heated gaze watches my every movement while his fingers dig into the flesh of my hips.

"Fuck," he says as I start rocking my hips, taking him faster and deeper.

My pussy pulses around him, squeezing his cock tight. Evan flips us over and thrusts hard into me as I hook my legs around his waist. My nails rake down his back as he rocks his hips into mine.

As he thrusts, he dips his head and sucks a nipple into his mouth. I moan, my back arching off the bed as my inner walls squeeze him. We finish together, our bodies slumping together in a tangle heap against the sheets.

"You know," he says softly as he traces a finger up my spine. "You could wake me up with my cock in your mouth every morning and I would die a very happy man."

I smirk and get out of bed, grabbing a blanket and wrapping it around me. As Evan rolls out of bed, I grab the baby monitor. Toby is sleeping in the other room, his soft sleeping sounds coming through the monitor.

My heart melts as I look at my baby. He's growing up fast and I don't know if my heart can handle it. Before we know it, we're going to be sending him off to college. I'm going to be at his wedding, watching him get married to the person he loves the most in the world.

"Are you about to cry?" Evan asks as he takes my hand and leads me through the cabin. "Because I don't know if I can take that hit to my ego. The sex wasn't *that* bad."

I laugh at his teasing tone and shake my head. "No. I was just thinking about how fast Toby is growing up. It seems like he'll be an adult in a matter of days and then he won't need me anymore."

"He's always going to need you," Evan says.

We lean against the deck railing together. Evan takes the blanket from his shoulders and wraps it around both of us as a cool breeze blows.

It reminds me so much of the morning that he proposed that tears start to well in my eyes. That moment was perfect. Our families were together and he made me feel like the most loved person in the world.

Since then, he's made me feel that way every single day.

It's funny how love finds you when you're least expecting it. I went to work for a man so I could put myself through university and instead I got the family I always wanted.

I built my business with my husband by my side. Together we built our family.

And there is still so much more we have left to do.

Every time I think about where the future will take us, I can't wait. He's everything I've ever wanted and everything I didn't know I needed.

Even after two years, I still fall a little more in love with him every day.

"Happy anniversary," he says as the sun rises. He kisses my cheek before holding me a little tighter. "I love you so much."

"I love you too." I tilt my head back to kiss him properly. "Happy anniversary."

I hand him the small box I snuck out with us. Evan raises an eyebrow and takes the box from me.

"I thought we said no presents."

"This is a different kind of present."

Evan chuckles and lifts the lid off the box. He grins as he sees the positive pregnancy test nestled against the tissue paper. For a few moments, he alternates between staring at the test and staring at me.

"Holy shit," he says, smiling as he kisses me. "I can't believe that we're going to have another one."

“I know. We’re going to be the parents of two kids. How fucking unbelievable is that?”

He laughs and kisses me again. “It might be unbelievable, but it’s the best anniversary gift you could have ever given me.”

I nestle back into his embrace, and we watch the baby monitor as the sun comes up. Toby is getting older and soon we’re going to have another baby. Our lives keep changing but it doesn’t scare me the way big changes used to.

I’m no longer running scared.

Evan was right on the morning he proposed.

Our love story was far from perfect but it’s the kind of story that only happens once in a lifetime.



Thank you for reading *Silver Fox’s Surprise Baby!*

If you enjoyed this, you’ll love *Baby by my Brother’s Best Friend.*

It’s an enemies to lovers, surprise pregnancy standalone.

Keep reading for a preview!



“This story was charming, funny, spicy and very enjoyable!

A must read!”

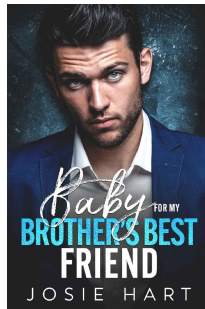
★★★★★

“I cannot get enough of this book! **Enemies to lovers is my favorite and this one does not disappoint!**”

★★★★★

“**100% an enemies to lovers book.** I read all morning and literally **could not put it down** since I woke up. Definitely recommend!”

Baby for my Brother's Best Friend Sneak Peek



***One brother's best friend + one hotel
room = two blue lines***

If “sexy” had a mascot, my brother’s best friend would be it.

Deep hazel eyes and a diamond cutting jawline.

He offers me the business deal of a lifetime,

If I play a convincing date for *his ex's* destination wedding.

But pretending we’re smitten is easier said than done.

His devilish smirk and cocky attitude work me up,

Until I can’t decide if I want to punch him or kiss him.

Now sharing one room in paradise has me questioning
everything.

He’s more than off-limits,

But my heart, *and his hands*, have a mind of their own.

His fingers grazing my skin sends my body humming,

His mouth has me throbbing in brand new places,

And we’re waking up tangled together, again.

At least on the island, our passion is mutual.

I don't know if he'll want "us" in real life.

What I *do know* is he'll be my brother's *ex-best friend*.

Because *I'm pregnant*.

ALLY

“I’m sorry...” My voice trailed off. “You want me to
what?”

Levi rolled his deep hazel eyes—as if his proposition wasn’t shocking. “You heard me loud and clear, Ally. It’s simple: just come with me to Rachel’s wedding and pretend to be my girlfriend.”

“You have a whole roster of women,” I argued, folding my arms across my small chest. “Give me one good reason why I should accept.”

“I’ll pay you ten thousand dollars.”

“I make twenty times that working as your mom’s CPA,” I threw out, raising an eyebrow at him. “That’s hardly appealing.” I mean, seriously, if my brother’s best friend, who I just so happened to *abhor*, was going to reel me into playing his girlfriend, it was going to be worth my time.

Period.

“Okay, but you get a free trip to the Caribbean.” Levi let out a frustrated sigh before rubbing his perfectly defined square jaw, dotted with a tinge of black stubble. “What else do you want from me? I need to prove to Frank Lewis that I’ve matured since I was a reckless twenty-two-year-old.”

“*Why?*” I retorted, shaking my head in confusion. “You can’t seriously tell me you’re still in love with that salty, high-maintenance ex-girlfriend of yours.”

Levi’s jaw tensed, his face filling with irritation. “Why can’t you just accept the offer? You *never* go on vacation, Ally. I figured you’d accept just for that reason alone. I need someone I can trust—and who has their shit *mostly* together. You’re the best option I have.”

“Wow, I think that’s the nicest thing you’ve ever said to me.” I feigned a smile, batting my thick eyelashes at him. “So if it’s not to win Rachel back and crash the wedding, then why do you need to prove to Frank that you’re a grown-ass acting man?”

Which we both know is a lie.

“He’s selling CyberSecure, and I *need* to get my hands on that company. I’ve been watching it for years, and it’s finally my chance to make a name for myself outside of the Lombardi family trust.”

I pursed my lips, studying his face for a few long moments. His patience was waning, but playing with his impatience was more than amusing for me. We’d never gotten along—mostly

because he was an arrogant asshole who hated the world ninety-nine percent of the time...

But whatever.

“That’s a multimillion dollar company,” I remarked, the wheels in my CPA brain spinning as I thought of what it could do for *me*.

“Obviously, I know that,” Levi snapped, rolling his broad shoulders. “You’re starting to waste my time right now, Ally. I have things to do.”

“Ditto, Levi.” I snorted, before gathering up my courage. “I’d like to counter your proposition.”

“You can’t be serious right now. This isn’t a negotiation.”

I swallowed my nerves, ignoring his words. “Forty percent stake in the company, and I accept.”

“Absolutely not.”

“Fine then. Thirty-five.”

Levi pursed his lips, his eyes narrowing. “Fifteen.”

Hope burst through my chest—I had a shot. “Thirty-four.”

“*Twenty.*”

“Thirty or no deal.” I gave him my best poker face, flipping my auburn hair over my shoulder.

He let out a sigh. “*Fine.* Thirty-fucking-percent it is. You’re welcome for turning you into a millionaire.” Levi pushed his chair back, shaking his head as he stood to his feet. “I’ll write something up.”

“No, *I* will do the write-up,” I challenged him, leaning back in my desk chair. “Knowing you, you’ll put some stupid clause in there that will ruin me *actually* getting what you just agreed to.”

“Wow.” His eyebrows shot up, and for a brief—*very* brief moment, I thought he might actually be a little hurt by what I was implying. “I won’t fuck you over if you don’t fuck me over, Ally. Plain and simple as that.”

I met his gaze, the deep green hue mixed with chocolate brown a little jolting, my heart skipping a beat. There was no doubt in my mind that those eyes swayed a lot of women right out of their clothes...

But not me.

My brother’s best friend did *not* have that power...nope. Not over me.

“I’m still going to write something up,” I stated, clearing my throat and looking away. “I just think it’s in my best interest. Also, I think it’s only fair that I write up a few rules as well.”

He folded his arms across his chest. “Like what? No bumping uglies, Ally? I don’t think you have to worry about that when it comes to me. Besides, I’ve already seen you naked—remember the Christmas party of fifteen? Yeah, I can’t *unsee* that.”

I rolled my eyes, pushing away the small pang of humiliation. “You didn’t see *all* of me. You just didn’t knock

before barging into the bathroom while I was taking a shower.”

“Um, because *most* people lock the door, Ally.”

“Right, but like you couldn’t hear the water running on the other side? The shower is *open*. I don’t know how you didn’t hear it.”

“That rain showerhead is really quiet...” His voice dropped off for a moment before he shook his head. “*Anyway*, it’s fine to write up whatever rules you want, but we *will* have to have some PDA. It’ll be weird if we don’t touch each other at all.”

My stomach knotted up—Levi was more than known for his PDA-packed appearances. “Minimal PDA. I have class, Levi.”

“Yeah, okay. Whatever. Just write it up and I’ll mark out what I don’t agree with. We’ll go over it once we land on Friday.”

“Wait, *this* Friday?”

“Yep, get to packing, *baby*.” He shot me a wink and slipped out of my office, his laughter echoing down the hallway.

I let out a sigh, facepalming as I glanced at my computer screen, having lost my place in balancing Lisa’s accounts.

Damn it, Levi.

My phone buzzed on my desk, and I looked over to see a text from my best friend, Linley, lighting up my phone.

Got you lunch, can I stop by?

“Absolutely, you can,” I muttered, texting back a quick reply. I needed all the help I could get figuring out what rules to put in place between myself and Levi. Just as I hit the send button on the message, there was a knock on my cracked office door.

I looked up. “Oh, hi, Lisa,” I greeted Levi’s stunning mother, whose dark hair was fashioned in perfect waves, cascading past her shoulders.

She gave me a smile, adjusting her dark rim glasses and shutting the door behind herself. “So, Levi just swung by and told me he’s taking you to Rachel’s wedding?” Her puzzled expression told me everything.

He didn’t tell her about the arrangement. You sly dog, Levi.

I nodded. “Yeah, it’s last minute, but I can definitely work remotely and keep up with the books.”

She waved me off. “Nah, you don’t have to worry about working while you’re there. I just...I had no idea...”

Right.

“It’s just a friend thing,” I answered her, my voice coming out with less confidence that I hoped for.

“Are you sure *he* sees it that way?” Her brows furrowed, lines of concern growing on her face. “He made it sound like he was pretty excited to get away with you.”

Is he seriously going to con his own mother?

“Oh, well...” I hesitated, having no way to work myself out of it. “I’m just trying not to get too excited over it.”

That seemed to work, her face brightening. “I bet you’ll have a great time. I know it might be a little early, but I just always thought the two of you would be so cute together. You’re already basically family.”

I swallowed hard. “Thank you, Lisa. I love all of you so much.”

“Aw, we love you too.” With that, she tapped the doorframe and spun around, disappearing down the hallway.

Ugh.

Groaning, I laid my head down on my desk. Why the hell was Levi pulling it over on his own freaking family? I’d known them since I was a kid, since Levi and Josh, my big brother, had been lifetime friends. Lisa was practically my second mom, and now accepting the proposition might ruin all of that? I hadn’t even asked Levi how he planned on explaining us *not* being together when we returned.

Should’ve thought about this longer, Ally.

I mean, was he planning on conning Josh too? Because there was no way in *hell* my big bro was going to buy that Levi and I were suddenly dating seriously enough to jet off to some Caribbean wedding of his ex-girlfriend’s. In fact, if we *were* seriously dating, Josh might beat the shit out of him.

He had done it to my other boyfriends.

“What’re you chuckling about?” Linley’s voice interrupted my thoughts.

I jerked my head up from where it was resting on the desk. “Oh hey, you look *hot*.” I wiggled my eyebrows at her sweatpants and oversized shirt. “Working from home looks good on you.”

“Oh my god, shut up.” She laughed, handing me my pecan cranberry salad from Rob’s Diner just down the street. Her blonde hair was pulled up in a loose bun on top of her head in the most adorable way, and her no-makeup look just emphasized her natural beauty.

My best friend was a stunner.

“I mean it, Lin,” I said in my best serious tone. “Thanks for lunch.”

“Anything for you.” She kicked back, propping her Converse up on my desk. “So seriously, what’s with the weird head-on-the-desk laughter thing you were doing when I walked in? Is there a manic episode in the works or is it the funny cat meme I sent?”

I shook my head, hesitating. Should I tell her about the deal with Levi? Or would it be best to keep it on the down-low before having the details of who *he* was telling?

Nah.

“You’ll never believe what Levi wants me to do.”

She forked a bit of her own salad in her mouth, curiosity filling her face. “And what’s that? I can’t think of *anything*.”

“He wants me to be his date to Rachel Lewis’s wedding.”

She nearly choked on her mouthful of kale and spinach. “No way—like for real?”

“Of course not,” I laughed. “He wants me to do it as like a business deal.”

“And why the fuck would he do that?” Her tone was already growing defensive. “What is he scheming up now? Because you don’t have to do this.”

God, I love my best friend.

“He wants to buy some business from her dad, and has to prove that he’s matured or some shit like that. He thinks that if he takes a girlfriend who has her life together, he can convince him.”

“And why you?” Her eyes narrowed.

I shrugged. “You’ve seen the kind of girls he surrounds himself with.”

“Aspiring models, influencers, and actresses.”

“Exactly, and so to make it worth my time, I negotiated that I would get a percentage of the business that he buys.” I sat up a little straighter, proud of my business dealings.

“*Dayum* girl, look at you. You’re a freaking boss. But how do you know he’ll come through on the deal? We *know* how Levi is. He can be a real douche.”

“He has to sign a contract, and you better *believe* I’m going to cover my bases. Also, Levi can be a real jerk, but he’s not

like that. He's always been loyal—think about everything he's done for Josh. I don't think he'll bail on me.”

She was quiet for a few moments, but then nodded. “That's true. And he wouldn't risk messing up his friendship with your brother over it. Josh is like his only close friend.”

“Yeah, because my brother has the patience of a saint,” I snorted, grabbing for my water bottle on my desk. “But anyway, let's talk about rules I should put in the contract. I don't want *any* gray areas.”

LEVI

“**A** bso-fucking-lutely *not*,” Josh roared, throwing his hands in the air. “You’re not jetting off with my sister thousands of miles away to your *ex*’s wedding!” He was pacing around my master bedroom, his chucks squeaking on the freshly polished dark oak floors.

“Dude, relax,” I said, shoving more of my clothes into my suitcase and shaking my head. I turned to look at him. “It’s really not what you think it is. Let me explain before you give yourself a heart attack.”

Don’t get me wrong, I knew that telling my best friend was going to be a shitshow, but *this* was a little overdramatic—even for him.

“Have you slept with her?” he demanded, slamming his hand down on my suitcase, stopping me from continuing to fill it. He was *seething*, his light complexion burning crimson as his icy blue eyes bore into mine. “Because I will literally *murder* you if that’s what happened.”

“What? No.” I snorted, spinning around to grab my good blazer from the closet. “I have no desire to fuck your sister, Josh. Gross.”

Well, maybe not gross.

She did have the body of a goddess—but it was still a no. She was beyond off-limits, and annoying.

Which is why she was perfect.

He jerked back, his eyes narrowing. “Then what the hell are you doing with her, Levi? I don’t like anything that’s coming out of your mouth right now, but you better start talking, or my fist is going to.”

Again, so fucking dramatic.

“Bro, I told you about Frank selling CyberSecure. That’s all this is about. I just want to prove to him that I’ve matured so I can buy his company.”

His demeanor didn’t change. “Cool, but that doesn’t explain my sister...”

I let out a sharp breath, taking a step back from him—just in case he went swinging on me. “She agreed to be my *pretend* girlfriend.”

“*What?*” His eyes went nearly as wide as his face. “Why would she even agree to such stupidity? How will that help you buy some company? Is this about Rachel? Because—”

I shrugged and cut him off. “Their biggest complaint with me when I was dating Rachel was that I was too much of a

flirt, and that I was immature when it came to handling my relationships. I mean, Rachel was a far cry from mature herself—and she *did* cheat on me with like three different guys when she went to Italy. But that’s not important,” I added quickly. “This has *nothing* to do with her. I just want that business. If I show up with a successful, charming woman—who has everything going for her, and I present myself as the perfect boyfriend. Maturity reached...”

“You think *my* sister is those things?” Josh burst into laughter. “Like, we *are* talking about Ally, right? The woman you’re talking about does *not* sound like her. Ally is a firecracker.”

“Oh, come on,” I drew out. “Your sister has her shit together more than ninety-nine percent of the women we know. She’s got her own place, makes a killer living with a steady smart-person job, and she’s...you know, not ugly.”

Josh raised an eyebrow. “Are you indirectly calling my sister hot?”

I rolled my eyes. “I said she’s not ugly. I’m not getting off to your sister in my spare time or something.”

Okay, maybe a handful of times.

That shower accident would be forever burned in my brain.

Sighing, I pushed the thought away. “The point is to just solely show that I can manage a nice, successful woman as my girlfriend. I can be the mature guy that I’m supposed to be—

the kind of guy that can land a multi-million-dollar company and keep it running profitably.”

Josh was quiet for a few moments, his face contorted in a mixture of amusement and disbelief. “And you don’t think *lying* about a relationship is a little immature?”

“Why are you being so fucking unsupportive?” I groaned, running my fingers through my hair. “You know that I’m more than capable of running a business like that. I’ve been working for my dad for nearly ten years now—I’ve proven my business capabilities.”

“No, no,” Josh said quickly. “I *do* think you’re capable of running the business. I just really *don’t* understand why having some fake girlfriend, especially my *sister*, is going to make the deal more plausible. Everyone knows that you’re a suave guy in the tech world. I don’t see why that wouldn’t be enough.”

“Frank Lewis is all about family—he’s the epitome of a family man. That’s *why*. Back when I was dating Rachel, he would always pick the guy with the family over the bachelor, even if the latter was more deserving of the position.” I folded my arms across my Rolling Stones t-shirt, ignoring the irritation burning in my chest. I *had* to convince Josh that this was a good idea...

He was the only person standing in the way of the plan. If he wasn’t on board, then there was no way in hell I would go through with it. Not even a company like CyberSecure was worth losing my friendship with him.

“And Ally *agreed?*” he finally said, letting out a sigh and rubbing his jaw.

“Yeah, for thirty percent of the company.” My jaw clenched at the mention, but it was what it was. She was a hell of a negotiator, and she was also the *only* option I had. I needed her to agree. I could give up some profit to her.

Josh laughed. “Man, I love my sister.”

“Yeah, everyone seems to—which is why she’s perfect. I just have to try and get along with her for two weeks.” I grimaced. On paper Ally really was the ideal girl, but there was never a time when the two of us had seen eye to eye.

I’ll just have to suck it up and keep my eyes on the prize.

“Okay, fine. Do it, but don’t mess with Ally—like you know,” he warned, though his expression was more weary than anything.

“I don’t think you have to worry about that,” I assured him, awkwardly shifting my weight. “She’s not really my type anyway.”

“She better not be,” he grunted, side-eying me. “Ally deserves better.”

Ouch. But seriously?

I tensed by jaw. “I’m not even going to go there with you—but I’ve seen your sister’s dating choices over the years, and I wouldn’t exactly call them top tier. I mean, who was that one guy she dated for like three years? He was the biggest douche.”

“Which is exactly why she deserves better. She has terrible taste.” Josh chuckled, and my shoulders dropped with relief. “I think you’re a solid bro, but your past with women is sketchy at best. Rachel was your only relationship that lasted longer than a handful of months.”

“I was with Rachel for years,” I pointed out, furrowing my brow. “That’s a lot more than a handful of months, so I *am* capable of maintaining a long-term relationship. I just...I realized after Rachel that I like to have fun more than I like to be nailed down.”

“And so now you’re going to convince Frank Lewis that you’re ready to settle down and be serious. Genius.” Josh shook his head and reached for a pair of my designer sunglasses. “Do you want these? Because you only have like ten pairs, and I broke mine last week.”

I glanced over to the black Gucci sunglasses—they were my favorites, but... “Yeah, you can have them.”

“Dude, you’re the best.”

“Consider it payment for letting me borrow your sister for a couple of weeks, though that sounds...*weird*.”

“Really fucking weird,” he agreed, before bursting into laughter. “But anyway, I know that Ally can hold her own. The woman negotiated a thirty percent stake out of you. That’s impressive.”

“Yeah, and my mom is convinced that it’s a real relationship, so we’re going to have to just play this off as that.

I had to ask off for Ally last minute, and I didn't want to make her be the one who had to explain it. My mom had a thousand questions, and it was hard to bullshit my way through—even for me.”

“So then I guess the two of you just *don't* work out when you get back?”

“Yeah, and I think it might break my mother's heart.” I rolled my eyes and plopped down on the bed. “Like, I seriously had no idea that she was pining after the two of us somehow ending up together.”

Josh's eyes went wide. “No way? I knew Lisa loved Ally, but I thought it was just because she's, well, *Ally*. Everyone loves Ally.”

“Which is why she's perfect for my fake girlfriend. I know she'll charm the shit out of Frank.”

Josh didn't say anything, but his phone ringing interrupted the conversation. He pulled it out of his pocket and smiled at the screen. “Oh, this is perfect.”

My stomach knotted up as I saw Ally's face on the phone. *Great.*

“Hey sis, what's up?” He put her on speaker phone.

“Uh, well...” Her voice trailed off, and I already knew she was fishing to see what he knew. “I'm packing. What're you up to?”

“Hanging out at home with Levi, helping him pack for the wedding. What're you packing for?”

“Uh...”

“So you caught the feelings for Levi?” The amusement in his tone made me smile, but not as much as Ally’s reaction.

“Absolutely not. You can’t seriously tell me that he thinks he’s going to get away with lying to you about the arrangement? I swear he’s such a—”

“I’m right here,” I cut her off, chuckling. “Careful what you say. I’d hate for you to lose that thirty percent of CyberSecure before we’re ever even wheels up.”

She groaned. “You’re insufferable.”

“We all know that, and if it wasn’t for the fact that you’re going to be a millionaire once the deal is sorted, there’s no way in hell I would be letting you do this. I hope you know that,” Josh said, running a hand through his hair.

“Well, first of all, I’m a grown-ass woman and I can do whatever I want. And secondly, there’s no way in hell *I* would be doing this. But since Levi is right there, I have some questions for him.”

I cringed. “Yeah?”

“On a scale of one to black-tie affair, how formal is this wedding? It’s at the beach, right? I don’t know what I’m supposed to wear.”

“Uh, whatever women wear to a wedding—so anything but white should be fine. Just buy a nice designer dress of any color that’s a little beachy and you should be fine.”

“I hate to break it to you, Levi, but I can’t afford a dress like that—and I’m not spending thousands of dollars on a dress that I’ll only wear once.”

I shrugged. “No problem. I’ll buy you one then. Just text me your measurements.”

There was silence on the other end of the phone, and Josh and I exchanged a look.

“Ally?” Josh asked. “Are you still there?”

She let out a sigh. “Yeah. I just...yeah, I’ll send over my measurements, but *nothing* slutty, Levi—I mean it.”

I burst into laughter. “The less material, the better. I got it.”

“I’m serious,” she snapped.

“Don’t worry,” Josh spoke up, shooting me daggers. “I’ll make sure he picks something that you’d like.”

“I wish you were coming,” Ally said on the other end.

Josh smiled. “You’ll be good. If you have to take a cheap shot to keep him in line, I’ll back you up when you get back.”

“Hey!” I called out, instantly covering myself. “Not cool, man.”

Ally’s laughter echoed through the room. “Deal. This is gonna be fun.”

“So fun.” I feigned a smile, wondering what the fuck I had gotten myself into.

Keep Reading *Baby for my Brother’s Best Friend*.

