

A man with a beard and a black cowboy hat is shown in profile, looking to the left. He has several tattoos, including a large cross on his neck and various designs on his arms. He is wearing a blue and brown plaid shirt. The background is a dark, textured grey.

He hates me,  
I'm having  
his baby

# SINFUL ENEMY

WALL STREET JOURNAL & USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

M. ROBINSON

# SINFUL ENEMY

*Beckham Dynasty: Book 3*

*USA TODAY & WALLSTREET JOURNAL BESTSELLING  
AUTHOR*

**M. ROBINSON**

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*To readers who want to save a horse and ride a Cowboy.  
Thank you for entering my Small Town, Cowboy Era with me.*

# PROLOGUE

## HAZEL

N<sup>ow</sup>

I couldn't believe I was stepping foot in Ledger Beckham's house again.

Especially after what happened the last two times I was there. Despite the first time being over eleven years ago, it still felt like I was reliving that moment of utter heartbreak, and I was only standing at his front door. I promised myself I'd never give him the time of day after I got even with him a few months ago.

Yet there I was. Waiting for I don't know what.

At this point, I ran on pure adrenaline of what I had to do before I lost the nerve to actually do it. Once again, the Beckhams were having a party. Except this time, it wasn't for Ledger's high school graduation. It was for his little sister Haven's instead.

My heart beat out of my chest at an unbelievable speed, making it hard to catch my next breath. I hated that he still had this overwhelming power over me, but now it was for a different reason. The most important one being why I was there to begin with. I was about to lay it out on him, fully aware that once I did, it would forever change the course of both our lives.

I inhaled a deep breath, staring at the doorbell with wide eyes and an anxious expression that was clear across my face. There was no hiding from it.

There was no hiding *from him*.

You heard about this type of situation happening to a friend, a cousin, or a neighbor all the time, but you never



considered it could happen to you. Especially when you took all the necessary precautions to be a responsible adult.

However, it didn't matter.

There was no going back.

No changing the past.

Our only option was to go forward whether we wanted to or not. I had to tell him the truth. There was absolutely no way I could keep this from him. Not when he was still my twin brother Chance's best friend.

*How will we explain this to everyone? How do I explain this to him?*

I inhaled another deep breath, debating if I would truly pull this off.

*Maybe I could write him a letter? An email? A text message?*

I shook my head, knowing this was how I needed to tell him. It was the right thing to do.

Face-to-face.

One-on-one.

Besides, it was my fault we were in this situation in the first place. My stupid pride got in the way of my rational thinking when I randomly saw Ledger a couple of months ago at a bar in New York. All I wanted was to get back at him. To finally give him a taste of his own medicine. Bottom line, those were my intentions.

I was a fool.

*Dumb fucking emotions.*

With a trembling hand, I knocked on the door, and Haven answered. This was quickly followed by a shocked expression on her behalf about why I was there. It was obvious that was what she was thinking. Not only was Ledger my brother's best friend but his family's ranch was also my parents' biggest competitor.

During our childhood, my family remained neutral on Chance being best friends with the enemy. However, business became business for my parents, and they declared war on the Beckhams' ranch after I left for college.

While Chance remained loyal to Ledger and his family, I stayed out of it. I hadn't lived in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, since I moved away to New York for college and didn't visit often. My home wasn't this small town anymore; honestly, it never felt like it was.

From an early age, I knew I wanted more out of life than what Wyoming had to offer. I had big dreams and bigger goals. I was a city girl now and had no desire to move back to this town. Even with my unexpected predicament.

I owned the clothing brand Sin, which was housed in all the high-end department stores around the world. From lingerie to swimwear to athletics and shoes, whatever you needed, Sin had it. I made sure of it.

This town could never handle my fashion sense, then or now. The stares I received from my professional yet sexy black pantsuit with a tight corset and sky-high red bottom heels wasn't lost on me as I pumped gas in my Audi rental before I found the courage to knock on Ledger's door.

I overheard my brother talking to Ledger on the phone earlier that morning about Haven's party at his family's ranch. Since I wasn't in town a lot, from an outsider looking in, it probably seemed like I stayed true to my parents' business matters, and I never tried to prove otherwise.

*I couldn't.*

My hatred for Ledger wouldn't allow it.

Memories of that night from eleven years ago formed in the forefront of my mind as Haven and I locked eyes.

She opened her mouth to say something but quickly shut it.

I shyly smiled, coaxing, "Wow, you've grown up since the last time I saw you."

There were six siblings in the Beckham household. Haven was the youngest, the only girl, and twenty years younger than her eldest brother, Jace. Ledger was the third son, and he'd eventually inherit the ranch. Out of all of them, he was always the most passionate about ranch life.

The walk.

The talk.

The attitude.

Ledger Beckham was a cowboy through and through.

I was the first to break the silence, asking, "Is Ledger around? I need to talk to him."

She nodded. "Come in."

"I can just wait out here."

"Hazel, it's fine. You can come in."

I reluctantly gave in, swallowing the perpetual lump in my throat as I crossed the threshold and shut the door behind me.

Everything happened so fast but so slow at the same time. One minute, I'm standing at their front door, and the next, I'm in front of a very pissed-off Ledger Beckham.

Not that I could blame him with how I left things between us, but the asshole deserved it.

In true form, he wore his black cowboy hat and boots with a plaid orange-and-black flannel shirt. The three cross tattoos on his neck were on full display, along with the ones on his hands and arms. His black beard was longer than I remembered, but his bright green eyes glared at me.

He was as handsome and rugged as ever.

*Fuck him.*

With a sudden harsh tone, he bit, "Why are you here, Hazel? What else do you need from our ranch that you haven't already tried to take?"

The audacity. I had nothing to do with that.

In one breath, I replied, "We need to talk."

He shrugged. “Whatever you need to say, you can do it in front of my family.”

My hands fisted at my sides. “Fine!” I exclaimed, pissed at his cocky bullshit demeanor as if he could intimidate me. “Have it your way,” I added, never once holding back as I snapped...

“I’m pregnant with your baby!”

ONE

## HAZEL

### *T*hen: *Eleven Years Ago*

The first time I realized I was in love with my twin brother's best friend Ledger, I was nine years old. During recess, the class bully set his eyes on me and pushed me off the monkey bars.

Except I didn't need anyone to protect me. I was raised on a ranch with a brother I had to keep up with. I was tough, but sometimes it felt like I went from being a tomboy and dressing in his clothes to a girly girl who only wore dresses and heels overnight. I became obsessed with fashion, particularly designing my own.

After I fell to the ground, I was about to jump up and give that bully one hell of a fight. However, before I could, Ledger was right in his face, body checking his chest, completely squaring up to him. Let's just say, from that moment forward, I was never picked on by anyone again.

Since we were all the same age and in the same grade, I often hung out with my brother and his friends. Chance and I were always close, and the truth was, he would forever be my best friend. People always said that twins shared a special connection formed in the womb.

In the case of Chance and I, it was true. We had a deep bond that most people didn't understand. Sometimes we knew what each other was thinking without saying a word. Other times, we finished one another sentences. We even had our own language when we were kids, driving our parents insane, simply making it more amusing for us to continue to provoke them.

Chance was only two minutes older than me, and he never let me forget it. If Ledger hadn't protected me that day, it

would have been my brother. This led me back to just one of the many reasons I could never show or tell Ledger how I felt about him. Chance would shit a brick if his best friend ever laid eyes on me with anything other than sisterly affection.

I kept my feelings a secret from everyone except my journal. It was the only thing I had to sincerely express myself about my desire to feel Ledger's lips on mine. I mean, don't get me wrong. I dated a few guys over the years, but none of them held a torch to my brother's best friend.

Writing my emotions on paper without worrying about Chance finding out was the only escape I had in a situation I had no control over. Because of that, I kept my distance from Ledger, never allowing him to get too close to me.

Of course, we were friends. I'd known him since I was four years old. There wasn't much I hadn't seen regarding our childhood and growing up together.

I was there when he had his first kiss with Maggie Cinabello at her thirteenth birthday party. They played Seven Minutes in Heaven, and according to everyone, Ledger also rounded second base that night.

I was there when he lost his virginity to Claire Uptom in the woods at the after-party of our ninth-grade homecoming dance. I still remembered the expression on his face as he walked out of the woods, hand in hand with her. If I thought watching him with Maggie hurt, witnessing him with Claire broke my fifteen-year-old heart in ways I never saw coming.

I was even there when he had his first threesome with Makayla and Tiffany after junior prom. Two cheerleaders, a brunette and blonde in the hotel suite we rented without our parents knowing. I slept on the pull-out couch, refusing to go anywhere near the bed where he did the deed.

I still remembered hearing them moan and the wall between us tremble from the relentless headboard banging against the thin wall. It was the first time I felt hatred for him. It took everything inside me not to leave that night and go back home, but then I'd be ruining my brother's night too. He had his own chick in the other bedroom.

While Ledger had the power to piss me off like no one else could, he also had the ability to make me melt from a simple gesture. After he was done with his little party that night, he came out into the living room where I was trying to sleep, saying I could take the bed instead, and he'd crash on the couch.

I played it off like it didn't affect me, but the last thing I wanted to do was sleep on that bed. Let alone have to be in that room where he just did God knows what. I told him I was fine, and before he walked back into his bedroom, he tossed me a blanket and kissed my forehead.

*Ugh!*

A kiss on the forehead was the death sentence in the friend zone.

The list of things I saw Ledger experience for the first time was endless.

Including his first beer.

His first car.

His first horse—a dark brown Quarter Bay stallion with a black mane and tail and a white stripe down his nose that he still rode to this day. While Ledger was a proud cowboy who wanted nothing more than to inherit his daddy's ranch, I was the complete opposite. I wanted to run away from this small town and never look back.

My brother, on the other hand, was somewhere in the middle.

My knowledge of Ledger Beckham didn't end there. Not only was I a bystander on most of his firsts but I also knew a lot about him. It came with the territory of growing up together. Some of the memories I cherished, others I despised.

“What are you thinking about over there?” Chance questioned, leaning against the doorframe of our shared bathroom.

We had Jack and Jill bedrooms our entire lives, living in the same house since the day we were born.



I smiled, looking at him through the mirror of my makeup vanity.

“I’m just finishing up getting ready for Ledger’s graduation party.”

He nodded, folding his arms over his chest.

According to most of the female population at all our schools, Chance was drop-dead gorgeous. He was quite the ladies’ man. He and Ledger were quite the dynamic duo. Ledger was the bad boy, so to speak, and my brother was my nice guy with an edge. The number of girls who threw themselves at them on the regular wasn’t lost on me.

“I can’t believe you leave for New York tomorrow,” he shared, tearing me away from my thoughts.

“I know.”

“Why did you enroll in summer session again?”

I shrugged, knowing exactly why I did.

It made things easier for me. I needed to get on with my life and stop holding on to the fantasy that Ledger would eventually be mine. I couldn’t do that when I basically saw him every day.

“There’s no reason to put off the inevitable. Plus, it gives me a chance to get the classes I want. Freshman are at the bottom of the barrel at the Fashion Institute, so I’ll take all the help I can get.”

“Does that mean I can’t change your mind?”

I shook my head. “You’re a little late for that. Mom and Dad already paid my yearly tuition for an out-of-state university, and they’d kill me if I decided to pull out now.”

He stepped into my room. “What if I tell them it’s my fault?”

I smiled, still gazing at him through the mirror. “I’m going to miss you too, Chance.”

He gave me a loving smile, sitting on the edge of my bed.

“It’s going to be so weird not having you around anymore.”

“You can always come and visit me, you know that. And I’ll be back for Thanksgiving.”

“That’s five months away.”

“So come and visit me at the end of the summer. There’s a pull-out couch with your name on it in my apartment.”

“Remind me why you’re living alone again?”

“You need to stop worrying about me. I’m going to be fine.”

“I just don’t understand why you wouldn’t want to live in the dorms in a city where you don’t know anyone.”

“I live near campus.”

“Whatever you say, little sister.”

I rolled my eyes. “How many times do I have to tell you that two minutes is not that big of a deal?”

“As many as it takes for you to remember that it doesn’t change the fact that you’ll always be my little sister.”

I turned in my chair to meet his eyes, changing the subject. “When do you move in with Ledger?”

“At the end of the month.” Jumping right back into the conversation I was trying to avoid, he asked, “You can always drop out and enroll at Wyoming University with us. It’s not too late to rent a three-bedroom apartment.”

“Because good ole Wyoming University has a top-notch fashion department, right?”

“Well,” he exclaimed. “Don’t forget about us little people when you become the next big thing in *Vogue*.”

I chuckled. “Your future wife will truly appreciate how much you know about fashion because of me.”

“If by that you mean how you’ve tortured me over the years with watching every fashion show known to man?”

I chuckled again, standing before giving him a little twirl. “How do I look?”

He cocked an eyebrow. “Isn’t that dress a little much?”

“Chance, you and I both know I’ve always been a little much for this small-ass town.”

He stood, sighing deeply. “Did you design it yourself?”

“But of course. When do I ever wear clothes I don’t design?”

He nodded, standing in front of me.

After eighteen years, this would be the first time we wouldn’t be living in the same house right beside each other. As much as I’d miss him, I was ready to have my own identity where I wasn’t Chance Blakely’s twin sister. New York was a fresh start for me. Nobody knew me there—I could be anyone I wanted, and I wanted *that* more than anything.

Chance grabbed my shoulders. “I’m not going to lie and say I don’t hate that you’re moving, little sister.”

“I just think it’s time I experience life without my *older* twin brother by my side.”

“Hey, I let you have boyfriends.”

“Hardly.”

He wrapped his arms around my neck, pulling me into a tight hug.

“But look how amazing you turned out with my brotherly guidance.”

“Don’t toot your own horn or anything. I was the one who taught you how to dance.”

“And I was the one who taught you how to throw a football.”

“My tailspin is definitely on point.”

“So is your fumble.”

I elbowed him in the ribs.

With a loving expression, he coaxed, “I love you, Zel.”

“I love you too, Chance.”

Despite being in my brothers embrace, I couldn't help but think about what I was determined to make happen that night. It was now or never, this was my last opportunity because this time tomorrow, I'd be alone in my new apartment...

Except I was silently hoping.

I'd no longer be a virgin.

Two

## LEDGER

“Honey, I’m so proud of you,” Mom praised, standing in front of me in the kitchen.

“I know.” I grinned, leaning back against the island in the center of the room. “You’ve only told me about a dozen times just today.”

She smacked my chest. “I’m your mother. I’m allowed to gloat.”

“Yes, I know.” I kissed her cheek. “Gloat away.”

“Now that’s more like it. Now go change. Our guests will be arriving soon.”

I glanced at my flannel button-down shirt and jeans. “What’s wrong with what I’m wearing?”

“Ledger Beckham!” She scolded in an exaggerated tone. “You are not wearing that to your graduation party. Do you hear me? How long have you owned those Wrangler jeans?”

“What?” I shrugged. “They’re clean.”

“Ledger...”

“Ma’am,” I drawled out. “Let me remind you that all a man needs is a button-down shirt, a pair of jeans, some boots and a cowboy hat...” I grabbed mine off the counter, placing it back on my head “And I’ve got all that covered.”

She shook her head, hiding back a smile. “You sound just like your father.”

“Couldn’t think of a better man to be compared to.”

She beamed.

“You know, out of all my boys, you’ve always been my special cowboy.”

I smiled, tipping the front of my hat in acknowledgment.

“Fine.” She smirked. “You win. It doesn’t matter what you wear, Ledger Beckham, you’re still my handsome guy.”

I tipped my hat again.

“Oh,” Chance announced, striding into the kitchen. “Don’t fall for his bull charm, Mrs. Beckham. He’s full of it.”

I opened my mouth to reply but was rendered speechless the second Hazel walked into the kitchen behind him, wearing a fucking clingy red dress that simply accentuated all her curves.

Clearing my throat, I quickly peered back at Chance. “You let your sister out like that?”

“What’s wrong, Ledger?” Hazel questioned, shifting my gaze to her.

“Don’t like what you see?”

I met her eyes. “Don’t poke the bear, Zel.”

Standing firm on her ground, she challenged, “Ledger doesn’t tell me what I can and can’t wear.”

“Is that why you’re moving?”

“I mean, can you blame a girl? I’ve had two bodyguards for most of my life. This is my first taste of freedom.”

“Freedom entails you dressing like that?”

She peered down at her outfit. “What’s wrong with my dress? It fits perfectly.”

Mom intervened. “What my overprotective son is trying to say, Hazel, is that you look gorgeous.”

“I always knew you had style, Mrs. Beckham.”

Mom turned to face me, muttering, “Be nice.”

I mouthed, “I’m always nice.”

“Chance.” Mom’s gaze shifted to him. “Can you move your car into the garage please?”

He nodded. “Sure can.”

After they left the room, Hazel locked gazes with me. Not missing one fucking beat, she enticed, “I see the girls you’re into wearing a lot less than I am.”

*Why is she baiting me?*

Over the years, Hazel changed the most out of the three of us. She went from relentlessly following us around, trying to be one of the guys, to a woman before our very eyes.

I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t attracted to her. Hazel was always a pretty girl with her long blond hair and almond-shaped bright-green eyes, but now she was fucking stunning. I’d be blind not to notice she was curvy in all the right places. Her pouty pink lips and petite nose just added to her sexy-as-sin allure.

“I’m not concerned with what they’re wearing. We’re talking about you, not them.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

I didn’t hesitate to tell her the truth. “Underneath those heels you’re wearing, I know a cowgirl’s just screaming to wear her boots.”

“After tonight,” she sassed, “that girl no longer exists.”

“Well, you know what they say, Zel. You can take the girl out of the country, but you can’t take the country out of the girl.”

She narrowed her defiant stare at me. “I guess I’ll just have to prove you wrong.”

Unable to hold back, I countered, “Hazel, why are you baiting me?”

In a confident stride, she made her way over to me until she was standing close to my face.

“So what if I am?”

Arching an eyebrow, I cocked my head to the side.

“I’m leaving tomorrow.”

“I’m fully aware.”



“Are you going to miss me, Ledger?”

“Don’t ask questions you already know the answer to.”

“Is that yes?”

“It’s not a no.”

She smirked in a heady sort of way. “I’m going to miss you, a lot.”

Before I could respond, the doorbell rang.

“You better go greet your guests, cowboy.”

She spun, leaving me alone to dwell on our encounter.

For the rest of the night, I tried like hell to shake off what felt like she was coming onto me. Further into the night, there were still hundreds of people dancing, drinking, and socializing. I tried to have fun, but my eyes wandered toward Hazel almost like I could feel her from across the room.

Each time she found my gaze, I’d quickly look away. The last thing I wanted was for her brother to see how she affected me. For the first time, I thought about what she’d taste like in my mouth.

Needing a minute to compose myself, I went upstairs to my bedroom. The moon was glowing outside my balcony doors, luring me out there. I don’t know how long I stood there, lost in my own thoughts. I couldn’t believe how fast this year had flown by.

At the end of the month, I’d be moving into my own place with my best friend, and for the life of me, I couldn’t stop thinking about his sister. If Chance knew, he’d fucking kill me. A part of me wanted to strangle myself for my reckless thoughts that came out of nowhere, hitting me like a bull in the night.

After I composed my careless mind, I opened the slider and walked back into my bedroom. Only to stop dead in my tracks when I saw the woman I least expected, sitting on her knees in the middle of my bed, wearing nothing but a white bra and panties.

“The fuck?” I rasped with wide eyes.

What happened next would forever change the future of our friendship. One thing was for sure, Hazel may have been my best friend’s twin sister, but at that moment...

She was a goddamn vixen, trying to fucking seduce me.

## HAZEL

He was the first to break the deafening silence between us.

“Hazel, what are you doing on my bed?”

“I think that’s pretty obvious, isn’t it?”

His lust-filled gaze devoured every last inch of my skin. With a predatory regard, his stare continued to travel down my body, stopping at my breasts that were popping out of the seams of my silky bra. Seconds later, his greedy expression roamed to my slender, hourglass waist until his eyes found my tiny thong panties that barely covered my pussy.

I loved how he took me in, and I used his desire to my advantage.

Before I lost my nerve, I confessed, “I want it to be you. I’ve always wanted it to be you.”

Our eyes locked.

He opened his mouth to say something but quickly shut it. I could physically feel his conflicting emotions burning off him in traitorous waves as the silence once again took over.

Nothing could have prepared me for this moment.

Not me rehearsing it repeatedly in my head.

Not me dreaming about it.

Not me remembering our past or looking forward to our future.

*Absolutely nothing.*

Finding my courage, I professed, “I can’t move away without knowing what it feels like to finally be with you, Ledger.”

Slowly, I provocatively slid off his bed and walked toward him. Each step more precise and calculated than the last as I

swayed my hips for him. I didn't stop until I was a few inches from his mouth.

Swallowing the lump in my throat, I boldly leaned in as my hands found his solid chest. In a slow, agonizing motion, I touched him through his signature flannel shirt, causing my breath to hitch.

All the years of pent-up frustration.

Of endless thoughts of us in this way.

Of all the times I wanted to tell him how I felt.

It was finally here.

The moment I'd been waiting for.

# THREE

## HAZEL

I knew countless women had touched and been with him, but in that second, it felt like I was the first woman to actually feel him. My heart beat out of my chest, pounding against my rib cage. I swear he could hear it. The thrashing echoed off the walls and into the pores of our heated skin.

My fingers pressed against his pecs, and he still didn't utter one word.

"I want..." I hesitated, knowing as soon as the words left my mouth there was no going back. "You... to take my virginity, cowboy."

His lips parted, and I resisted the urge to lay mine against his.

"Hazel—"

I snapped, kissing him. Just waiting for him to stop me.

*He didn't.*

Even with all the confidence in the world, there was no taking away how much this meant to me.

How much *he* meant to me.

My lips immediately betrayed me, and I kissed him as if I had a right to, as if he was mine, as if I was his—as if this kiss would change the course of our lives.

It was consuming.

My emotions.

My longing.

*My love for him.*

The desire to claim not only his lips but also his heart and soul. All of these feelings drove me to the brink of insanity. I loved and hated it. The emotions he stirred were ones I'd never experienced before.

It was overwhelming.

The thrill of him.

The thought of him.

*The need for him.*

My tongue slid into his mouth, and he tasted like everything I ever wanted and didn't think I could have. I kissed him like I was trying to prove he was indeed all the things that wreaked havoc in my head.

I glided my tongue into his mouth.

Moaning.

Panting.

Clawing at my senses.

My core throbbed, aching to feel him inside me. The mere thought of knowing he'd be the only man to touch me was fucking agonizing to every part of my body. I needed to stop, but I couldn't help myself. The truth was, I wanted him more than I ever wanted anything.

It felt like he belonged to me, but it was wrong.

*We were all wrong for each other.*

We were complete opposites and had very little in common.

However, none of it mattered at that moment, especially the number of women he'd been with. No one could come close to what was happening between us, and I knew that like I knew my name. The emotions he incited in me were sentiments I never expected.

Never thought possible.

And I knew the feeling was very much mutual.

Ledger and I shared a relationship built on a deep friendship. I wouldn't be just a meaningless fuck to him, and he wouldn't be one to me either. It'd be more.

*It'd be everything.*

The longer he didn't stop me and let me kiss him, the more determined I became to get what I wanted from him.

*His cock.*

But when my hands reached for his belt, he stopped me.

“Sugar...” he rasped against my swollen lips. “What are you doing to me?”

I didn't waver, speaking with conviction. “I'm in love with you, Ledger. I've been in love with you for as long as I can remember.”

Again, he didn't say one word. Instead, he stepped back, breaking our connection.

“Your brother—”

“He never has to know.”

“For fuck's sake,” he exclaimed, shaking his head with a torn expression.

I played into his uncertainty, coaxing, “Just be with me.”

Not allowing another second to pass us by, in one swift movement, I removed my bra and was about to slide down my panties, but he stopped me again. Grabbing my fingers that were on the elastic of my panties, he held them in his tight grasp.

There I stood, topless in front of him.

Exposed.

Vulnerable.

Laying it all out for him to finally know how I feel about him.

“You're leaving tomorrow,” he reminded in a ragged tone.

I looked deep into his eyes and rasped, “So then give me something to come home to.”

Neither one of us said anything for what felt like forever. We just stood there, staring into one another's eyes and searching for answers in the forefront of our chaotic minds. I



don't know how long we stayed like that. It could have been minutes or hours. Everything seemed to blend.

The past.

Present.

Future.

It was a kaleidoscope of mixed emotions and memories, shining blindly at us until everything was about to change between us. What happened next was a moment I'd never forget. It'd haunt all of my feelings about us, replacing all the good ones with *this* bad.

With one last look at me, he let go of my hands.

I felt the loss of his touch.

His warmth.

His affection.

Swiftly, he grabbed the throw blanket off his bed and draped it around my shoulders, covering my bare body with it. Instantly making me feel foolish.

Rejected.

Undesired.

"I can't," he sincerely stated, putting an end to us before we had a chance to begin.

"Because of my brother?"

"He's just one of the many reasons."

"And what are the others?"

"Hazel. I just..." He pulled his hair away from his face like he wanted to rip it out. With a tormented expression, he added, "Your first time should be with someone who isn't watching the door, waiting for your brother to lose his shit over this misunderstanding."

"Misunderstanding?" I jerked back, hurt. "How about I make it crystal clear to you, then?"

"Hazel, don't do this."

“Do what? Tell you the truth?”

“Sugar—”

“I can’t keep this locked up inside me anymore! You have no idea how many times I’ve tried not to think about you!”

His jaw clenched. “Keep your voice down.”

My hands fisted at my sides. “You don’t know how often I’ve told myself this would never work between us. It plays endlessly in my head. I’ve often hated you because you couldn’t see how much I cared for you. You couldn’t see me, and I know I’ve shown you several times.”

“For fuck’s sake,” he bit in a harsh tone.

“That’s all you can say?”

“What do you want from me? You’re my best friend’s sister, his twin sister. I can’t—”

“He doesn’t have to know.”

“I’ll know!”

I grimaced, holding back the tears as I reached for him. “It’s okay, Ledger.”

He shoved my hands away, brutally spewing, “It’s far from fucking okay.”

I was at my wits’ end. “What if I wasn’t Chance’s sister? Would you be with me then?”

I waited on pins and needles for his reply, anxiously lingering on his every word.

“It doesn’t matter,” he profoundly declared. “You are his sister, and there’s no changing that. I’m not going to stand here and pretend you’re not. It’s fucking pointless.”

“Not to me.” There was no controlling the tears when they slid out of my eyes. “I love you. I’m in love with you, Ledger.”

“Hazel, you don’t know what you’re saying.”

“Now you’re going to invalidate my feelings?”

“I’m just saying, we’ve known each other for most of our lives, and I could see how that could twist your perception of what you think love is.”

I gasped. “I can’t believe you. You’re treating me like a little girl who doesn’t understand basic emotions. You think this has been easy on me, Ledger? You think I’ve wanted to feel this way for you for almost a decade?”

His stare went wide.

“Yeah, that’s right. Now tell me again how I don’t know what I’m feeling? Because I sure as shit know what it felt like the first time you got your dick sucked and every time since, but maybe, just maybe, you were doing that on purpose to push me away?”

He growled, stepping close to my face. “Hazel, don’t fuck with me.”

“No, I’d much rather you fuck me instead.”

He adamantly shook his head. “This can’t be how you want your first time.”

“As long as it’s with you, I don’t care.”

“Hazel...” He wiped away a tear from my cheek with his thumb.

I thought his rejection hurt, but it was nothing compared to what he declared next. “I’m sorry, Sugar. I just don’t love you like that.”

And before I could recover from his confession, he quickly ordered...

“Now put some fucking clothes on and get the hell out of my room.”

# FOUR

## LEDGER

I left her in my bedroom.

Alone.

Naked.

*Fucking heartbroken.*

I hated myself for hurting her. She didn't deserve it. I barely knew how to handle the unexpected situation I found myself in, and I couldn't talk to anyone about it. The one person I told everything to wasn't an option. Not when it was his twin sister who just threw herself at me.

I was blown away this was happening to begin with. Somewhere along the way, her feelings for me must have taken a turn I never saw coming. I thought...

Fuck, I don't know what I thought.

Over the years, I watched her from afar.

I told myself it was to keep her safe.

Protected.

It was what friends did for one another.

Hazel was the only girl I ever let into my life in more ways than just my bedroom. She knew me, and I knew her. Bottom line, no matter what, we were always there for each other. I wasn't lying when I said I didn't love her in that way.

*Was I?*

I guess I never gave it much thought.

I couldn't.

I wouldn't.

Chance was like another brother to me. Hazel was off-limits, and we made sure guys were aware of it too. As we grew up, she flourished into this stunning woman right in front

of my eyes, and now I couldn't get her naked body out of my mind.

Her perky tits.

Her slender waist.

Her luscious thighs.

*Fuck!*

I was a man, hiding the fact that the mere sight of her made my cock hard as fuck. Just thinking about her right then and there caused my dick to twitch.

Before I knew it, I was sitting outside with a bottle of Jack in my hand. I wasn't one for drinking, but fuck did I need it. I chugged it, savoring the fiery liquid as it burned down my chest.

To make matters worse, Chance watched me like a fucking hawk as if he knew something was up. I blinked, and he suddenly stood in front of me.

He nodded to the bottle. "What's up, man?"

I took another swig. "I'm just celebrating."

"Celebrating what, exactly?"

Cocking my head to the side, I countered, "What are you implying, Chance?"

He tapered his stare at me, gazing through me, not at me.

Because for the second time in a few short minutes, he accused, "What the fuck were you doing with my sister in your bedroom?"

I played it off. "What are you talking about?"

"You know exactly what I'm referring to."

"Actually, I don't. It's not the first time Hazel and I have been alone in my room, so what the hell is the problem?"

"My problem is you."

I bit, "Is that right?"

“Yeah, that’s right!” He stepped up to me. “How about you explain to me how you walked out of your room looking pissed as fuck, and my sister left minutes after you, looking like she’d been crying.” His eyebrows pinched together.

Unable to bite my tongue, I snapped, “Chance, just ask me what you want to know!”

“I thought I just did.”

“No, you’re pussyfooting around, so out with it.”

He didn’t hesitate, roaring, “Did you fuck over my sister?”

I jerked back, scoffing. “Do you mean if I fucked her?”

“That’s not an answer.”

“You think I’m capable of that? Or did you forget that she’s my friend too?”

“Friends don’t make you cry.”

I casually shrugged. “You sure about that?”

“Don’t give me that shit, Ledger. I know you.”

“Obviously not well enough.”

“You know what I’m talking about. What happened in there with my sister?”

“You don’t have to keep calling her that. I know who she is to you.”

“Doesn’t look like that to me.”

“You don’t trust me?”

He thought about it for a second. “Do I need to remind you that Hazel is off-limits?”

I shook my head. There was no need for the reminder. “We through here?”

He simply nodded, slowly backing away, never taking his intense stare off me.

I couldn’t blame him for coming at me. I’d do the same thing if a guy like me was fucking around with her.

“You’re jumping to all the wrong conclusions,” I stated, trying to ease the tension between us.

“Am I?”

“We were just hanging out, Chance.”

“Then why was she crying?”

Thinking quick on my feet, I replied, “Tomorrow, she’s moving away from everything she knows.”

“Yeah, no shit. So she’s confiding in you?”

“Something like that.”

“That’s interesting, considering earlier tonight she sang a much different tune about moving.”

“What can I say?” I casually shrugged again. “She’s a woman. You know how that goes.”

After a moment, he sighed deeply. “Fuck, man. I’m sorry. I just... I saw her upset, and now you’re drinking. My mind just went wild.”

“Fair enough. So are we good?”

“Yeah.” He mirrored my stance. “We’re good.” With that, he left.

I didn’t have to think twice about it. I knew what I had to do in order to ease his mind. Even if it meant I’d hurt her more than I already had.

It was the only way to get Chance to see reason and for Hazel to hate me. Two birds with one stone. She needed to forget about me, and I had no problem being the enemy if it meant she’d move on from her illusions of us.

Everybody always said that I was impulsive, and I was about to prove them right. At the end of the day, the truth was, she meant more to me than I could admit to myself.

Let alone out loud.

Finding a chick was the easy part. I never had a problem scoring pussy. Once I found someone, I didn’t have to look



over to know that not only was Chance watching us but Hazel was too.

Gripping her waist, I sat her on my lap, making sure her ass was right on my dick. Only a couple of guests were left, and my parents had already gone to bed.

Leaning in, I grabbed her chin to face me. From where they were watching, it looked like we were making out. I took it a step further, holding her hair at the nape of her neck and tugging her head back, causing her to whimper in my tight hold.

Eagerly, she straddled my waist and licked her lips, sucking in another breath when I suddenly clutched onto her hips. I immediately felt sick to my fucking stomach, feeling as if I was betraying both at the same time.

The chick inhaled, holding her breath as my hand continued its descent, running along her smooth, heated skin and down to the seam of her ass. Everyone there saw what was going down between us.

Especially Chance and Hazel.

After fourteen years of friendship with both of them, I proved my loyalty to my best friend...

While wrecking his twin sister in the process.

# FIVE

## HAZEL

*T*hen: *One year later*

This was only the third time I was flying home since I moved to New York for college. One occasion was for Thanksgiving, and the other was for Christmas. I avoided seeing Ledger both times, but just because I didn't come home often didn't mean I hadn't seen my brother.

He flew out to see me a couple of times this last year. Usually over the weekend. Although, he did stay at my apartment for most of spring break. We were still close, and we texted almost every day.

Never in my wildest dreams did I think I'd be flying home for anything like this. The more I thought about what had unexpectedly happened, the further my devastation took over.

During my entire plane ride, I thought about what I'd say to Ledger, and still, I couldn't form a proper condolence. From the moment I heard the news of his mother tragically passing away, my heart dropped to the floor, and I'd yet to find it again.

I couldn't fucking breathe.

The ground beneath me on the flight felt like it was swallowing me whole the entire time. I shut my eyes while my emotions bled out of me, desperately trying to come to terms with the fact that I didn't get to say goodbye to a woman whose home I grew up in.

I hadn't felt homesick up to that point, but the news hit me hard. I couldn't stop the tears that formed in my gaze. The pain in my heart was ripping at my soul and eating me alive. The emotions crippled me in ways I'd never experienced before. The guilt of not seeing her because I didn't want to run into Ledger was too much to bear.

For the most part, this last year, it was out of sight, out of mind, which was about to come back and bite me in the ass the second I laid eyes on him. There I was, about to see him again for all the wrong reasons.

At that moment, in that second, I didn't care about the consequences of his actions from the last time I saw him.

He needed me.

More now than he ever had before. There was no way in hell I couldn't not be there for him. At that moment, he was all that mattered to me.

Three hours later, I was breaking so many traffic laws on my way to her funeral in my rental car. Chance offered to pick me up, but I didn't want him to leave Ledger's side. I could only imagine what he was going through, and even then, it wouldn't be enough.

It was like drowning in the deep end of a pool with no water.

I. Couldn't. Fucking. Breathe.

Chance didn't tell me about Ledger's mom till last night, and I took the first available flight out. I was mad that he waited until the day before the funeral to inform me, but now wasn't the time to call him out on it. I knew he must have been going through a lot, and being there for his best friend was the only thing on his mind.

Physically and mentally, I was exhausted as I drove up to the cemetery around noon.

It was the moment of truth.

My heart pounded out of my chest as I walked over to them. People were scattered around, though I didn't pay attention to anyone. I was too focused on the grave I was walking toward. Grabbing a single rose from one of the several floral arrangements, I finally made my way to her grave.

Once I stood in front of her tombstone, I immediately bowed my head and crouched down. My legs were unable to

support my crumpling body. I delicately placed the rose above the engraved beloved mother, burying my face in my hands. I had no idea how long I stayed like that with my anguish pouring out of me.

I broke down, crying for a mother I'd never see again.

I could have been kneeling there for a minute or an hour. Time seemed to stand still, but the pain continued on all around me. Shaking my head, I wiped my face before I stood, locking eyes with my brother.

I smiled for the first time since he told me the news.

"It's so good to see you," I wept, hugging him.

"Shhh... don't cry," he whispered in my ear.

This was so surreal. I never thought I'd be back here, at least not anytime soon.

"You okay?" he asked, pulling away.

"Do I look okay?"

He peered into my eyes.

"Why didn't you tell me about Mrs. Beckham sooner than last night?"

He rubbed the back of his neck. "Everything happened so fast, Hazel. I told Mom to tell you, and I didn't know she hadn't until I asked what time your flight landed."

I looked around the cemetery. "Where are they?"

He shrugged. "They didn't come."

I jerked back, confused. "Why not?"

"I don't want to get into it right now."

"So now you're keeping secrets from me?"

"It's not like that."

I opened my mouth to respond, but Haven hollered, "Hazel!"

My gaze shifted to her as she ran into my arms.

“I feel like I haven’t seen you in forever,” she greeted.

I exchanged hugs with the rest of Ledger’s family, offering my condolences the best way I could. There was no need for random conversation.

It was pointless.

Too much had happened.

In all of our lives.

One question after another plagued my mind until I found myself in Ledger’s bedroom again. It was like I was having an out-of-body experience. A battle between the conscious me and the unconscious me. I watched from afar as a girl who looked like me stood there in a trance-like state. Going through the motions of life while feeling absolutely nothing but grief.

I wasn’t ready.

I’d never be ready for this.

I slowly walked around his bedroom, taking in all the pictures still on his walls. I was in several of them, making me smile that he hadn’t taken them down since our last encounter.

Moments later, I blankly stared out his bedroom window, remembering that night as if it was happening right then while tears streamed down my face. I mourned not only his mother’s death but also the death of our friendship.

I only saw him once for a second while he was talking to the pastor, and I didn’t want to disturb them. As I continued to get lost in my memories and heartache over the whole situation, it was becoming too much for my emotions to overcome.

It seemed like it was one thing right after another.

I blinked a few more times, going through the motions when I suddenly felt a cool breeze from his bedroom door opening. I didn’t have to wonder who it was—I just knew.

*I felt him.*

Finding the courage, I turned around, coming face-to-face with him.

Ledger Beckham.

He looked older, dressed in a black tie and suit.

Neither of us said a word, possibly finding some peace in the silence between us.

I shyly smiled, muttering, “You never knew how to tie your tie, Ledger.” In four strides, I rested my hand on his chest before adjusting it for him. “What can I do for you?”

He didn’t utter a word, simply mirroring my shattered composure.

“I’m here. I’ll be here for—”

“I’m not a child, Hazel. I don’t need you to babysit me.”

“I know that,” I reasoned. “I’m just worried about you.”

He looked like he hadn’t slept in days.

“What are you doing here?” he asked in a lifeless tone.

“Come on, don’t do this. You know why I’m here. I’m here for you.” Again, he didn’t say one word, so I added, “I just found out last night, or I would have been here sooner. I’m so sorry, Ledger.” My eyes rimmed with fresh tears as I tried to put my arms around him. “Your mother was one of a kind.”

He held me back, away from him. “Don’t do this.”

“Do what? Be here for you?”

“I don’t need your pity, Zel.”

“My pity?” My eyes went wide. “How could you say that to me? You know how much I loved her too. She was the closest thing I had to a second mother. Please don’t do this...”

“You shouldn’t be here.”

“Where else would I be? Huh?”

“You don’t belong here anymore.”

“That’s not fair.”

He stubbornly shook his head. “I don’t need you.”

I winced, upset that he was doing this. “Listen, I know you’re hurting, but you don’t have to push me away. I’m not here to talk about our past or the last time we saw each other in this very room. As far as I’m concerned, none of it matters right now. Do you understand me? I love you, Ledger. You’ll always be my friend regardless of what happens between us.”

He contemplated what I was saying with an expression I couldn’t read. I never thought it would come to this, or maybe I did, and I just chose to ignore it.

He didn’t answer me with words. Only his eyes talked to me. His stare held mine, and I noticed a slight headshake with an internal battle suddenly clear across his face.

Needing to have him hear it, I vowed, “I’ll always be here for you.”

That was enough to break his silence.

In one rigid breath, he ordered, “Go home, Hazel. You need to go back home.”

My eyebrows pinched together, caught off guard. “I am home.”

“No.” He backed away from me. “You’re not. Your home isn’t here anymore. Not in this town. Not in this bedroom with me.”

I stepped back, needing more space between us. “Why are you saying this?”

He didn’t hesitate in repeating, “Go home, Hazel. Go home to your New York. That’s your home now. Stop worrying about me. I’m not your concern, and I never was. I don’t need you here for me, so go home.”

I sucked in a deep breath, trying to steady my mind.

My heart.

My emotions.

I wanted to fight with him. I wanted to tell him that it wasn’t true. That this would always be my home. I knew he



was just mourning and needed someone to take his anger out on, which caused a domino effect of my love and hate for him.

For what he did and didn't do.

For what he said and didn't say.

For how he made me feel like I was nothing more than an acquaintance. Nothing more than a stranger.

Instead of his close friend.

"Please don't do this," I shamelessly begged, fearing that it truly was the end of us. "I know you're in unimaginable pain, but pushing me away won't change how you feel." I paused, allowing my words to sink in. "I could take time off school and move back to town to help you through this. Please..." I caressed the side of his face. "Just let me in. I lov—"

"Hey, babe." A brunette I'd never seen before walked into his bedroom, making the space seem much smaller than a second ago.

"There you are," she exclaimed, standing beside him and wrapping her arm around his. "I've been looking all over for you. This house is so big. There are so many rooms, and I didn't know which one was yours." Her stare went back and forth between us before it landed on him. "Who's this?"

I answered, "I'm Hazel." Waiting for her recollection of who I was to him.

*Nothing.*

Not an ounce of what I was hoping for.

*He never talks about me?*

In a moment's notice, Ledger spewed, "She's just Chance's sister."

I wanted to yell at him.

Hurt him as much as he'd hurt me.

With my words.

My actions.

With everything inside me.

I didn't do any of those things. I just stood there like a deer in headlights, suffocating in the reality that we'd never make it back to a place where we were close friends again.

He didn't want me in his life, and that was the hardest pill to swallow.

"Oh!" She extended her hand for me to shake. "I'm Valerie, Ledger's girlfriend."

I shook it, trying to hide the shock of her announcement.

He'd never had a girlfriend before.

*Not once.*

I swallowed hard, feeling the weight of her statement. I couldn't believe it. He'd finally settled down with someone. And of course, she was gorgeous, completely his type.

"Do you want to—"

"Valerie." He interrupted her. "Hazel was just leaving."

*Fucking asshole.*

I couldn't bring myself to say it, so I just turned around...

And flew home to New York City.

SIX

## LEDGER

*N*ow: *Ten years later*

By the time I made it to the bar in downtown New York City, it was after eleven. The place was packed to the brim with people. I was only in town for the night, meeting with some potential meat buyers for our ranch. My father was near retirement. Soon, he'd hand everything down to me.

I was exhausted. Spending the entire day talking about one thing or another with clients was never my strong suit. I didn't care much for people. The ranch consumed my life. Always had. Except now, I'd be the boss, and I had no fucking problem with that. If anything, I couldn't wait to be in charge.

That was why I lined up buyers in the first place. I hated the bullshit of having to play nice to win people over, but it came with the territory. My routine was the same every day. I was up by four o'clock every morning and home way after dark every night.

Day in and day out, my time was spent on the ranch.

Nodding to the bartender, I ordered a beer and sat down on the barstool, trying to unwind from the day's busy events before returning to my hotel room.

A woman sat down beside me, greeting, "Hey there, cowboy." She tapped my cowboy hat. "You in the wrong city?"

I grinned, swigging a pull off my beer.

"A man of few words, I see."

"Something like that."

"Well, my name's Tiffany. What's yours?"

"Ledger."

“Good name for a good-looking guy like you.”

I simply stated, “I’m not much for talking.”

“Great.” She leaned in close to my face. “I’m not much for talking right now either. In fact, I think we could do something that doesn’t involve any talking at all.”

I arched an eyebrow, eyeing her up and down until I needed some air. It was hotter than hell in there. Excusing myself, I overheard her mutter, “*Asshole*,” as I stood and made my way out onto the empty balcony, wanting a change of scenery for a few minutes. I wasn’t a fan of big crowds, much less entertaining a woman I had no interest in.

Being in New York City was doing all sorts of fucked-up things to my head. Hazel still lived here, and I swear I thought I saw her everywhere—at the coffee shop this morning, on the street walking in the opposite direction of me, and even at the damn pizza stand.

This town might have stirred images of her, but the reality was that not a day went by when I didn’t think of her at least once, especially in my dreams. She haunted them often. My subconscious would set up different scenarios of a life together.

And it always came back to the same dream of what would have happened if I hadn’t turned her down...

Through the past decade of self-reflection, I learned a lot about myself. Including how much I really did love her and the effect she had on me. Every day, I regretted turning her down for the future she wanted with me at my graduation party, then kicking her out of my life a year later after my mother’s funeral.

I thought I was doing the right thing, but as time flew by, all I did was set myself up for a world without her in it. Chance was still my best friend, but Hazel was just as important to me back then. There wasn’t a memory of my childhood that didn’t include her. She was my closest friend outside of her brother, and the ways I let her in, I never did with anyone else.

I'd dated on and off since then, but nothing more than fucking and hanging out with random women. Not only did I have no time for a committed relationship but I also didn't care for one. Women were always disposable to me and that hadn't changed. To be honest, it probably became worse.

I was cold.

Detached.

Unemotional.

The complete opposite of the way I was with her. She owned me. Mind. Body. Soul.

Staring at my beer, I contemplated going to her apartment. I knew where she used to live because I helped pick out her place. We spent hours looking online for something perfect for her. I didn't know if she still lived there, but it was worth a try. Chance and I didn't talk about her. In his mind, we just grew apart through the distance between us. I never had to explain what happened with us to him; it simply went away.

They said that time heals all wounds, but the one she scarred me with was a permanent reminder of what I did to her, and now she was a part of me whether I fought it or not. And again, the truth was I wanted her there. Although she wasn't in my life, she saved me from myself so many fucking times I lost count.

The urge to get in a cab to see her was strong.

Leaning against the railing, I rested my elbows on it, taking in the people dancing inside. When out of nowhere, long blond hair caught my attention as the music changed to a slower beat.

I narrowed my eyes, trying to get a better look at the woman near the dance floor with her back to me. Her long hair cascaded down her back as her hips swayed to the song's rhythm. She wore a tight red dress that accentuated all the curves of her body, leaving very little to the imagination.

For the first time in what felt like forever, I became captivated by the woman in red. She started to dance by

herself, slowly working her hands up toward her head to run her fingers through her hair, holding it up off her neck.

Biting my bottom lip, I imagined the way her inviting skin would feel beneath my mouth. The way she danced was so unbelievably fucking sexy, but it wasn't like every other girl I was used to seeing. She wasn't dancing for anyone but herself. She rocked her hips and spun around. The dim lighting made it hard to make out her face.

Describing what I could see didn't do her justice. She was oblivious to all the stares she attracted. I swallowed hard, my mouth becoming dry from the vision before me. My gaze traveled down her body.

She wasn't wearing a bra, and I could see her nipples peeking through her clingy fucking dress. She had a tiny waist and curvy hips. An hourglass figure, exactly how I liked it. The front of her dress was a deep V down her chest, finishing off her outfit with red fuck-me heels.

I sucked in a visible breath as I took her in. She was a vision, a goddess, and I couldn't remember the last time someone held my attention quite like her. The music shifted to a faster beat, and within seconds, I lost sight of her.

A sense of familiarity filled my bones.

*Do I know her?*

Unable to resist, I walked back inside, looking solely for her. Quickly feeling a sense of panic I'd lost her when I suddenly found her again from across the room. I watched the way her hips swayed, the way her tits bounced, the way she licked her lips, making my dick twitch at the mere sight of her striding toward the hallway with a finesse I'd never seen on another woman.

Following her lead, I rounded the corner, and we finally came face-to-face. It was only then I realized who she was, almost knocking the shit out of me.

Her pouty red lips parted as she instinctively stepped back, causing her to stumble on her own two feet. I caught her by the hollow of her lower back before she fell to the ground,

immediately tugging her close to my chest where she always belonged.

She lightly gasped, assaulting my senses with her scent of honey and bourbon. Her hands pressed against my chest, but she was too late. She was already wrapped around my arms.

Her breathing hitched, and her gaze widened, searching for answers in my narrowed eyes. She opened her mouth to say something, but instead, she licked her lips, and I trailed the movement of her tongue, wishing she was licking my mouth.

With her body against mine, I felt every last inch of her. From her hard nipples to her pussy. The only thing I could think about was how much I wanted to kiss that pouty fucking mouth of hers.

Without saying a word, we stood there frozen.

Until she asked, “What are you doing here?”

I smiled. “I’m catching you from falling.”

I hadn’t seen her since my mother’s funeral, but you wouldn’t think that with how deep our connection felt at that moment.

I didn’t give it a second thought. I wrapped my arms around her tighter, pulling her into a hug.

“Fuck,” I rasped in her ear. “It’s so good to see you, sugar.” Knowing right then and there...

I was never letting her go again.

She. Was. Mine.



# SEVEN

## HAZEL

Since I'd left his house after the funeral, I hadn't looked back.

I couldn't.

If I did, I wouldn't have made it out alive.

Sometimes my mind would drift to his bright-green eyes, and as soon as the thought occurred, I'd shove it to the back of my head where it belonged.

The way he held me still consumed me in ways I never thought possible, but that wasn't what captured my attention the most. It was the sincerity in his gaze before he pulled me into his arms.

He wasn't looking at me. He was staring through me like he always could.

It felt as though no time had passed between us.

Our connection.

Attraction.

Was still very much there, breathing life into me after all these years. I bit my lip like he could read my mind, and a part of me knew he could.

He always did.

It didn't matter how much time, how many years passed us by, nothing could take away the memory of how he treated me the last time we saw one another.

I fucking hated him.

I was the first to back away, needing to put some distance between us. After a few seconds, he reluctantly let me go. Still, I didn't say anything because I didn't know what to say.

I barely knew how to feel.

It had been too long.

Too many years of pent-up hatred for him bled out of me, mixing in with the confusion of why I still felt this strong pull to him.

He caressed the side of my cheek with the back of his fingers. “I can’t believe we’re running into each other here, of all places.” He smiled at me. “You look beautiful.”

I swallowed hard.

“But I’m not the only man who’s enamored by you. I see you still like to wear clingy fucking dresses that barely cover your body.”

Matching his rough tone, I repeated, “I can see you still like to dress like a cowboy. You know you’re in New York City, right?”

I zeroed in on him, reminiscing before his eyes. Despite the lust evident in his gaze, I could still see the pain he’d caused me floating through his predatory regard.

I shook away all the memories that could destroy me again. It took me years to get over him, years to forget about him, yet I still had trouble trusting men. The way he shattered my heart left a long-lasting impression. I had a considerable problem opening up to men and letting them into more than just my bed.

Ledger was why I kept every man at arm’s length, causing several relationship problems—particularly in my last one.

When Jonathan got too close, I cut him loose. I thought I could give him what he wanted. I tried so hard to love him like he did me, but I couldn’t. We played house, and I broke his heart in the process. He had to move to Italy for his international business for a few months, and that was the moment I realized I wasn’t in love with him.

I refused to get hurt again.

I barely survived it the first time.

Ledger may have kicked me out of his life, but it took me years to kick him out of mine. He took up permanent residence

in my head for a long time, and I couldn't for the life of me evict him.

I thought I had.

However, now...

I wasn't so sure anymore. Not when he stood in front of me. I cleared my throat and swallowed hard again, my heart beating out of my chest.

Playing a game of cat and mouse, I baited, "Where're you from?"

He didn't miss a beat, replying, "Wyoming. You?"

"My home is this city." I resisted the urge to remind him he was the one who brutally made me realize it was.

I didn't expect him to counter, "I find that hard to believe." As if he was purposely trying to take me back to another place and time, he reminded, "You can take the girl out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the girl. And you have cowgirl written all over your pretty little face."

For a split second, I felt myself falling for him like the past didn't exist between us.

"You here alone?" he asked.

"I'm here with a friend."

"I don't see your friend."

"She left with some guy."

"And you stayed by yourself?"

"I wanted to dance."

"Isn't that dangerous?"

"You think I need protection?"

"With the dress you're wearing? Abso-fucking-lutely."

I looked down at myself. "What's wrong with my dress?"

"Where's the rest of it?"

I smirked, peering up at him through my long dark lashes. “You didn’t seem to have a problem with my dress a few minutes ago when you couldn’t take your eyes off me.”

“I still can’t take my eyes off you.”

*Was he flirting with me?*

He was so different from the guy I remembered. It was like night and day. We barely spoke for five minutes, and I hardly recognized the man seducing me. He’d never spoken to me like this before.

Feeling spiteful, I bit, “In that case, you don’t need to worry. The only man I need protection from is *you*.”

He flinched, quickly recovering. “You live around here, Hazel?”

I couldn’t resist. “That’s none of your business.”

“I’m making it my business. You shouldn’t be out alone by yourself.”

“I’m not alone. You’re here with me now. But if you want to continue playing this game of I run and you chase, then I’m happy to oblige.”

“I was never one for playing games.”

“Could have fooled me.”

“Would you prefer I say how fucking sexy you look?”

“Wow.” I called him out, “If only Chance could hear you now.”

“Sugar, we aren’t kids anymore.”

“And that makes a difference?”

“It makes all the difference in the world.”

“In what sense?”

“In all the ones that matter.”

“It doesn’t change the fact that Chance is still my brother.”

“Chance isn’t here right now.”

“Oh, I see. That’s why you’re coming onto me?”

“I’m just stating the obvious. You look good all grown up.”

I cocked my head to the side. “You’re still a paradox, Ledger Beckham.”

“And you’re still trouble, Hazel Blakely.”

“Yet here you are playing with fire.”

“I can’t talk to an old friend?”

“You’re doing much more than talking, cowboy.”

“From what I remember, you wanted much more from me.”

“Yeah, well from what I remember.” I folded my arms over my chest. “You didn’t want to give me anything. Including your friendship.”

“Trust me, sugar, it was never that I didn’t want to.”

“Right... I guess I have that effect on men.”

He zeroed in on me. “Care to elaborate?”

I winked at him. “There are too many men on my roster to do that.”

His jaw clenched. “Last time I remember, you were a virgin.”

“Last time I remember,” I mocked, “you kicked me out of your bedroom.”

“Hazel, that was another life.” Stepping toward me, he broke the small distance between us.

“Another life that’s blended into this one.”

“I’m not the same guy I was back then.”

“What changed?”

He didn’t hesitate in acknowledging, “My mother died.”

I was rendered speechless.

“I went through a lot after that.”

“I can only imagine since you shut me out.”

“I know.”

“That’s all you have to say for yourself?”

With a sincere expression, he communicated, “I have no excuse for my behavior other than I was broken for a very long time.”

“And what put you back together?”

“Time, but also realizing that life is short, and we only get one.”

“I see.”

“Do you?”

“Listen,” I stressed, mirroring his expression. “I’m glad you’re in a better place, Ledger. It’s all I ever wanted for you.”

“It all felt like it happened so fast. First you, then her, then you again. I lost so much in a matter of a year, and seeing you right now just puts everything into perspective for me.”

“Ledger, I—”

“How many men have you been with?”

I scoffed. “That’s what you’re thinking about?”

“That’s not an answer.”

“I’m not a virgin.”

“That’s not what I asked.”

“Asked or demanded?”

He grinned. “Do you need me to say please?”

“I mean...” I sassed, “it wouldn’t hurt to see you on your knees.”

“I can’t think of anything I’d rather do more than be on my knees for you, sugar.”

I called him out, “Are you drunk?”

“On you.”

“What’s gotten into you?”

He narrowed his gaze at me.

“Is this a test?”

“You tell me.”

Fine.” I purposely shrugged, grabbing his cowboy hat off his head, and placed it on mine. “Too many to count.” Backing away, I emphasized, “Enjoy the rest of your night.” I turned to leave, but he grabbed my arm, holding me in place.

“Where do you think you’re going?”

Before I could answer, he pulled me toward his chest, once again bringing me into his arms. In one fluid motion, he gripped the back of my neck, tugging me closer to his lips. I could see it in his eyes, the internal battle he was fighting. I guess some things never changed particularly when it came to us.

It was only then, I wanted something more than I ever wanted him. And it started and ended with me in his bed.

In one breath, I spoke with conviction...

“Take me back to your hotel room.”



# EIGHT

## HAZEL

Ledger walked behind me. “A girl like you could get into a lot of trouble at night on these streets dressed like that.”

I rolled my eyes. “You’re the one who said you wanted to walk.”

“You know what I mean.”

I turned to face him, walking backward. “I can handle my own.” Spinning back around, I purposely swayed my ass. “How far down is your hotel?”

“A block. You sure you can make it in those heels?”

“I can do anything in heels. I basically live in them at this point.”

“That’s right, Miss Designer of the Year.”

“Kept tabs on me?” I smiled at him.

“It’s hard not to. Your brand is everywhere. You’ve made quite a name for yourself.”

I spun to face him again. “I do what I can.”

“Look at you, all grown up as a successful businesswoman, but you look like you’re all work and no play.”

He smirked, and fuck did it appear sexy on him. Ledger was still devastatingly handsome. If anything, he was better looking. Age definitely agreed with him.

“You think you can read me that well, huh?”

He nodded, but now his grin was from his amusement.

I didn’t want to see the gleam in his eyes. “I can say the same to you.” I turned, walking straight.

He threw my words back at me. “Kept tabs on me?”

I bit back a smile even though he couldn’t see me.

We continued to walk in silence until we arrived at his hotel building. I had no idea how we could go from never speaking to flirty banter and sexual tension, but there we were.

The guard greeted us with a nod, and we entered a private elevator to the penthouse floor. The elevator doors opened to a lavish living space with bay windows all across the back walls of the suite. It overlooked all of downtown New York. Dark, elegant furniture was perfectly placed everywhere, and a grand piano sat in the corner of the room.

He walked toward the bar on the other side of the open space. Without asking, he made me a whiskey sour. My favorite drink. After I grabbed it out of his hand, I made my way over to stand in front of the bay window.

The view was breathtaking.

It was then that I realized this wasn't a place to sleep.

It was a place to fuck.

"You bring all the girls back here, Ledger? You never struck me as the guy who needed luxury to get pussy."

He stood beside me with his own drink. "Look at you, using big-girl words, but to answer your question, I had meetings here all day."

"Oh, I see." I glanced at the side of his face. "So your plans weren't to pick up a woman at the bar and bring her back here?"

"I don't need to be in New York to get pussy."

"No, that was always your strong suit. I guess some things never change." I finished off my drink and moved to stand in front of him. "You going to show me the bedroom anytime soon?"

"You think that's what I want?"

"Why else did you take me up on my offer to bring me back here?"

He didn't respond. Instead, he finished his drink and placed it next to mine on the table before his gaze connected

with my eyes.

“I thought we were playing a game?” I questioned, arching an eyebrow.

“Is that what this is? A game to you?”

“You know, I’m not the kind of girl who just goes into a stranger’s hotel room with them.”

“Sugar, I’ve seen you naked.” He swept the hair away from my cheek, placing it behind my ear. Letting his fingers linger on my skin for a minute. “I’ve seen you at your best and at your worst. That sound like a stranger to you?”

“You don’t know me anymore.”

“I beg to fucking differ.”

Shaking my head, I asked, “What do you want?”

“What I’ve always wanted but couldn’t have.”

“And now?”

“Now, we’re not kids.”

“What about Chance? He’s still your best friend and I’m still his sister.”

“Eleven years ago, that mattered. We’re in different places now.”

“You think Chance will feel that way?”

“I know he wants you happy.”

“And you think you’ll make me happy?”

“I can sure as hell try.”

I shook my head again, blown away. “What are you saying?”

He eyed my mouth as he leaned into my lips. This was a power struggle—an exchange of some sort that I wasn’t willing to lose.

“I’m saying that I want to see where this can go.”

“Just like that?”

“We’ve known each other all our lives. Don’t you think we’ve wasted enough time?”

“I wasn’t the one who kicked you out of their life.”

“Sugar, I was fucked up back then.”

“Alright, then why haven’t you ever reached out since?”

“Who says I didn’t want to?”

“Wanting and doing are two totally different things.”

“It’s better this way.” He paused to let his words sink in. “Almost like fate bringing us together.”

I asked, “When did you turn into such a romantic?”

In one breath, he shared, “There’s a lot you don’t know about me.”

“Starting with?”

He didn’t answer my question. Instead, he stated, “I’m going to kiss you now.”

Before the last word left his mouth, he crashed his lips onto mine. Shoving me into the floor-to-ceiling glass bay window behind me, he placed his hands on the sides of my head. Slipping his tongue into my mouth, he demanded complete and utter control.

Kissing me fucking senseless.

At a moment’s notice, he went to war with my mouth. For the first time in eleven years, he kissed me until the earth stopped moving and time stood still.

Claiming me.

Owning me.

Branding me.

Making me feel like I was *his*.

## LEDGER

That was all it took for me to lose my mind, getting lost in her instead.

“I’ll give you what you want,” I growled between kissing her.

She’d kissed me before, but this time, I devoured her. Kissing Hazel was like coming home. I gripped the back of her neck, effortlessly pulling her to me like we weren’t already close enough. Her lips were soft, and when my tongue beckoned her mouth to open for me, she did, feeling my need for her.

She tasted of citrus and whiskey. I let my lips speak for the years of chemistry and undisclosed emotions between us. Our kiss became heady and fucking intoxicating, I felt her everywhere, even though I was barely touching her.

I wanted more.

I wanted all of her.

She was always there, in the forefront of my mind. There were so many times I almost called her, so many times I almost showed up at her door, but I didn’t know what to say or how to say it.

You wouldn’t think that now with how easy it was to be honest with her in this setting. I thought our deep connection would have gone away, but if anything, it was stronger than ever. She was right, though. All the reasons I turned her down and pushed her away were still there.

However, the circumstances were different. We were all adults now. Able to make our own decisions. Chance would understand, and if he didn’t, he’d come around. I wasn’t man enough to take what I wanted back then. Being loyal to my best friend was all that mattered to me.

I didn't think about the consequences of what I'd be losing in the process. For the past ten years, I had him, but I lost her. After seeing her again, no way in hell could I deny the effect she'd forever have on me. There was no hiding it. Even if I wanted to, and the truth was, I didn't fucking want to.

I was over doing the right thing. It cost me too much. So much had happened since I last saw her, so much I craved to tell her, so much I had to make up for.

Maybe I truly was losing my mind...

"Tell me, sugar, what do you want? Ask nicely..." I taunted, roughly yanking her hair back farther and placing her where I wanted her, right up against the window.

Where she couldn't move, and I could control her pleasure.

Her skin was red and warm. I could see her nipples harden through her dress. I kissed my way down to the side of her neck, right along the edge where I knew it'd drive her crazy. Skimming my free hand up and down her thigh, I glided a little higher toward her pussy.

She moaned in response, and I took it as an open invitation.

"You wet for me, sugar?" I could feel her rapid pulse against my lips as I slowly and torturously rubbed the tips of my fingers along the rim of her panties. "You want me to touch you here?"

She moaned again, and it wasn't the reply I wanted, so I lightly slapped her clit, and her knees buckled. Through her silk, I rubbed her clit with the palm of my hand, and she rocked her hips against me.

"We have unfinished business, Hazel."

We locked eyes as I slid my middle and ring fingers into her tight, warm cunt a little more each time.

"Fuck me... you're soaking wet... we play by my rules, or we don't play at all," I warned. "You like that? Huh? You like it when I fuck you with my fingers?"

"Yes..." she finally spoke. "Harder... faster..."

“You greedy little girl.”

This woman was going to be the death of me. And I didn't fucking care...

Not one bit.

Her pussy clamped down, and her eyes rolled to the back of her head as she cried out my fucking name.

It's not what I wanted...

But it was a start.



# NINE

## LEDGER

G roaning against her lips, I coaxed, “Fuck... I missed you...”

Her frustrated screams were muffled by my mouth, knowing she wasn't going anywhere unless I wanted her to. And the only place she was going was right on my fucking cock. Loosening my grip, I slowly brushed my lips against hers.

I breathed out, “Say it, sugar.”

She turned her face away from my attack, but I gripped her chin, forcing her to lock eyes with me. I needed her to see she wouldn't win this power struggle between us.

We both panted profusely.

“Say it,” I ordered.

“Stop it.”

I rubbed her bottom lip with my thumb, needing a minute to touch her.

To look at her.

Hold her.

Fucking feel her.

I missed her so much, and she was right there in front of me, giving me her come.

We stared at each other for what felt like hours, both of us lost in our own demons. In the past, we couldn't change. In the present that seemed like it took an eternity to get there. In the future we still wanted.

Even after all these years, she still took my goddamn breath away. She was so beautiful, so painfully breathtaking. Her pouty lips already swollen from my assault made her look like a gorgeous disaster, and I was just getting started.

“Do it for me... say it.”

Her hands dug into my hair as she came down my hand, her pussy dripping onto the floor beneath us, and still, I didn't stop. I growled, slamming my mouth onto hers again.

Claiming her tongue.

Her mind.

Her heart.

Every last part of her body and soul. She met each push and pull I expressed through my rough touch.

It was intense.

It was needy.

It led to angry fucking.

In an instant, I stripped off her dress, tossing it over my shoulder. I made a mental note to throw it away later. My cock throbbed against my zipper. Seeing her naked and helpless in front of me caused an excruciating ache in my balls.

I groaned because my memories of her didn't even compare to this.

*To her.*

She forcefully gripped the front of my button-down flannel, yanking me closer, trying to mold us into one person, kissing me as if her life depended on it. She moaned into my mouth, frantically trying to gather her bearings from my tight hold while our bodies shook with undeniable desire. Every part of our reserve hammered all around us.

I slapped her ass, making her whimper before lifting her to straddle my waist as I set her on the edge of the piano with only her heels on. Our mouths collided again, unable to get enough of each other.

Before I dropped to my knees, I spoke with conviction, “If we do this, Hazel. You're mine now.”

I stared down at her, lust pounding through every vessel in my body. I caressed from her neck to her breasts to where I

wanted to be the most.

Her pussy.

She was wet.

Silky.

Tempting to eat.

I had yet to thrust my tongue into her heat, and like a possessed man, I questioned, "Do you understand me?"

Her frenzied gaze found mine.

She opened her mouth, hesitating for a few seconds. Fully aware that once she said it, there was no going back, only forward.

She finally gave in. "I'm yours."

My hands slid down her body, needing to touch her.

Own her.

Fuck her.

"Tell me again."

"I'm yours, Ledger."

She was spread wide, vulnerable and ready.

"Again," I demanded in a harsher tone than I intended, needing to hear it again.

"I'm yours," she repeated as I kissed and licked my way down every last inch of her skin.

"Spread your legs wider for me, baby."

I dropped to my knees, taking off her panties with my teeth. Kissing her clit, I slowly sucked it into my mouth. Growling, I fucked her with my lips as she surrendered to me, and I knew it was one of the hardest things for her to do.

Especially after I viciously hurt her.

I rewarded her by sucking on her clit harder, moving my head up and down and in a side-to-side motion. Making her squirm and shake all at once. She broke apart in front of me.

I'd never tire of watching her come undone. Her juices started flowing loosely down my mouth.

I didn't give her any chance to recover. I fucked her with my mouth, tongue, and fingers over and over again till she squirted all down my face, chin, and neck.

And then, I did it again.

"Please..." she begged for mercy, and I gave in.

Standing, I demanded, "Pull out my cock."

Her hand immediately undid my belt, working my button and zipper. Unable to open my jeans fast enough. She freed my hard cock, stroking it.

"Fuck," I huskily groaned, biting her lip.

In one hard thrust, I was balls deep inside her.

Wrapping her arms around my neck, she used me as leverage to sway her hips faster and harder. Her head rolled back, giving me access to her tits. I took her nipple into my mouth, kneading the other one, unable to get enough of her. Another moan escaped her throat. All I could hear was desire as I fondled her breasts and sucked on her nipples.

"Ledger..."

"Yeah, sugar. Just like that. Fuck me. Fuck my cock like my good girl."

Moving one of my hands to her clit, I worked her bundle of nerves, sending her over the edge. Her breathing escalated, and her cunt tightened, gripping my dick like a fucking vise and vaguely feeling her shiver all around me.

She leaned in, kissing me more aggressively than before. I grabbed the back of her neck, wanting to bring her closer, needing my body to cover hers. Our lips moved on their own accord, no longer having control over our heady movements.

"Fuck, you feel so goddamn good." I groaned loudly against her parted lips as she hissed into my mouth. Crying out but not saying a word.

I dug my fingers into her ass, rolling her hips to fuck me harder and faster, for her pleasure and mine. Nothing about what we were doing to each other was sweet. I kissed her jawline, to her neck, and deliberately made my way back to her lips. Thrusting my hips upward, I felt her G-spot on the tip of my dick.

“Right there, baby? That feel good, yeah?” I baited, knowing damn well it fucking did.

“Ledger... yes... right there... please... don't stop... right there...”

With every thrust inside her, she felt the mass of my body's movement, inching her a little higher each time. Savoring the velvety feel of my mouth claiming hers, her pussy throbbed against my shaft, and her G-spot pulsated along the head of my cock.

Over and over again.

“I'm going to come,” she breathlessly panted.

“So come, come on my fucking cock.”

We spiraled out of control in a heated frenzy from the feel of our mouths and bodies colliding, coming together for the first time. She could feel it as much as I could. It lingered in both our chaotic minds.

Each thrust.

Every moan.

Brought back memories both of us could never forget. I fucked her harder and with more determination, kissing her passionately with everything left inside me, needing her to understand my agony of fucking her over.

“Give it to me, Hazel.”

“Ah, Ledger! I'm coming, I'm coming, I'm coming...”

Her pussy squeezed the hell out of my shaft as she rode out her orgasm. I kissed and bit along her neck, leaving more marks on her perfect creamy skin while never once letting up on my ruthless thrusts. She cried out some more, compressing

her thighs with her release and clamping down on my dick again through another wave of ecstasy.

I drove in and out of her a few more times before I pulled away, needing to look into her eyes. Our bodies smacked from the skin-on-skin contact, never letting up. My pace increased as I made her fuck me as hard as she could. I couldn't help it. I loved taking her raw, and so did she from the sounds escaping her. Both our mouths parted, winded, riding the high, wanting to prolong her pleasure for as long as I could.

“Say it.”

She smiled, and it lit up her entire face. “I'm yours.”

Those two words were my undoing, exactly the way I always knew they'd be. Another growl escaped from my chest as I came so fucking hard that I took her over the edge with me. Our bodies went lax, feeling the eternal connection, nothing could ever break.

Not the past.

Or the present.

Not even the future.

We stayed like that for I don't know how long before I carried her to the bed, and we did it all over again. I couldn't believe I was lucky enough to have a second chance with her. I'd be lying if I said I wasn't pissed at myself for not claiming her virginity, but I'd make sure I was the only man who ever mattered to her.

Tomorrow was a new day, and I'd deal with the repercussions of what this night meant for our relationship. I wasn't letting her go again, even if it cost me my best friend. But I held on to the hope that Chance would understand.

Well into the night, she fell asleep in my arms, and I watched her at peace. I was happy for the first time in what felt like forever. While she was on my chest, I took in her long, messy, unruly hair, partially covering her face, to her pouty, pursed lips swollen from my relentless and insatiable assault on her mouth. Her flushed, bare skin only reminded me

of how many times I'd lost myself inside her with the scent of sex hanging heavy in the room.

Her beauty held me captive.

She glowed.

Serene.

Fucking breathtaking.

I fell asleep, holding her closer to me. She was the only woman I ever cared for. I woke up excited for the future, reaching for her. Except she wasn't there, and her side wasn't warm.

I groggily opened my eyes, searching for her. "Hazel!" I hollered, waiting for a response.

It was only then I noticed a note on her pillow. Smiling, I reached for it, expecting her to tell me she'd be back later or giving me her address. It was none of those things.

Instead, it read...

**Payback's a bitch. Go fuck yourself.**



TEN

## LEDGER

*N*ow: *Three months later*

I roared to my father, “They stole one of our best clients!”

“Ledger, you need to calm down.”

“Calm down?! You want me to calm down?! I’ve been busting my ass trying to—”

“We’ll make up for it. We don’t need their restaurant.”

“Restaurants! It’s a fucking franchise!”

“Ledger...”

I pulled my hair away from my face. “I can’t believe you’re taking this lying down.”

“Chance is family. I’m not like his parents. I won’t stoop that low.”

“Yeah, well if I was in charge—”

“You’re not,” he snapped. “I am.”

“This is bullshit!”

“You don’t think I’m pissed? I’m furious, but I won’t let them get the best of me. Especially when we have a house full of people for your sister’s graduation party.”

With a sigh, I shook my head, disappointed he didn’t want to take them down.

I was seething.

Seeing only red.

Bright. Fucking. Red.

“This isn’t over.”

He stood from his desk. “It is for now.”

Over the past few months, it seemed to be one thing after another. Starting and ending with Hazel fucking Blakely. I hadn't seen her since the night she fucked me over.

I tried calling her, but she changed her number. I even went to her apartment that morning, ready to put up one hell of a fight. However, she didn't live there anymore, and it wasn't like I could ask her brother for her new address.

As far as he was concerned, we'd lost touch after she moved to New York. Thinking about what she did to me only fueled my anger toward the direction my life had shifted.

I thought...

*Fuck. I thought she was mine.*

I couldn't believe she played me like a fool. Now all I could feel for her was hatred. She went from being my lover to my enemy. At this point, I wouldn't put it passed her to be behind this takeover her parents wouldn't give up on with our ranch. She obviously hated me that much.

I tried to compose myself, but it was no use. I was too far gone in my rage, which was never good. I never thought she'd stoop so low to get back at me.

*Payback is a bitch.*

Looking out the window, I watched Haven walk into the office that was on the property, closer to the stables than the house.

By the expression on her face, whatever she had to say wasn't good.

"What?" I bit, unable to control my temper.

"Umm..." She swayed back and forth, weighing her words.

"Everything okay?" Dad asked her, aware something was up as well.

"Define okay?"

"Haven..." I warned, ready to fucking snap.

She inhaled a solid breath. “You promise you won’t flip out?”

“Too late for that.”

“Ledger, I’m serious.”

“So am I. What did you do now or is it Cove again?”

Haven and her best friend put my family through the wringer these past few months. Between Haven’s boyfriend, Hayes, and our eldest brother, Jace’s fiancée, who just happened to be Cove, they were trouble. What could I say? Jace loved nineteen-year-old pussy. They were twenty years apart, but who was I to judge.

“Actually,” Haven exclaimed. “It’s neither of us. Now are you done being an asshole?”

“Out with it, Haven, or you’re going to see much more than just an asshole.”

“Sweetheart,” Dad chimed in. “Now’s not the time to mess with your brother.”

“Yeah, I noticed, but what I’m about to say isn’t going to help his attitude problem.”

My eyebrows pinched together.

I never expected her to announce, “Hazel Blakely’s here, and she specifically asked to see you, Ledger.”

I jerked back, stunned.

“See,” she acknowledged. “Told you.”

“What does she want?”

She shrugged. “I don’t know. She just asked if you were here.”

“Where is she?”

“In the living room.”

I stared at her wide eyed.

“She looks great,” Haven admitted. “I mean, really good. Better than she does on the magazine covers, if that’s even

possible.”

“Fuck,” I muttered under my breath.

“Can you please calm down before you see her? You’re going to scare her away with your temper.”

“Haven—”

“For real! I haven’t seen her since Mom’s funeral, Ledger. I’ve missed her. She used to be here all the time. It felt like I had an older sister, and when you’re constantly surrounded by testosterone, it was a nice break to have her around. I’d love to have her in our lives again. Don’t you? Wasn’t she one of your best friends?”

“Haven—”

“I never asked you what happened with her, and I’m asking now.”

“She moved to New York,” I simply stated.

“Well, maybe she’s moving back, and that’s why she wants to see you.”

“Or maybe she just wants more of our clients.”

Haven gasped, shaking her head. “I don’t think so. She’s a mogul. Why would she be involved with what her parents are doing? Chance isn’t.”

“I’m not giving her the benefit of the doubt.”

“What’s up with you?” she shouted. “Why are you being so stubborn? Don’t you miss her?”

“Don’t ask questions you won’t understand.”

“Whatever.” She rolled her eyes. “Are you going to see her or what?”

“Give me a minute.”

She happily nodded, turned, and left.

For fuck’s sake, like I needed another problem today.

“Your sister is right.” Dad agreed with Haven. “What happened between you two?”

“Nothing.”

“Son, you wouldn’t be acting this way if it were nothing.”

*He was right.*

Shifting my stare over to him, I repeated, “Can you give me a minute?”

“Yeah, but please check your attitude before you see her. She’s obviously here for a reason, and I remember how much you cared for her. Your mother always thought you’d end up together.”

I jerked back again. “What?”

“Come on.” He cocked his head to the side. “That can’t come as a surprise to you. You guys did everything together, and she’s the only woman you let into your life like that. Regardless of the ones you’ve brought around us.”

“It’s complicated.”

“Because of Chance?”

I was caught off guard. “Since when did you become so perceptive?”

“I’m your old man, but just because I don’t say anything to you and stay out of your personal life doesn’t mean I’m blind. Your mother adored her. She was planning your guys’ wedding since you were eight.”

“What the hell? She never told me that.”

“You’re a private person, Ledger. You always have been. The last thing you want is your mom involving herself—”

“I wish she had. It may have helped.”

He rounded his desk to stand in front of me. Placing his hand on my shoulder, he squeezed it in a reassuring action.

“Maybe she is now.” With that, he spun and left.

I didn’t know how long I stayed there until my pissed-off composure moved in autopilot. One minute, I stood in the office arguing with my father over his choices with the ranch, and the next, I was in front of Hazel.

I couldn't help but take her in. Haven was right. She was fucking gorgeous, wearing a black pantsuit with a small-ass top. Once again, leaving very little to the imagination with her fuck-me heels.

*Did she own any clothes that covered her?*

Shaking off the thought, I spewed, "Why are you here, Hazel? What else do you need from our ranch that you haven't already tried to take?"

She stumbled back like I slapped her.

In one breath, she coaxed, "We need to talk."

I didn't back down.

Already over her bullshit.

"Whatever you need to say, you can do it in front of my family."

Her hands fisted at her sides, and I snidely smiled in satisfaction.

"Fine!" she shouted, quickly furious. "Have it your way."

For the second time in just a couple of minutes, I was almost knocked on my ass when she informed...

"I'm pregnant with your baby!"

# ELEVEN



## LEDGER

A loud, collective gasp echoed off the walls around us. I didn't have time to consider her announcement before her brother suddenly stood beside us.

“What the fu—”

I bit, “Not. Now. Chance.”

His gaze flew from me to her. “You want to explain this to me, Hazel?”

“Chance,” I warned. “Not. Now.”

“When the hell were you guys toget—”

Running on pure adrenaline, I ignored him and grabbed her hand, dragging her to my old bedroom that my father kept intact.

On our way up the stairs, Chance yelled, “This isn't over!”

At that moment, I didn't give a shit about Chance.

All that mattered was her and the truth.

Once I shut the door behind us, she yanked her arm out of my grasp. Her heaving chest caused her tits to pop out of the seams of her top.

We were back in the bedroom where it all began, and the irony was not lost on me.

Hazel was the first to break the silence. “Aren't you going to say something?”

Getting right to the point, I asked, “How do you know it's mine?”

She wasn't taken aback by my question. It's as if she expected it. “You think I'd be here if it wasn't?”

“I don't know what to think. The woman I knew wouldn't have fucked me over after riding my dick.”

She glared at me. “I warned you that you didn’t know me anymore, but you were never one to listen.”

“I’m listening now, so answer me. I have very little patience left. Especially with you.”

“Oh, I’m sorry,” she mocked, looking offended. “Let me spell it out for you. You’re the only man I’ve been with in the past six months.”

“I thought you had a roster,” I reminded.

“It doesn’t mean I fucked them, but thanks for thinking so highly of me.”

“What do you expect after the bullshit you pulled?”

“It’s not so nice when you’re on the other end of someone’s pain, now is it?”

I scoffed. “You’re unbelievable.”

“I’m unbelievable?! You’ve got to be kidding me!”

“Keep your voice down.”

“Why? Chance knows I’m pregnant, and it’s yours, so we have nothing else to hide. Thanks to you, everyone knows now. You couldn’t have just talked to me privately like I wanted.”

“What do you expect from me? You played me.”

“What goes around, comes around.”

“Chance is—”

“News flash! My brother doesn’t run my life despite how he runs yours.”

“That’s not fair.”

“None of this is fair, Ledger! If it were, I wouldn’t be having your baby, asshole!”

“You’re the one who fucked me over, and I’m the asshole?”

“Yeah! To get back at you!”

I snidely remarked, “How’s that working out for you?”

“I’m pregnant with your baby. What do you think?”

“How sure are you that you’re pregnant?”

She reached into her purse, pulling out what appeared to be a photo before slamming it onto my chest.

“This sure.”

It was only then I realized it was an ultrasound picture.

“I’m only here to tell you that I’m pregnant and it’s yours.”

“That’s it?”

“Yeah.” She nodded. “It’s the right thing to do.” She hesitated briefly before adding, “I don’t need anything from you, okay? That’s not why I’m here. I don’t need your money or for you to even be involved if you don’t want to be. I can handle this on my own. I already have it all planned out. I hired a live-in nanny who will help me with everything, and you can be present as much or as little as you want. I’m not here to trap you. I’m just as surprised as you are, and I’m just trying to move forward with this unexpected situation we’re in, but you don’t have to claim this baby if you don’t want to.”

“For fuck’s sake,” I breathed out. “You really think I’m capable of that?”

“I’m just saying, you’re free to come and go as you please. I’m not holding you hostage. The last thing I want is for you to think I did this on purpose. Yes, we didn’t use a condom, but I was on the pill and never missed one. I wasn’t having sex with anyone for the six months prior to you, and I still stayed on it, taking it regularly. Believe me, having a baby without being married wasn’t exactly in my plans, but I guess you have super sperm, and we’re in the seven percent category. So congratulations, Ledger. We’re now a cautionary tale.”

Trying to control my temper, I continued. “It’s only one baby?”

“Yes,” she confirmed. “Thank God! It was my first question to my doctor. Thankfully, there’s just one in there, which is already hard enough.”

“How far along are you?”

“Three months.”

“And you’re just telling me now?”

She raised her arms in the air in a surrendering gesture. “Give me a break. I had to get over the shock first before I told you. I’ve only known for a little over a month.”

“You should have told me the second you *thought* you were pregnant. I’ve missed so much already.”

“Ledger, the only thing you’ve missed is me peeing on an obscene number of pregnancy tests that literally turned positive the second I peed on them and then my doctor confirming what I already knew. Other than your baby torturing me on my stupidity of wanting revenge on you, I’ve spent the last six weeks throwing up everything I tried to eat, and the smell of anything floral makes me want to puke. There,” she sneered, “you’re caught up on everything.”

“Is that why you look like you’ve lost weight?”

“Yes, but don’t worry, I’ll gain it all back and then some.”

Not wanting there to be any misunderstanding on my part, I made myself crystal fucking clear. “Hazel, I’m not missing another second of this pregnancy.”

“I’m not asking you to. Like I said, you can be as involved as you want. I’m not pressuring you or taking this baby away from you. It’s as much yours as it is mine. I know that, and I’d never want our child not to know its father. We both come from two loving parents, and that’s all I want for our baby.”

“You really mean that?”

“Of course, I do. I don’t know how we’ll make it work with you living here and me living in New York, but we’ll figure it out. My company has a private jet, and you’re welcome to use it for any future doctor appointments. I’ll give you my entire schedule. After the baby is born, you can still use it whenever you want to see him or her, alright?”

“If you’re still living in New York—”

“There is no *if*, Ledger. New York is my home.”

“Wyoming is mine.”

“Are you suggesting that I need to move?”

“I’m not suggesting.”

“Ledger…”

I didn’t back down, insisting, “You can run your brand anywhere.”

“As opposed to what? You can move to New York.”

“The ranch will be mine soon, and I can’t run it successfully from New York.”

She defiantly folded her arms over her chest. “I own a penthouse downtown with plenty of room for a baby. I even have a guest bedroom that you’re welcome to crash in when you come and visit. Although, from what I hear, The Beckham Ranch is on its way to becoming the best distributor—”

“If your parents stopped stealing our clients, we already would be.”

She adamantly replied, “I have nothing to do with that.”

I took her word for it.

“Since you’re a big deal, you can afford to buy a place in New York if you want to spend more time with our kid.”

“You living in New York is keeping my baby away from me.”

“Our baby,” she emphasized. “And don’t you ever forget that.”

“I’m not the one keeping our baby from you.”

“I’m not moving back here.”

“What kind a life is raising a child in the city?”

“An amazing one! I’m in the top school district, surrounded by some of the best food in the world. Not to mention, my whole life is in New York.”

“You don’t even have a yard. I live on five acres.” I threw her words back at her. “Not to mention, you have no family

there.”

“Now you want our baby around my parents?”

“I was talking about mine.”

“Ledger, I’m not doing this with you. I’m not changing my entire life and moving back here to buy a whole new house—”

“You don’t need to buy a house.”

“I’m not renting.”

I didn’t think twice about it, stating, “Move in with me.”

## HAZEL

I swear my eyes flew out of my skull. “What?!”

“You heard me.”

“Obviously not correctly. You didn’t—”

“I did.”

“You can’t be seri—”

“I am.”

I opened my mouth to retort, but I couldn’t form words. He had to be joking. There was no way in hell he actually thought I’d move in with him.

“I think you’ve officially lost your damn mind.”

“I’ve never been surer of anything in all my life. Sugar—”

“Don’t call me that! I can’t believe—”

“Then believe this.” He stepped toward me, getting right in front of my face. “If we’re going to make this work.”

For what felt like the hundredth time, he shocked the shit out of me when he added...

“Marry me.”

# TWELVE



## HAZEL

If dealing with Ledger wasn't enough, now I had to handle my brother.

"Chance," I coaxed. "It's not what you think."

"Really? Then my best friend didn't knock you up?"

Ledger shook his head, stepping into his face. "Don't talk to her like that."

Chance's eyes widened. "Since when do you care how I speak to my sister?"

Ledger didn't falter. "Since she became the mother of my child."

Chance's hands fisted at his sides.

"Chance," I breathed out, overwhelmed by the turn of events for what felt like the hundredth time that afternoon.

His eyes flew from Ledger to me. "What the fuck is going on?"

I repeated, "It's not what you think."

"Actually," Ledger chimed in, "it's exactly what you're thinking."

I glared at him. "Stop it."

"Stop what, Hazel? Chance knows the truth. There's no need to hide it from him anymore."

I couldn't believe he was undermining me with the one person I didn't want to deal with right now. Like dealing with us wasn't already hard enough.

"There's no better time than the present. I'm done hiding our relationship from him."

"We're not in a relationship!"

My brother bit, "What the fuck?"

“Chance.” I faced him. “Just let me think for a second.”

“I find out you’re fucking my best friend—”

“I’m not fucking him!”

“Then how the fuck are you pregnant with his baby?!”

“Jesus! Can you relax? I wasn’t expecting this.”

In one quick movement, Ledger shifted me aside and stood up to my brother. This was the first time in all our lives I was truly worried about what would go down between them.

From best friends to enemies in a matter of seconds, at least it was with Chance’s perception of the man standing in front of him. I’d never seen him glare at Ledger with such disgust and hatred. The tension was so thick and palpable it swarmed through Ledger’s old bedroom. The same room that hadn’t changed in the past ten years.

It was the worst case of déjà vu.

Chance appeared as if he was ready to strike and attack, taking no prisoners.

“Let’s all calm down, okay? This isn’t helping anything.”

Chance considered what I was saying before his anger quickly turned to rage, and all the color drained from his face as he stared at Ledger like he was nothing more than a piece of shit who impregnated his twin sister.

The years of hoping this would happen as a teenager were finally there, in a moment I least expected it. I didn’t know what to say or do to make this alright between them and all of us.

This was the first time in eleven years we were all together like this, and I never imagined it’d come to this.

“Chance, please,” I begged for I don’t know what.

Ledger didn’t waver, simply admitting, “We slept together the night I was in New York.”

Everything happened so fast, yet it still felt like it played out in slow motion.

“Chance, no!” I screamed as his fist slammed into Ledger’s jaw, causing his body to whoosh back from the impact of his forceful blow.

Ledger caught his balance, stumbling around for a second, while I stared with a wide, petrified gaze back and forth between them, not knowing who to focus on more. Ledger found his bearings, massaging his jaw and moving it around.

“You’re my best friend!” Chance growled, roughly shoving him back with so much force. “How could you do this to her?”

I’d never seen my brother so mad before, scaring the absolute shit out of me.

But it wasn’t until Ledger responded, “Chance, I lost your sister once because of you, and it’s never happening again,” that I truly almost fell to the ground.

He didn’t stop there, speaking with conviction, “I’ve wasted over a decade of not being with her for my loyalty to you and our friendship, and I refuse to do it anymore. I kicked her out of my life after my mother’s funeral, and I’ve lived to regret it every day since. I’m the first to admit I fucked up, and I’ll have to deal with that for the rest of my life. I’ll apologize as many times as I need to in order to make things right between us, but don’t think for one second that I’ll ever apologize for getting her pregnant. Do you understand me?”

My head wasn’t spinning, barely keeping up with what was happening and what Ledger declared. I desperately wanted to stop him, but I couldn’t get my lips to move, to speak, to do anything other than watch with an open mouth because of what he was admitting.

I didn’t know what to think, let alone how to feel. He shared all this information, and he didn’t stop there...

## LEDGER

This was the only way to finally get over our past and move into our future. I was tired of all this bullshit, so I took matters into my own hands.

I was back in control, and it was the only reason I wasn't losing my temper with the man who was my best friend. He had every right to be furious, but we couldn't do anything to change our situation.

I didn't regret a second of that night. Despite how she fucked me over, I'd do it again. We made a baby, and I'd never have guilt over that. In my mind, this was the best thing that could have happened.

I was ready to fight for her.

*For us.*

No matter what, she was mine. Even if I had to prove it to both of them. Man to man, we'd have it out, regardless of the outcome. I was grateful that my old bedroom was the farthest away from everyone at the party. Although, my family knew better and gave us the privacy we deserved.

“Don't fucking try me, Ledger! Not right now!” Chance spew with a menacing tone, drawing my attention back to the present, where I willingly put myself on the line.

*For her and our child.*

“Or what?” I challenged, arching an eyebrow. “You're going to hit me again? Then just fucking do it! Hit me! Hit me as many goddamn times as you want! If that's what it will take to make you realize we're having a baby and you're going to be an uncle.”

He pushed me, and since I was expecting it, I didn't budge.

“I thought you were my best friend!” He pushed me again. “I thought you were my brother!”

“I know, but we’re not kids anymore! We’re all grown-ass adults!”

“You think that matters to me? I don’t give a shit if we’re eighteen or eighty!”

“Chance, please,” she coaxed.

“Hazel, stay out of it! This is between me and your brother.”

“Actually, this absolutely involves me! I’m the one who’s pregnant, and this isn’t good for the baby!”

“I have to find out like this?” Chance questioned with a pained expression. “What now? Huh? How long have you been fucking my sister behind my back?”

“It only happened once.” Hazel stood in front of me.

“It may have only been one night, but let’s not forget, sugar. I spent most of the time inside you.”

“You son of a bit—”

“Stop it!” Hazel demanded. “This is ridiculous. You both need to calm the hell down. Nothing will get worked out if you’re both acting this way. We’re not together. I don’t even like him.”

Just to prove my fucking point, I moved her aside, stepping right back into his face. “She’s full of shit.”

“You shameless fuck!” Chance barked. “I trusted you, man! I don’t know you at all, do I? Because the man I thought I knew would’ve never betrayed me with my own family!”

“For fuck’s sake, Chance! What do you want from me? I can’t lie to you anymore.”

“How am I supposed to get past this?”

“I never wanted to do this to you. It’s why we’re in this situation to begin with.”

“You’re blaming me for you knocking her up? How long were you lying to me? How long were you fucking my twin sister?”

“She’s not lying! We haven’t seen—”

“So that makes it okay? Every woman you come across is just another fuck to you, and you expect me to believe she’s any different?”

“Chance! Enough! Now!” Hazel pleaded, standing in front of him with her back to me. “Please just calm down.”

“Calm down?! You want me to calm down when you spread your legs for my best friend and let him come inside you like you’re just another one of his whores?”

Before the last word left his mouth, my fist connected with his jaw, sending him flying back against the wall.

Hazel’s stare went wide. “Oh my God!” She snapped around. “What the fuck is that going to solve?”

I pointed at him. “He won’t talk to you that way. Do you understand me?”

Chance shoved his sister out of the way, standing in front of me again.

“Chance, please!” she begged in a desperate tone that shook my entire body to the core.

His glare flew to her. “Fuck him!”

“Chance, stop! Please!”

“Does he know, Hazel?”

“Don’t do this!” she urged.

My eyes shifted to her. “Do I know what?”

He didn’t stop. “I can’t believe you haven’t told him.”

“Chance, stop it!” she pressed.

I was at my wits’ end. “What the hell are you talking about?”

“Chance, don’t—”

“Oh! So your fuck buddy has no idea!”

“Don’t look at her, look at me,” I ordered, and he did.

He eyed me up and down, making all the air from my lungs vanish for a much different reason when he declared...

“You don’t know she’s engaged?”

# THIRTEEN



## LEDGER

“What the fuck is he talking about?” I snarled.

She stared at me with wide eyes.

Her chest rose and fell while she was frozen in place.

“Hazel.” I stepped toward her. “I won’t ask you again.”

She lifted her ring finger in the air. “I’m not engaged.” Glaring at her brother for a second, she shifted her gaze back to me. “At least not anymore.”

In two strides, I was in her face.

“Were you engaged the night—”

“No! I’m not a cheater, Ledger. I’d never do that.”

“Then what the fuck is going on?”

“It’s complicated.”

“I want you to look me in the eyes and uncomplicate it for me.” When she didn’t respond fast enough, I demanded, “Now!”

She jolted. “I don’t know what you want me to say.”

“I want the truth.”

Chance sought out, “You heard your baby daddy, Hazel. How about you explain it to both of us because I can’t keep up with your love life any more than he can.”

“Oh my God. This has nothing to do with me being pregnant.”

I didn’t pay her any mind. My focus was still on her being engaged at one point.

She mirrored my stance, standing taller. “I don’t owe any explanation for my personal life, Ledger. Regardless of what you think, I owe you nothing.”

I growled from deep within my chest, not backing down. “I’m only going to say this once, so you better fucking listen. If you think another man will raise my kid, then you have no idea who you’re dealing with.”

“Let me remind you that we’re not a couple, and I’m free to be with anyone I choose. Now or in the future.”

“I’ll take you to court before another man—”

“You fucking asshole! I swear to God, Ledger, I’ll—”

“You’ll what? Tell me, sweetheart, what will you do?”

“You have no right to be angry with me! I didn’t do anything wrong! You’re the reason we’re in this mess. You couldn’t just leave well enough alone. You had to approach me at the bar?”

“I didn’t know it was you until you were already in my arms.”

Chance chimed in, “So you ran into each other at a bar?”

She immediately turned to glare at her brother. “Yeah, Chance. But since you’re so adamant about knowing everything about my life, let me break it down for you.”

“Hazel—”

She interrupted me. “The night before I left for New York, I threw myself at your best friend. In this very bedroom to be exact. It was during his graduation party. I waited for him on that bed.” She nodded to it. “Would you like to know what I was wearing?”

“Hazel,” Chance warned. “Don’t fuck with me.”

“After I offered your best friend my virginity and kissed him like I’ve never kissed anyone, he turned me down. But I couldn’t take no for an answer, so I took off my clothes and told him I’d been in love with him since I was eight. You remember the day I got pushed off the monkey bars, and Ledger came to my defense? Well, instant fucking crush on him!”

Chance jerked back. “How did I not know this?”

“Because I pretended it didn’t kill me every time he was with another girl! And you and I both know—Ledger always had some chick he was fucking. Except me, of course!”

He shook his head. “I can’t believe this.”

“Well, believe it. I tried to get over him, but I couldn’t. He was part of the reason I moved away for college in the first place.”

It was my turn to jerk back. I didn’t expect her to say that.

“Thanks to you, he turned me down like I meant nothing. Okay? Your best friend, the one you’re furious with right now, broke my heart for his loyalty and friendship with you. He chose *you* over me. So the next time you start throwing blows, remember I was humiliated to think that he’d love me over you.”

Chance’s stare moved to me. “Is this true?”

I slowly nodded, trying to process everything in a matter of seconds.

“To make matters worse because I wasn’t heartbroken enough, he fucked Marie right after he kicked me out of his bedroom. That was super fun to watch.”

I instantly spoke up, “I didn’t fuck her.”

We locked eyes.

I added, “I just made you think I did.”

“Because you hadn’t destroyed me enough?” she baited.

“I wanted you to hate me.”

“Mission accomplished.”

“So you lied to me?” Chance questioned, bringing our attention over to him.

“I asked you point blank what happened with Hazel in your bedroom.”

“What?” She gasped, meeting his gaze. “You knew?”

He shrugged. “I saw you come out of this room crying minutes after Ledger left. What did you expect? That I

wouldn't confront him about it?"

"Oh my God." She placed her hands on her face. "It was all a show."

I drawled, "Something like that."

Chance understood. "I guess that explains why you never like to come home."

"Ledger made sure of that when he kicked me out of his life after his mom's funeral. Now let's fast-forward to three months ago, shall we? This jaunt down memory lane is just so much fun."

Chance paid attention to her every word.

"I revenge fucked your best friend and wound up pregnant. There," she bit. "Now you know everything. Happy now?"

Taking a deep breath, I was at a loss.

"This has nothing to do with you, Chance. I'm not a little girl anymore. I don't need your protection, so back off!"

The only thing he replied was, "What now?"

It was my turn to shock the shit out of him, sharing, "Your sister's marrying me."

## HAZEL

“It’ll be a cold day in hell before I ever marry you, Ledger.”

Immediately furious, he snidely remarked, “That’s right, you’re already engaged to someone else.”

I rolled my eyes. “I already told you I’m not engaged.”

“Were you?”

“I’m not having this conversation with you. It’s none of your business.”

“My baby in your stomach says otherwise.”

“Our baby!” Out of nowhere, a sharp pain hit my belly. “Ow!”

Ledger and Chance rushed over to me as I was stricken with it again.

“Ah!” I fell forward, touching my abdomen. “Something’s wrong.”

“Shit.” Chance grabbed his cell phone. “I’m calling 911.”

“Fuck 911.” Ledger picked me up wedding style, and I didn’t put up a fight as he carried me out of the house through the back door.

He softly set me in the passenger seat of his truck while Chance jumped into the back.

“Ah!” Sharp pains kept hitting me, one right after the other as Ledger hauled ass off their estate, speeding through the roads.

“Hey, Felicia,” Ledger suddenly greeted on his cell phone. “Yeah, I need a favor. My girl’s pregnant—”

“I’m not your girl. Oww...”

He glanced at me. “Looks like my baby disagrees with you.”

“Our baby,” I hissed, cramping again and falling forward.  
“Ah...”

Ledger continued. “She’s experiencing sharp pain in her stomach. Can you meet me at your hospital?” He paused. “Thank you. I owe you one.” He hung up.

“Who was that?” I asked, breathing through the discomfort.

“She’s an OB-GYN. She can be your new doctor when you move in with me.”

Chance instantly asked, “You’re moving in with him?”

I shook my head. “No.”

“Yes,” Ledger corrected me.

“I can’t deal with either of you right now. Can we please just take a break from this conversation?”

They both nodded as Ledger placed his hand on my belly, and I resisted the urge to move it. For some reason, it helped, and he noticed.

When he pulled up to the emergency room entrance, he goaded, “Baby already loves me.”

I mumbled, “Whatever.”

What felt like an eternity later but really didn’t take that long, we were in one of the rooms. Dr. Malone, or as Ledger called her, Felicia, examined me while we waited for my records from my OB-GYN in New York. After she finished, she excused herself, leaving us alone.

I couldn’t help but notice how friendly she and Ledger were, but I bit my tongue—not wanting to give him the satisfaction that I was jealous.

He must have sensed it because he whispered in my ear, “She’s a client of our ranch.”

My stare connected with his. “Did I say anything?”

“You didn’t have to. It’s written all over your pretty little face.”

I turned away, ignoring him.

“Can you guys stop flirting in front of me please?” Chance requested, pacing around the room. “This day has been overwhelming enough.”

“I’m not...” I insisted. “You know what? Never mind.”

I was beyond thankful when Dr. Malone walked back into the room with my chart in her hands.

She looked it over for a minute before she asked, “How’s your stress level recently?”

“Ummm...”

“That’s what I thought.” She smiled at me. “Well, everything looks great other than your high blood pressure. However, your medical history indicates that you’ve never suffered from it.”

Ledger walked over to her. “What does that mean?”

“It means that Hazel needs to take it easy for the next week, and I recommend as much bedrest as possible with absolutely no stress.” Her gaze shifted to me. “You’re going to need someone to help you. No heavy lifting. No exercise. No moving around a lot. The longer you can stay in bed, the better. I know how hard this will be. Especially for you. By the way”—she smiled—“I love your new spring collection.”

I faintly smiled, trying my hardest not to lose my shit over her orders.

“We can check back in next week and monitor her from there, but I need you to stay vigilant and make sure you’re not spotting or bleeding, okay?”

Ledger tensed. “Is the baby in danger?”

“Not right now. She just needs to be careful.”

Chance put his hands on my shoulders, giving them a gentle squeeze as I was still lying on the examination table.

Ledger shook her hand. “Thanks for meeting us here, Felicia. I’ll make sure she’s taken care of.”

“No problem at all.” She peered over at me. “Try to eat. You need to gain some weight too.”

“Okay.”

“It was nice meeting you, Hazel. I’ll see you next week.” With that, she turned and left us.

Rubbing my face, I tried to sit up, and Ledger was at my side before I moved an inch to help me instead.

“I’m not an invalid, Ledger.”

He didn’t pay me any mind while I lost mine. If things couldn’t get any worse, now I was on bedrest and the thought alone worried and annoyed me at the same time. I hated lying around. Aside from the baby being in jeopardy, this was the worst thing that could happen.

After I changed into my clothes in the private bathroom, I stepped back into the room as Ledger was on his phone.

“Yeah, Jenna,” he agreed. “That’d be great.”

*Who’s Jenna?*

“You can come get her key from my place in like an hour. I already booked your flight for nine tonight. Yeah. Her address is”—he lifted what appeared to be my driver’s license—“5725 35<sup>th</sup> Ave, penthouse 12.”

I snatched it out of his hands. “What are you doing?”

Chance bowed his head, placing his hands in the pockets of his jeans.

“Okay, thanks again, Jenna.” Ledger hung up, gesturing at me. “Let’s go.”

By the determined expression on his face, I knew what he was going to say next wouldn’t sit well with me.

“You need to listen to me because I’m only going to say this once.”

I defiantly folded my arms over my chest.

“My assistant Jenna is flying out to your place tonight to pack your things for you.”



Through a clenched jaw, I warned, “Ledger...”

“You’re moving in with me. End of discussion.”

I opened my mouth to reply, but Chance intervened, “She can move in with me.”

Ledger pointed out, “With all your remodels?”

Chance owned a very successful construction company.

“You’re swamped with work,” Ledger added. “You don’t have the time—”

“And you do?” Chance countered.

“I’ll make it work, and when I can’t be with her, Haven can step in for me.”

I looked back and forth between them. “Hello... I’m standing right here. Can you not talk about me like I’m not in the room with you two? Besides, Haven has her own life she doesn’t need—”

“My sister absolutely adores you, Hazel. She’d love to spend time with you.”

“I haven’t been around her—”

“She was just telling me how much she’s missed you. Trust me, she won’t have a problem helping us out.”

I was taken aback. “She was?”

“Yeah, after she yelled at me to be nice to you so you’d visit more. She also said you were like a sister to her.”

I frowned. “I missed her too. She was the sweetest little girl.”

“That little girl is now living with her bar-owning, twenty-five-year-old boyfriend, who I try not to fucking kill every time I see him. Our family’s history with him isn’t exactly the best, but he makes Haven happy, and that’s all that matters, I guess.”

“Wow, and I thought you were overly protective of me.”

“I protect anyone I love.”

I lowered my gaze, trying to avoid the sincerity in his.

“I hate to break up this magical moment, but as much as I hate to admit it, and believe me, I loathe this idea of you moving in with him, but Ledger’s right. I’m book solid for the next few months. It’s probably best for the baby if you move in with him.”

“Oh! So now it’s two against one?”

Ledger reaffirmed, “You heard the doctor.”

“She didn’t say anything about moving in with you.”

Chance supported, “I’ll stop by every day if that’s what it’s going to take for you to listen to her orders and move in with Ledger.”

“I have like five assistants, or I can hire a nurse. I don’t need to move back here, let alone move in with Ledger.”

“You’re not leaving my sight.” Ledger grabbed my purse, handing it to me.

Once again, I snatched it out of his grasp.

In three strides, Chance stood in front of me. “This isn’t just about you, Ledger, and me anymore.” He gestured to my belly. “You have my niece or nephew in there too, and I want to be there for you in any way I can.”

These were the times I wish I had a good relationship with our parents.

“Now you’re on Ledger’s side?”

“It’s not about sides, sugar. It’s what’s best for our baby.”

I sighed. “You both are treating me like a little girl.”

Ledger firmly agreed. “Get used to it.”

“This is bullshit.”

Chance kissed my forehead. “I’m still livid over this situation, but I love you and my niece or nephew. Please, just do this for me.”

Shaking my head, I snapped, “I can’t believe you’re agreeing to this.”

“I can’t believe you’re pregnant by my best friend, but here we are.”

“She also said no stress. What do you think it will be like living with him?”

“You don’t have to worry about me,” Ledger informed. “I’m already getting what I want.”

And I knew...

It had nothing to do with me moving in with him.

# FOURTEEN

## LEDGER

“Ledger Beckham,” Hazel reprimanded, standing in my bedroom as I sat in my armchair.

I chuckled. I couldn't help it.

It was comforting she was finally breaking the silence between us. We were both quiet on the drive to my home. It was obvious we were lost in our own thoughts.

Once we walked through the front door, my house manager, Adele, took over. She knew I was coming back with Hazel. After introducing them, I headed into my office for a bit, needing to get some things in order while Adele showed her around.

She finished the tour in my bedroom, and I just happened to be sitting in there talking to my father, catching him up on everything.

He was surprised, but excited. This would be his first grandchild, and he was thrilled it was with Hazel. He kept saying my mom would have wanted it that way.

“Where's my bedroom?” she questioned, leaning against the doorframe. “Adele didn't say which one was mine.”

I smiled. “You're standing in it.”

She glanced at my bed. “You're giving me your room? Where are you sleeping?”

“Where do you think?”

The realization of what I meant quickly spread across her face. “We're not sharing a bedroom.”

“It's a king-size mattress.”

“Are you implying we're sleeping in the same bed too?”

“I wasn't implying.”

She adamantly shook her head. “I’m not sleeping in the same bed as you.”

I grinned. “Are you worried you won’t be able to keep your hands off me?”

“You wish.”

“Then what’s the problem?”

“I’m worried *you* won’t be able to keep your hands off me.”

“From what I remember, you’re the one who hogs the bed.”

“I do not.”

“Hazel, you basically slept on top of me when we were kids.”

“We were six, and you guys liked to scare me about the beasts under the bed.”

I chuckled. “The only beast you have to worry about now is me, and I’ll be sleeping right next to you, so no need to be scared anymore.”

“Can you be reasonable for one second?”

“I’ll let you shower alone.”

Her mouth dropped open. “Let me? You’re absolutely shameless.”

“Been called worse.”

“I bet. How about we start with fuc—”

“You need to relax and sit your ass down.”

“You’re not the boss of me. I’m putting my foot down.”

“Your foot doesn’t even make noise.”

“You’re the absolute worst. I’m not sleeping in the bed where you fuck other women.”

“I don’t fuck women in here.”

She arched an eyebrow. “You expect me to believe that?”

“If I did”—I shrugged—“they’d want to spend the night, and I hate sleepovers.”

“Wow.” Her eyes widened. “You’re worse than ever.”

“I make no promises. They know what they’re getting into.”

She sassed, “So they don’t come—”

“Oh, sugar, they come. Just not in here.”

She glared at me.

I softened the blow. “I’m taking care of you, remember?”

“That doesn’t mean we have to share a bed.”

“That’s exactly what it means.”

“Ledger...”

“Doctor’s orders. How else am I supposed to help you in the middle of the night if we’re not sleeping together?”

“Yeah, because I’m sure your plans are to sleep.”

“Do you think I have no restraint?”

“Yes. I absolutely do.”

“I’ll remember that the next time my face is buried between your legs.”

She glared at me again. “You’re stressing me out, and I only just got here.”

“If I were stressing you out, your cheeks wouldn’t be flushed like you want to sit on my face.”

She gasped.

“But just to be clear since that seems to be a reoccurring issue for us. I have no problem fucking the stress right out of you, but until then, I’ll be the perfect cowboy. You don’t need to worry about my intentions, and just for that little remark, I won’t lay a finger on you until you’re begging me to. Unless it’s to touch my baby.”

“*Our baby.* And I’ll tell you right now you’ll be waiting forever. We’re never having sex again.”

“Tell that to your greedy little pussy. From what I hear, women are the horniest when they’re pregnant.”

“How do you know that?”

“I know a lot of things.”

“How do you know about pregnancy?”

“Why do you care?”

“I don’t.”

“Then why’d you ask?”

She stubbornly shook her head. “I’m done playing these little games with you.”

“Sweetheart, you know there’s nothing little about me.”

She ignored my response. “I can sleep in your guest bedroom.”

“It’s on the other side of the house, and as you can tell, my estate is big.”

“Like your ego.”

“And my dick.”

“Ugh! I want my own room.”

“I’ll meet you halfway.”

“Which means what?”

“I’ll sleep on the couch in here and you can take my bed.”

“That’s not going to work. I sleep naked.”

I smirked. “So do I.”

“All the more reason to have separate bedrooms.”

“There’s no need to be shy, I’ve already seen every inch of your body.”

She adamantly repeated, “I want my own room.”

“What’s mine is yours.”

“This isn’t a marriage.”



“Not yet.” I stood, never breaking eye contact. “But for now, I’m already inside you.”

## HAZEL

I stared up at the ceiling. “God, what did I do to deserve this?”

“You rode my cock.”

I snapped my attention to him.

“Or maybe it was when I fucked you doggy style?”

“Ledger...”

“Or it could be when you were against the window?”

“Ledger...”

“How about when you were on the desk or we were in the shower?”

“Okay!” I raised my hands in the air, stopping him. “On that note, I have some work to do.”

Before he could object, I turned and left.

The nerve of that man; he truly knew no bounds. I shouldn't be shocked he'd pull a stunt like this. He was invading my personal space in a way I hadn't prepared for or anticipated. It felt like we were playing house, and it was too close for comfort to me.

I couldn't do this again, especially with him. I wish I could say I wasn't attracted to him anymore, though I'd be lying through my teeth. My body responded to his presence the same way it used to, and I was beginning to think I never really hated him as much as I thought I did.

I tried to focus on why I was there in the first place. Except he had pictures of us in his stunningly beautiful house. It was huge, way too big for only one person. The farther I walked around, the more I felt warmth and love through these walls.

Unable to resist, I snooped around his bedroom when he was in the shower. Feeling free to roam, I peered around the massive space, getting a good look around. A huge black

armoire was positioned on the far-left wall. Two glass doors on my right led out to the balcony, overlooking his ranch.

The setting sun made his view captivating.

His suite was three times larger than the guest room, which was quite impressive. The walls were painted a dark shade of gray with expensive black-and-white art hung evenly. Two black end tables sat on each side of his bed with detailed wood carvings along the edges that matched the bed frame.

My toes immediately curled into the soft, shaggy black accent rug that lay directly beneath his bed as I ran my fingertips along the polished wood of the frame. I couldn't help but wander toward his immaculate walk-in closet.

Dozens of button-down shirts hung on multiple racks on one side with a few jeans, sweaters, and shirts. He was still a simple man when it came to his wardrobe.

My fingers skimmed over his flannel shirts, running my tips along the soft fabrics. I don't know what got into me, but I picked up the shirt he wore that day and brought it up to my nose. I held it tight against my chest. Inhaling deep, I wanted to drown in his scent, which gave me this sense of comfort and relief.

Remembering I had no clothes, I pulled a black hoodie and sweats from two hangers. As I walked back into his bedroom, the shower shut off, bringing my attention back to the present. His footsteps quickly followed. I didn't have to spin around to know he stood behind me by his bathroom door.

However, as soon as I did, I found Ledger Beckham...

My baby daddy.

Clean.

Wet.

Naked with only a towel around his waist.

FIFTEEN

## HAZEL

In all his glory, water glistened off his chiseled physique, muscular arms, and rock-hard abs. I couldn't resist the temptation that was this man. My gaze shifted from his face to his chest to where I had no business looking.

His dick bulged through the white towel.

When my lustful stare finally met his, the smug grin on his devastatingly handsome face instantly washed away all my desire for him.

“Like what you see?”

I played it off. “There's not much to see.”

Not hesitating in the least, he yanked off his towel, and again, I couldn't resist. Blame it on the pregnancy hormones. I inadvertently licked my lips as I stared at his pride and joy.

Long.

Thick.

Suddenly getting hard.

I immediately turned. “Oh my God.”

He scoffed out a chuckle. “What do you think will happen when you stare at my cock like you want to ride it?”

I swallowed hard, feeling my heated skin burning with desire. Once I heard his footsteps descend, and I knew he was getting dressed, I spun back around as he was pulling up his gym shorts.

Before I thought about it, I blurted, “Why do you have pictures of me in your house when you kicked me out of your life?”

“Don't ask questions you're not ready to hear the answers to.”

“I wouldn't be asking if I wasn't ready.”

“Is that why you’re prying around in my room?”

I reluctantly stated, “I thought it was our room.”

“By all means, Hazel.” He gestured to the open space. “I have nothing to hide.”

“You say that with certainty?”

“I meant it when I said what’s mine is yours.”

“It doesn’t matter how much you flirt with me. I still hate you.”

He leaned back against his dresser, crossing his arms over his broad chest. “Is that what I’m doing? Flirting with you?”

“Ledger…”

He walked toward me, each step more determined than the last, until he stood inches away from my face with his eyes dilated. Before I knew what was happening, he backed me up against the wall and caged me in with his arms.

Meeting his intense, brazen stare, I replied, “This isn’t going to work. I’m immune to your bullshit.”

“Well, my cock isn’t immune to yours.” To prove his point, he thrust it against my core.

“That was so inappropriate. You can’t—”

Then he did something that truly surprised me. He dropped down to his knees. For a second, I thought it was sexual, but he quickly showed me a side to him I never expected to see or experience with him.

He opened my suit jacket and kissed the uncovered skin on my belly. I froze, and I swear I stopped breathing. I didn’t know what to say. I barely knew how to feel.

“I can’t wait to meet you,” he rasped against my stomach. “I love you so much already.”

*Why is he doing this to me?*

He looked up at me with a wicked expression and added, “Now tell your mommy to stop pretending that she doesn’t want Daddy sleeping next to her every night.”

I smiled. “You can tell your daddy that Mommy has no interest in sleeping next to him because their relationship is strictly platonic.”

“At least Mommy admitted she has a relationship with Daddy.” He kissed my belly one last time before he stood, and I acted as if I wasn’t fazed by his sudden tender moment that I quickly wanted more of.

Instead of giving in to his incessant demands, I excused myself to use the shower, and to my shock, he let me go without saying another word. I think he was just as taken aback by what he’d done.

I needed to get rid of his scent.

His touch.

The memories of us that had the power to break me all over again.

Moving on autopilot, I blinked, and I was standing in the shower, welcoming the heat against my tense frame. I allowed the hot water to burn into my skin, hoping it’d take away the mixed emotions I was experiencing. Pressing my hands against the shower wall, I leaned my forehead against the cool stone tile. I closed my eyes, still feeling his strong, callused fingers all over my flesh. His body on top of mine, hearing echoes of his dirty words and hurtful ones.

No matter how much I tried or wanted to push away the unrelenting questions with no answers, it was no use. My mind ran wild. I couldn’t get my feelings under control.

I stayed in there until the water ran cold and finally stepped out. After drying off, I threw on his hoodie and sweatpants with no panties. Once I finished brushing my damp hair with his brush, I inhaled a deep breath and walked back out to his bedroom.

I stopped dead in my tracks, instantly blown away by the vision in front of me. An obscene amount of food was laid out on his bed, all of which were still my favorites.

Pepperoni pizza.

Chicken wings.

Breadsticks galore.

My mouth watered by simply taking it in.

I was exhausted, tired of fighting my emotions with this man, and we'd only just started what could be described as pure and utter torture for the next six months. I was in for a rough ride if this was any indication of where we were headed.

“Felicia said you needed to gain weight, and since you're on bed rest, I brought food to you.”

“Is that from Mariano's?”

“It used to be your favorite restaurant.”

“I haven't eaten there since I moved.” Narrowing my curious gaze at him, I cocked my head to the side.

“Did you order the—”

He lifted the dessert plate I was going to ask about.

“You're just full of surprises, aren't you?”

“I'm just taking care of my baby.”

“I'm not your baby.”

He smiled wide. “You're not the one I'm referring to.”

“Right...” I blushed, feeling foolish. “Are you planning on eating some because that's way too much for me?”

“Is that your way of saying you want to have dinner with me?”

“No,” I lied, making up an excuse, “but I can't eat all of that, and I don't want it to go to waste.”

“In that case, I guess I have no choice but to join you.” He eyed me up and down. “You look good in my clothes.”

I peered down at my outfit that was swimming on me. “Good isn't exactly what I'd call this.”

“At least you're finally covering your body.”



I made my way to the bed, sitting on the edge as I grabbed a slice of pepperoni.

“I cover my body.”

“Since when?”

“All the time.”

“You call what you were wearing today covering your body?”

“It’s a pantsuit, so yes.”

“Your tits beg to differ.”

“I can’t help that I have big boobs for my small frame.” I took a bite, moaning in delight.

Ledger smiled. “Good, huh?”

“So good,” I replied with food in my mouth. “Let’s just hope it stays down.”

“Just so you know, your tits are one of my favorite things about you, but you don’t need to share them with the world.”

“I do if I want women to buy my clothes.”

“Women aren’t the ones I’m worried about.”

“Ledger, this whole possessive, controlling thing you have going on is really not necessary. I’m a big girl. I can wear what I want.”

“Sugar, you have men all over the world fucking their fists to the sight of you.”

“You’re exaggerating, but I’ll take that as a compliment.”

We ate in silence for a bit until, out of nowhere, he requested, “Tell me about your brand.”

“What do you want to know?”

“How did it start?”

“With a shop on Etsy.”

“You mean the one I told you to open for years?”

“Are you trying to say I’m successful because of you?”

“You’re successful because you’re passionate about everything you set your mind to. I always knew you’d make all your dreams come true.”

“What about you?”

“What about me?”

“Did all your dreams come true?”

Another moment of shock tore through me when he shared, “Not yet, but ask me again after our baby is born.”

I grabbed my stomach, suddenly feeling queasy. “Ugh, I think I’m going to be sick.” Hauling ass to the bathroom, I was on my knees in front of the toilet, hurling into the bowl before I could help it.

Ledger was behind me within seconds, holding my wet hair away from my face. He rubbed my back the entire time I hurled up all the food I just ate. We stayed there with my cheek on the seat for what felt like hours but was probably only a few minutes.

“You okay?” he asked, still caressing my back.

“So much for pizza being on the approved menu. Your kid seems to hate food. You can go now. I’m humiliated enough.”

“This isn’t the first time I’ve seen you throw up.”

“Don’t remind me. To this day, I can’t even smell cinnamon.”

“I told you not to down that bottle of Aftershock.”

“Well, you were fucking Denise or Stephanie or whatever her name was, and alcohol was the only thing I had for comfort.”

“I left her to take care of you.”

“Yeah, and then she hated me for the rest of the year.”

“My baby needed me.”

All in one breath, he spoke with conviction...

“And this time, I’m referring to you.”

SIXTEEN

## HAZEL

“Ledger!” I hollered, driving the golf cart up to the stables where he was feeding the horses on his property.

He glanced at me. “You need to be in my bed.”

I ignored his double innuendo. “I can’t find my laptop or cell phone. Do you know—”

“I have them.”

I jerked back. “Umm... excuse me, what?”

“Felicia said no stress, and you need to relax for the next week. You can have them back after she clears you.”

“Are you for real?”

He didn’t reply, going about his business.

“Ledger... how am I supposed to run my businesses without any technology?”

“I spoke to your assistants, and they have it handled. In fact, they were thrilled that you’re finally taking some time off.”

I swear my eyes flew out of my head. “Oh my God! You’re completely overstepping your boundaries. You have no right—”

“I have all the right in the world when you’re carrying my baby.”

“How many times do I have to tell you that it’s our baby?”

“As many as it takes for you to realize I’m calling the shots now.”

“Over my dead body.”

“Since you’re standing there being a pain in my ass, why don’t you make yourself useful and hand me that brush?”

I did, except at the last second before handing it to him, his horse made a huge fuss over me. His nostrils flared, his tail flagged, and he neighed over and over again until I stood by his side.

“Hi, Rebel! How are you?” I rubbed my cheek on his soft fur, petting along his face. “You look so handsome.”

He nipped, putting his lips together while his head bobbed up and down. Showing me his affection.

“Yes, I missed you too.”

He neighed like he understood what I was saying. Ledger’s horse and I always had a special connection.

“I wish I could ride him.”

Ledger suddenly stood beside me. “I wish you would ride me too.”

I snickered. “You’re lucky Rebel missed me, or I’d be kicking your ass right now. You’re invading my privacy.”

He shrugged.

I needed something to focus my energy on other than wanting to murder Ledger, so I began brushing Rebel’s hair instead.

“You look good with my horse.”

I smirked. “He always liked me more than you.”

Rebel neighed, proving my point.

“You need to go back to my bed.”

“I’m bored out of my mind. I won’t make it another six days if you don’t chill on your control issues, okay?”

He reluctantly nodded. “You can have your cell phone back, but only if you promise not to use it for work for the rest of the week.”

I sighed. I couldn’t remember the last time I took a day off. I lived and breathed my company, but it would probably do me some good to take the week away.

If I didn't think it was possible for things to get worse, I was wrong. This was way worse. I was fucked. Ledger would watch me like a hawk, and I couldn't do anything about it. He wouldn't loosen up because I was already pregnant with his baby.

Tearing me away from my relentless thoughts, I watched Ledger grab the pad and saddle, setting it on Rebel's back. I decided to help him, inserting the bit into the horse's mouth before making sure it was comfortable for him. Ledger secured the reins as I mentally checked off the list in my head for a safe ride for him.

"You might be living in the city, but you're still a cowgirl at heart. Look at you remembering how to set him up properly."

"I grew up riding horses. It's like riding a bike. You never forget."

"Like I'll never forget the look on your face the day you rode your first horse."

"I miss my Daisy."

She was the white Lipizzan horse I got on my thirteenth birthday. I always thought she looked like a magical unicorn and had special powers to make me happy. I spent a lot of time with her while avoiding Ledger and the random girls he'd always bring around.

"She still on your parents' ranch?"

"No." I shook my head. "I wish. They sold her after I moved away. My parents didn't want the maintenance if I wasn't there to take care of her."

"I'm sorry to hear that."

"Yeah. I think that's where my resentment for them started. I begged them not to get rid of her, but they still did, and our relationship only went downhill from there. I wasn't lying to you when I said I have nothing to do with what they're trying to do to your family's business. I barely talk to them as it is."

"Do they know about the baby?"

“No.”

“Are you going to tell them?”

“Eventually. I know them being our kid’s grandparents complicates even more things between us.”

“They’re still your parents, and I won’t keep their grandkid from them.”

My eyes widened in surprise. “Really?”

With a sincere expression, he stated, “I know what it’s like to lose someone you love. I wouldn’t do that to our child. Regardless of my feelings for them.”

“That’s awfully kind of you, considering the hell they’re putting you guys through.”

“One thing has nothing to do with the other.”

To say I was surprised at how much Ledger had grown up would be an understatement. I honestly thought he’d try to keep our baby from my parents, so I was shocked he didn’t have those intentions. He turned into the man I always wanted him to be, and a huge part of me was sad that I didn’t experience it with him.

So much about him had changed in the past ten years, yet he still felt the same to me. It was confusing and frustrating, and we were only getting started on our new dynamic.

Although, the more things changed, the more they stayed the same. Something about him at that moment was captivating and so unbelievably endearing to me. For Ledger to set aside his hatred and rivalry against my parents said a lot about the man standing beside me.

I wanted to continue to hate him, but he made it nearly impossible for me not to fall for him again. I needed to keep my emotions in check because this wasn’t just about me anymore. I had a new life growing inside me to consider, and I didn’t want to fuck things up for him or her. Even if it meant I had to put my emotions on the back burner.

We had to remain platonic for my sake and our kid. I refused to let him in more than I already had. I’d only end up



getting hurt, and I wouldn't survive it a third time.

As if reading my mind, he swept the hair away from my face to look deep into my eyes.

"I'll always do what's best for our baby, Hazel. No matter what, she comes first."

"She?" I smiled.

"Yeah." His hand moved to my belly. "I think it's a girl."

"What makes you think that?"

"Because you're glowing. You're fucking stunning, sugar. Pregnancy agrees with you."

I blushed, peering up at him through my long, dark lashes. "What does that have to do with it?"

"I heard that being pregnant with girls does that to the mother."

"You heard?"

"Mm-hmm..."

"That's an old wives' tale."

"We'll see."

"Are you ever going to tell me why you know so much about pregnancy?"

He grinned before setting his foot into the stirrup, pulling himself up onto Rebel. I backed away as he made a short click sound with his mouth, Rebel's command to move, and off they went. Watching Ledger ride was a turn-on in and of itself. Seeing him wearing his black cowboy hat, riding boots, flannel, and jeans did all sorts of things to my pussy.

I pointed at my core. "You need to stop that." Squirming, I shook it off until Ledger caught my attention again.

Riding along the fence, he trotted, jumping over a few fallen trees like it was the easiest thing in the world when it was far from it. The way Ledger could ride always impressed me. He was a sight for sore eyes.

With the breeze in his face and the sun on his skin, he was a vision. Exuding so much masculinity and dominance in a sexy and demanding way, he lured me without trying to, which wasn't lost on me. It was hard to describe what I felt for him at that moment.

I missed him.

I missed him so fucking much.

I loathed to admit that, but I couldn't lie anymore. The times I thought about him throughout the years were endless. Especially when I was with other men. It was one of the reasons I called off my engagement to Johnathan.

On paper, we were perfect for each other. He checked off every box and then some. We were together on and off for the past couple of years, and then, out of the blue, he asked me to marry him, and I said yes when I shouldn't have.

The morning of his proposal tore through my mind like the horse Ledger was riding.

*"I think it's time I knock you up with some kids?" Johnathan remarked, catching me off guard as I dressed for a meeting downtown.*

*"I was thinking maybe four or five? I was an only child, so I definitely want us to have a huge family."*

*I glanced over at him. "What?" I asked, stunned.*

*He reached into his pocket, pulling out what appeared to be a turquoise Tiffany jewelry box.*

*"Johnathan..."*

*"I've wanted to do this for a long time, Hazel. I've had this ring for over a year. I bought it after we got back together the last time, and I've been waiting for the right day to ask you."*

*He opened the box, and the biggest diamond I had ever seen sparkled bright against the light from the sun.*

*"Oh, wow..."*

*Within a second, he got down on one knee, and all I kept thinking was that I was basically naked, and he was proposing*

*with a ring that wasn't me. It had to be at least five karats, and that didn't count all the diamonds around it and on the band. It was an opal shape. I hated that shape.*

*"Hazel Blakely, I love you. Will you do me the honor of becoming my wife? Will you marry me, baby?"*

*I stared from the ring to him, then back to the ring again. My mind was a huge, jumbled mess. I didn't know what to say or what to do.*

*Shouldn't I just know? Wouldn't it be instinctual to say yes? Wasn't this what every girl wanted?*

*My heart beat rapidly, hammering in my head and making me feel dizzy. Light-headed.*

*"I don't—"*

*His eyes widened, and worry immediately flashed through his gaze.*

*"I..." I licked my lips, my mouth suddenly dry. "I..." I stammered once again.*

*"I. Love. You," he emphasized with a look of pure love and devotion, and I crumbled.*

*He was a good man.*

*He had always been there for me.*

*He loved me.*

*He would never hurt me.*

*I would be safe with him.*

*So I shut my eyes and said, "Yes."*

*Except when I did...*

*Why did I see the asshole Ledger's face?*

# SEVENTEEN

## LEDGER

A month had flown by since Hazel moved in with me. Thankfully, Felicia cleared her during her follow-up appointment. She was fine on returning to her normal routine, but she still needed to avoid stress. Except Hazel proved to be the worst patient and stubborn as all hell.

My amazing family came together to help us out. Everyone was thrilled about having a new baby in the family. Anytime I couldn't be with Hazel, they stepped up and kept her company so she wouldn't be alone. She was getting close to them once again, and I loved that for her. My family meant everything to me, and it was important that she feel a part of it. Especially since she didn't have her parents to share this special time with her.

Despite all of that, we settled into a pretty normal schedule. I made mine work in order to be there for her as much as I could. Our relationship was still touch-and-go; one day, we were fine, and the next, we were bickering about one thing or another, usually about her pregnancy and how she was determined to stay on top of her business.

Her involvement in her brand was admirable. She had a hardworking team and was adamant about remaining a big part of it. Everything had her approval. There wasn't one aspect of her business that she didn't know about. The way she balanced it all was incredible to watch.

She was a household name worldwide and committed to staying at the top. Hazel was a workaholic, the same way I was. Our work ethic was a lot alike, and it was nice to have that in common.

After I finished in the stables, I walked back to my house and straight up to my bedroom, wanting to get cleaned up. Walking past my balcony as I unbuttoned my jeans, I noticed

she was by the pool. She wore a bikini that looked too small for her breasts and ass.

Her tits basically spilled out of the top while she was on all fours on a pink yoga mat. She did it every night around this time. It was my favorite part of the day, and I'd be lying if I said I didn't return home just to watch her exercise. This was the first time she was doing it like this, though. It was usually in her tiny spandex shorts and sports bras that I'd love to see on my bedroom floor.

I couldn't help but smile, taking in her little bump. She was starting to show, and it was fucking adorable. She'd be all belly, and I couldn't wait to see her grow.

However, it wasn't until she leaned down with her ass directly in the air toward my face that I realized I had no choice with what happened next. My cock jolted and sprang up high, aching. My mouth went dry and parted slightly.

Her skin was flushed.

Her body and hair wet from the pool.

Her nipples poking through her triangle top, just waiting to be freed.

It didn't help that her stark-white bikini left nothing to the imagination. It was all string, and with her bent over, her bottoms turned into a thong. I could see her pussy perfectly.

I immediately envisioned gripping her hips and guiding her down on my cock. Her tan skin, her slender thighs, her round, plump ass... made me lose my control. I handed it right the fuck over to her.

Narrowing my eyes, I continued my visual assault, wanting to kiss my way toward her perfect cunt. My cock twitched at the thought of her riding my face.

"Fuck me," I stressed out in pain.

I'd memorized every curve of her body and every inch of her skin. Every part of her was now engrained in my memory. When she moaned in satisfaction of stretching her back, my hand slid down my jeans.

I stood on the back of the balcony in the shadow part where she couldn't see me. Before I knew what I was doing, I gripped my rock-hard cock, needing some fucking relief.

Within seconds, I stroked my shaft.

Watching the way her hips swayed.

The way her luscious tits stood at attention.

The way her sweet ass bounced up and down, imagining it was my cock she was riding. There I was, fucking my fist as if I was a teenage boy. Feening for her pussy.

I pumped my dick harder and faster, my hips moving in the opposite direction of my hand. Seeing her every move effortlessly through my dark, dilated, hooded gaze.

“Christ...” I groaned out a little too loudly on the edge of coming, but not quite there yet.

My chest was rising and falling with each drive of my hand, stroking my dick to the sight of her. I was getting harder and harder, the bulging head of my dick a bright fucking purple to the point of pain. I wanted to come so hard.

My eyes widened.

My breathing hitched.

My entire body shook.

She lay on her back, pulling her legs back toward her head, giving me the perfect sight of her pussy. The thin fabric of her see-through bikini made it easy to see everything.

It was the view I wanted.

Needed.

Craved.

Was her cunt in my face.

“Fuck...”

I bit my lower lip and came so fucking hard that I saw stars from an intense orgasm before I let out a long, deep breath, rasping, “I’m so fucked.”

## HAZEL

A familiar heavy presence filled my lungs, making it hard to breathe. Every emotion possible suddenly makes itself known throughout my body.

*Ledger?*

I subconsciously glanced up toward his bedroom balcony, thinking I saw him. Quickly noticing I did. Except I didn't expect he'd be watching me.

*Was he?*

I could only see a shadowy figure for a few seconds before it disappeared like he was hiding in the back against the wall next to the glass doors.

*What is he doing?*

My heart pounded out of my chest, and my mind ran wild. Every fiber of my being told me that's what he was doing, and the thought alone made me wet. Stirring a tingle between my thighs and in the core of my stomach. Now, the thought alone sent my overly sex-derived hormones into a sexual frenzy, thinking he was watching me.

The mere thought quickly took over my reasoning, and after I was done with my yoga, I went to the pool bathroom to shower and relieve this wicked ache in my pussy that only intensified with each passing second.

Ledger wasn't lying about pregnant women being extra horny. I'd never been hornier in all my life. All I could think about was sex, and I hadn't been with anyone since Ledger.

I threw off my bathing suit and turned on the shower as I stepped into the porcelain enclosure with the worst echo off the walls. Placing one of my hands on the tile, I glided the other down to where I wanted them the most.



I gave in to the temptation and allowed my imagination to take over. My fingers moved of their own accord, sliding across my hard nipples, calling out to be touched. I rolled them between my fingers, flicking and pinching the small pebbles just enough to set my body on fire.

I pictured Ledger watching me through bright green eyes. The eyes I couldn't get enough of. The tip of my tongue licked my dry lips, envisioning the way he stared at me as my ass was in the air for him.

With one hand kneading my breast, I slid the other slowly toward my belly button and down toward the top of my pussy. Caressing the lining of my soft, bare folds.

I was soaking wet.

*For him.*

I touched my clit, manipulating the bundle of nerves harder, faster, and with more urgency. I moaned, arching my head back. I closed my eyes, visualizing the way he might have felt, the way I may have turned him on.

Moving my fingers from my clit to the opening of my pussy, I pushed my middle finger in, adding my index finger shortly after. Easing in and out of my tight hole, I breathed heavier the closer I got to my climax.

I don't know when things took a drastic turn, but as I glided my fingers back to my clit, swaying my hips, I imagined I was riding his cock.

"Oh God," I panted, picturing his face as his dick slid in and out of me.

I swallowed hard, taking a deep, heady breath. Spreading my thighs wider, I hissed upon contact with my clit yet again. All the nerve endings on my nub were on high alert from my assault.

My eyes were half closed, my legs trembled the closer I got to just letting go, with the images of him touching me, caressing me, making me come...

*I did.*

Panting out, “Ledger...”

I came so hard I got light-headed and had to lean my forehead against the cool ceramic for support. I had to catch my bearings before I left the bathroom because there was no way in hell I’d let him see me like this. It was written clearly across my face, so there’d be no hiding it from him.

Not for one second.

He knew me too well.

I was quickly learning that there was no hiding from Ledger Beckham. At times, it felt like he knew me more than I knew myself, and we hadn’t seen each other for ten years up until a month ago. It was confusing and afflicting all at once.

As soon as I found my composure, I was about to step out of the shower when I heard footsteps receding, and I just knew he heard me not only fucking myself, but...

I called out his name as I came.

# EIGHTEEN

## LEDGER

“You nervous?” Chance asked, sitting in the seat by Felicia’s desk while I stood beside her as she lay on the examination table.

“A little bit,” she replied, inhaling a deep breath.

Hazel looked fucking radiant, glowing from the inside out. Pregnancy truly agreed with her. She’d never looked better, constantly taking my breath away with her beauty and swollen belly.

For the most part, her pregnancy was good to her, and she could keep food down now. She had all sorts of weird-ass cravings at all hours of the night. I didn’t know where the hell the food was going other than in her round bump. You couldn’t tell she was pregnant unless she turned to the side.

Crouching down onto the floor, I murmured for only her to hear, “Have I told you how beautiful you look today?”

She smirked. “Once or twice, but you can totally tell me again.”

I chuckled, kissing the side of her neck.

I didn’t want to waste any more time with her. The days of coming home late were over. I was home early every night to be with her, wanting her to know that they were both my priority.

Over the past month, things had changed between us. We weren’t nearly as bad as we were with the bickering. She slowly but surely let go of our past and looked forward to our future as a family. For the most part, our communication was open and honest. Her animosity for me seemed to be replaced with a new beginning of our relationship.

One thing was for sure, she was the love of my life.

Then, now, always.

“Hey!” Chance exclaimed, bringing our attention over to him.

“Can you stop flirting in front of me please?”

She snapped, “We’re not flirting.”

“Speak for yourself,” I added, and she eyed me skeptically.

“Listen,” Chance proclaimed. “Before I forget, I appreciate you two letting me be here.”

Hazel smiled. “Of course, you’re the uncle. I’m happy you were able to make it.”

He nodded at her stomach. “What do you think it is?”

“I don’t care.” She shrugged. “I’ll be happy with either.”

“Well, I think it’s a boy,” he remarked.

“You do?” she asked, taken aback. “Why?”

“Because it’s karma for lying to me all these years. You’re going to have a mini-Ledger with you at all times.”

Her eyes widened. “Oh man, I didn’t think about that.”

I chuckled. “Be careful what you wish for, Chance. He’ll have your genes too, and let me remind you, you’re still single for a reason.”

“Eh.”

I nodded. “Tell that to all the women you take to bed and then kick out.”

“I learned from the best.” He smiled. “What do you think the baby is?”

“I think it’s a girl, and I hope to God she’s a mini-Hazel. I’d love nothing more than to have her with me at all times.”

Our eyes connected.

I didn’t hide how I felt about her. She was aware of how much I still wanted her, but I didn’t push the subject. Despite what I told her, I had no plans to let her go again.

She was mine.

She just hadn't admitted it yet.

Felicia opened the door. "Hello, everyone."

After she set Hazel up, my heart started beating a mile a minute.

Seconds.

Minutes.

Hours could have gone by.

Until a loud, fast heartbeat filled the silence of the room.

"Are you ready to know what you're having?"

"Yes," we announced together.

To my surprise, Hazel grabbed my hand, holding it right against her.

"Congratulations, you two, you're having a baby girl."

Hazel burst into tears. Unable to keep it in, they poured out of her.

I couldn't resist when I rasped into her ear, "I told you."

Which only made her cry harder.

"I'm sorry," she apologized. "I don't know why I'm crying."

Felicia smiled. "You don't need to apologize. It happens all the time. This is a big moment in your pregnancy. It's normal to feel emotional about it."

Chance walked over to us. "You lucked out. Except she's screwed." He pointed at her belly. "With Ledger and me, she won't date until she's forty. Congratulations, though." He kissed Hazel's forehead and then looked at me. "I know we're not on the best terms right now, and I never thought I'd say this, but you've really stepped up for her, and I can't ignore that. You're going to make one hell of a father, and I've always thought of you like my brother and this baby girl truly makes us family, so what I'm trying to say is, I'm glad it's you who knocked her up."

I nodded, and he patted my back, squeezing my shoulder for a second.

I never thought I'd be in this situation, especially with my best friend's sister, but now, I couldn't imagine experiencing this with someone else. Not thinking twice about it, I leaned forward and softly pecked her lips. Catching her by surprise, she lightly gasped but didn't back away from me.

It was over far too soon, and I was the first to pull away...

Although it was the last thing I wanted to do.

## HAZEL

I'd be lying if I said I wasn't shocked he kissed me, and I'd be lying further if I said I didn't like it.

"Can I talk to Hazel alone for a minute?" Dr. Malone requested.

"Yeah," Ledger agreed. "I'm going to call my dad and let him know the news of having a granddaughter."

After Chance and Ledger excused themselves, Dr. Malone arched an eyebrow at me. "So tell me, how are things? How are you feeling?"

"I'm good, I think."

"How's your stress?"

"I'm handling it."

I must have made an odd expression because she questioned, "Your face says otherwise."

"Right... are you an OB-GYN or a therapist?"

"With this job, it comes with the territory."

I sighed deeply. "I think it's just that my hormones are all out of whack, and I'm trying to understand and keep up with all these emotions."

"That's perfectly normal. You're growing a new life inside you. You're allowed to feel all over the place."

"Is it... I mean... is..."

"It's okay." She smiled. "Whatever you say to me stays between us."

"I was just going to ask if it's normal that I'm in the mood to, you know..." I wiggled my eyebrows. "All the time?"

She called me out, "Have sex?"

"Yes." I blushed. "That."



“It’s absolutely normal,” she affirmed. “I remember with both my pregnancies I wanted to jump my husband’s bones most of the time. He couldn’t keep up with my constant demands, but he never complained, and I’m sure Ledger wouldn’t either.”

“Yeah... it’s not like that between us. We’re just co-parenting.”

“Does he know that?”

“What do you mean?”

“He’s obviously in love with you.”

“No.” I shook my head. “We’ve just known each other forever, and that’s what you’re picking up on.”

“Hazel.” She stood, hovering over me. “Very few men attend these appointments with their spouses. Usually, they only come for the gender reveal and the sonogram to see the baby if they choose that obsession.”

“He’s just controlling like that.”

“Listen, you know him better than I do, but I know what love looks like, and Ledger is head over heels for you.”

I bowed my head, feeling the weight of her statement.

“But whatever you decide to do is up to you. In the meantime, maybe you can use Ledger to work out some of that eagerness.”

I laughed. “I think that would just confuse things more between us.”

“Sex is good for the baby.”

“That’s not what I was referring to.”

“I know.” She squeezed my hand. “I’m just giving you something to think about. It’s also a good way to relieve stress, so it’s doctor approved.”

“Are you saying it’s doctor’s orders to have sex with him?”

“Do you want me to say it’s doctor’s orders?”

I laughed again, appreciating how easy it was to talk about that. I didn't have anyone I could open up to, and it was nice that she was a mutual person and her feedback wasn't jaded by one of us.

Once we were back in Ledger's truck, I couldn't stop thinking about what Dr. Malone suggested. It replayed in my mind until we were home and in the kitchen.

*Did I just think his house was my home?*

Ledger interrupted my train of thought. "You alright over there?"

Before I could second-guess myself, I blurted...

"What do you think about us being co-parents with benefits?"

# NINETEEN

## HAZEL

He cocked his head to the side, narrowing his gaze at me, immediately making me regret my question.

“Never mind.” I sternly shook my head. “Forget I said anything.” I turned to leave, but he grabbed my arm and held me back, making me look at him.

I never imagined I’d take it this far, which was my first mistake. Ledger always got what he wanted, except this time, it was all me, and all I craved was his cock.

I anxiously spun back around, trying to play it off like I wasn’t losing my shit.

*These damn hormones!*

Peering deep into my eyes, he declared, “Sugar, we’re so much more than just co-parents.”

My lips parted. “That’s what you reply?”

He grinned. “Are your fingers getting tired of doing what I should be?”

I sucked in a breath.

“Or is it that you want the real thing instead of just screaming out my name?”

I gasped. “I knew you were at the door!”

He mischievously smiled. “Don’t worry, sugar. You weren’t doing anything I didn’t do minutes before you.”

“That was you on the balcony?”

“You knew I was there?” His eyebrows pinched together. “Were you putting on a show for me?”

I smirked. “I may have been a bit more sexual in my stretches than what I normally do.”

“I’m not complaining,” he beamed, looking irresistible. “Besides, I would have fucked my fist to you just wearing that tiny bikini.”

I licked my lips, and he followed the movement of my tongue.

“I swear you’re enjoying this,” I whispered.

He leaned closer to my mouth. “I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t.”

Feeling ballsy, I reminded, “You still haven’t answered my question.”

He thought about it for a second. “What do you want me to say? That I’d love to be your fuck buddy?”

“That’s a start.”

He playfully baited, “You horny, sugar?”

“I think that’s pretty obvious now.”

“Yeah,” he enticed. “Well, I want to hear you say it.”

I felt like I would explode. “Ledger…”

With a wicked grin, he recalled, “I told you I wouldn’t lay a finger on you until you begged me to, and I’m a man of my word.”

“Don’t I know it. In my defense, you started it.”

“Oh, it’s my fault you want to ride my dick?”

“You kissed me today.”

“I was celebrating.”

“By kissing me?”

“It felt right at that moment.”

“What about this moment?”

“There’s nothing I won’t give you.” He touched my stomach. “Either of you.”

“I don’t need any of that stuff. I can—”

“Then what do you need, Hazel?”

I didn't know how to respond, so I didn't.

“At some point, you'll have to forgive me. Because I'll tell you right now, I don't regret getting you pregnant, and if you'd let me, I'd do it again.”

“If you keep saying stuff like that to me—”

“You'll what? Admit you're still in love with me?”

I kept his intense gaze, once again announcing, “I don't love you, Ledger. How many times do I have to say it for you to believe me?”

He stubbornly challenged, “I'm not the one who needs to believe it. You may hate me, I'll give you that, but the truth is, you also still love me. It's a very thin line, you and I.”

“You know what?”

“What, baby?”

I snapped, “I fucking hate you.”

“Great.” He deviously smiled. “Now say it again until you believe it.”

I could feel his heat searing into my body. I couldn't take it anymore—it was all too much to process. I felt as if I was that eighteen-year-old girl all over again, completely at his mercy. Exactly how I craved.

He skimmed the inside of my thigh, my dress making it easy for him to do so.

I froze, locking eyes with him.

I cleared my throat, trying to steady my voice. “You're obviously ignoring what's blatantly in front of your face.”

He looked me up and down. “Sweetheart, you're the only one who's in my face right now.” Slowly, he slid his fingers higher. “What do you want to do about that?”

I had nowhere to go.

I could barely move.

“Because I can think of plenty of things to do with your sweet little mouth that loves to push all my buttons.”

“Beckham...”

“So I’m Beckham when my hand is near your pussy?” His pupils dilated, dark and daunting. “You’re not going anywhere unless I want you to.”

“You can’t keep doing this to me.”

“What’s that? Making you wet?”

“Ledger—”

“Oh, now I’m suddenly Ledger again?” With an arrogant smile, he called my bluff and my body’s natural reaction to him while his fingers caressed back and forth on the soft skin of my bare thighs.

My breathing elevated, simply proving to him that I was full of shit.

Reading my mind yet again, he added, “You can keep lying to yourself all you want, Hazel, but I know the truth. I can see it in your eyes, I can hear it in your voice, and I feel it”—he finally touched my core through the silk of my panties—“on your pussy.”

I sucked in another breath, leaning into his touch.

“You can think I’m an asshole for it, but I honestly don’t give a fuck. I’ve lost ten years with you, and I plan to make up for it. Even if it takes me the rest of our lives, I’ll prove to you how much I regret hurting you the way I did. I make no excuses for how I behaved. I was painfully wrong, and I know that now. I need you to understand how much I need you in my life. All I want, all I’m hoping for, is for us to be a family for our baby girl. With two parents who love each other and will give her the world.”

“You’re not being fair.”

“There’s nothing fair about this.”

My thighs clenched, hearing his retort. Using my defenses against me, he started rubbing my clit.

“What’s wrong, sugar? Where’s your smart-ass mouth? Huh? Where’s my tough city girl now? I guess she’s not so

strong when she wants something from me, knowing I'm the only man who can give it to her."

Hating his overinflated ego, I argued, "Plenty of men have given it to me."

He loudly growled from deep within his chest, continuing his sweet torture on my nub. I was so unbelievably torn between what was right and wrong. I may have hated him, but my body seemed to love him.

I needed him to hear it. "I'm not yours, and I never will be."

"Fine," he bit in a hard-edged tone. "I'll just own your pussy in the meantime because I have no intention of letting you leave *our home*."

"I don't care what your intentions are. I'm leaving after the baby is born."

"We'll see," he mocked in a condescending tone. "Home is where the heart is, and your heart belongs to me." Pushing my panties to the side, he slid two fingers inside me, and I didn't hesitate to ride his hand.

"Ahhhh..." I panted, knowing this wouldn't take long.

When his finger glided back to my clit, I released a heady moan, my body once again betraying my mind. His predatory regard watched my every move in a primal way. There was so much emotion behind his penetrating stare, and I was aware it probably mirrored mine, further proving his point that I truly was his. At that moment, there was no need for words. Our eyes spoke for themselves as his fingers began to really caress me.

My mouth parted, and he placed his forehead on top of mine, his lips inches away from my mouth.

I could feel his erection.

Inhale his musky scent.

He backed me against the kitchen counter, and I was a little worried that Adele would walk in and see us, but my sense was long gone, and in its place was my need for him.



I felt him everywhere, and all he did was rub my clit. His fingers were soft yet demanding, controlling yet eager, and so fucking consuming. He broke my heart, but a huge part of me felt like it didn't matter—this man owned my soul.

Completely.

Looking into his eyes, I erratically breathed out, "Ledger." Trying to catch my next breath.

My thoughts.

My words.

They all seemed to be intertwined with one another.

I shuddered against him, melting into his touch, wanting to kiss him.

*Why isn't he kissing me?*

I refused to demand it.

His rough, callused fingers played me like he knew my body more than I did. I hadn't been with anyone since the night we made our baby girl, so to have him in this way again was a whirlwind of emotions and consequences.

*I mean, can it get any worse?*

I was already pregnant with his kid.

"Fuck, you're so wet," he drawled in a husky tone. "Your pussy is always so responsive for me. I love that about you."

*Did he just say he loved me?*

I refused to ask that too.

"Fuck my hand, sugar." Curving his fingers toward my G-spot, he rhythmically stimulated it in a come-hither motion. I began to rock against him as he increased his speed. Harder, faster, he simply manipulated me. It seemed like no man knew my body quite like Ledger, and it was insane because we'd only had sex a couple of times that night. It didn't make any sense.

I was losing control, willingly handing it over to him like I did all those years ago in his bedroom. I wouldn't make it out

alive this time, so I had to guard my heart from him.

Even if I didn't want to.

Even if it didn't feel right.

Even if it meant I'd lose him all over again.

He'd forever be the father of my child, but this was where it ended with us. It's just sex. He's just getting me off.

Nothing more.

Nothing less.

"I'm still waiting for you to beg," he urged.

"Please," I shamelessly begged. "Make me come, Ledger. I want to come so bad..."

He released another growl from deep within his chest, vibrating against my breasts. He was openly sharing everything I always wanted to see.

His love.

His devotion.

His regret.

It poured out of him, and I had to close my eyes.

*Don't fall for his trap.*

Softly, he rubbed his lips against my mouth. "Before us in New York. When's the last time someone touched your pussy?"

"Really?" I groaned. "You want to talk about that right now?"

"I can't think of a better time than now." He fucked me faster with his fingers, and I rode him harder. Seeking relief.

"I don't know... it's been... a while."

I didn't have to open my eyes to know he wore a wide smile.

"How many men have you been with?"

“I’m... not...” He worked me over fervently. “Jesus... that feels amazing...”

“I’m not a patient man. You need to answer before I stop.”

My eyes snapped open. “You wouldn’t.”

“Try me.”

“Oh... God...” My eyes rolled to the back of my head. “None of... oh fuck... your business...” I bit my bottom lip, feeling my legs quiver and my pussy pulsate. “Don’t ask questions... you don’t want... answers to.”

“Is that right?” he breathed out into the side of my neck, making shivers crawl up my skin and throughout my whole body. “You’re not being a good girl.” Before I could react, he slapped my pussy hard, and my body jolted forward.

“Tell me, or I’ll stop and leave you like this. Don’t fuck with me, Hazel.”

“Ugh.” My head fell back for a second. “Including you, like a handful.”

His eyes glazed over with a destructive regard that made my stomach flutter from the intensity.

He leaned forward, close to my mouth. “I’m going to fuck the memory of them out of you. Do you understand me?” His fingers slid back inside me, making my back arch. “Did they make you come?”

“Sometimes,” I reluctantly admitted, hanging on by a thread.

“I’m the only man who knows where and how to touch you. I know how to lick you and how hard to fuck you.” His voice was laced with nothing but possession. “You’re mine, sugar. Just admit it.”

I whimpered into his mouth, but he quickly sat me up on the kitchen island, repositioning his face between my legs. I just about came undone when I felt his tongue on my clit—licking, sucking, tasting. Devouring me.

“Say it,” he demanded between eating and finger fucking me. “Who do you belong to?”

“Not a chance in hell.”

Profoundly, he snarled, for a much different reason that time. “You don’t have to say it, sugar. Not when your squirting pussy will do it for you.”

“Ledger...” I let go, coming all over his face and hand.

After I was done riding the high that was Ledger Beckham, he looked into my eyes as he stood and licked his fingers clean.

I reached for his jeans, and to my complete and utter dismay, he stopped me.

“What are you—”

“That was just for you, Hazel.”

“But I want to return the favor.”

“Don’t worry. Your come in my mouth already did that for you.”

He backed away, leaving me senseless and blown away.

“Does this mean we’re co-parents with benefits now?”

“No, sweetheart.” With a cunning smile on his handsome face, he spoke with conviction.

“We’re soulmates.”

TWENTY

## LEDGER

Stepping out of my truck with flowers in my grasp, I made my way to my mother's gravesite. I stopped by to see her at least once a week, spending as much time as I could talking to someone who physically wasn't there, but it felt like she was spiritually.

Once I stood in front of her tombstone, I swept away the leaves from the trees with my hand. I immediately sensed her presence watching over me. I needed someone to talk to, even if she couldn't talk back. Over the years, she became my only confidant. I was able to speak freely without having to worry about the repercussions of my honesty.

She knew everything that happened between Hazel and me. I never kept it from her. I couldn't. I had to tell someone, and she was the only person I trusted with the truth of my guilt and regret.

After cleaning up her site, I acknowledged, "It's been over ten years since you left this world. I miss you. I miss you so much." I bowed my head and closed my eyes briefly before peering back at the gray granite headstone.

It didn't get easier, and it quickly became apparent that it never would. This was forever my life without her in it. At times, her funeral felt like it was yesterday.

I took a deep, sturdy breath, breathing in through my nose and out through my mouth.

"I'm trying to put the pieces of my life back together, Mom, but it's so hard without you. My baby girl will be born in three months, and she'll never meet you. I think about that all the time. The things she'll miss out on—like your turkey at Thanksgiving and your birthday cakes that tasted better than anything you could ever buy. She'll miss the way you used to sing us to sleep and let us read as many bedtime stories as we wanted because you loved being our mother."

An unexpected shiver ran down my spine from the sudden breeze. Almost like she was making her presence known. She was there for me, comforting me the only way she could now.

“I love you so much,” I whispered into the misty air. “For a long time, I didn’t know who I was anymore. Between losing Hazel and then you, it was so hard for me to accept either of you being gone and out of my life forever. It was one of the hardest things I’ve ever had to go through alone. I know I had my siblings, but they were going through their own despair, and I didn’t want to add mine to their grief. It wasn’t fair, but none of this is fair. Now, is it?”

With a solemn expression, I placed the flowers beside her tombstone before I rubbed my fingers over her engraved name.

“Now that Hazel is back in my life, though, I couldn’t imagine my life without her in it. I know she’ll always be the mother of my child, but I want all of her. Wake up to her in the morning and fall asleep with her at night. I want a life with her. We’re in this confusing place where she’s let me in certain aspects of her life and even in her bed... or should I say my bed? While others, she’s pushed me away entirely. Her guard is so thick I don’t know if I’ll ever be able to break it down.” I paused for a second, trying to gather my thoughts.

“I won’t lose her again, Mom. I can’t. She’s mine; a huge part of me realizes she’s always been mine. We were so young, and I wanted to do right by my best friend, yet all I did was make myself miserable for the last decade. You know... I wish every day that you were still here with us. I pray that you’ve found peace and are proud of us. None of us want to disappoint you, Mom. You were such an important part of our lives, and that hasn’t faded.”

The scent of her flowers blew through the air.

“Hazel acts like she hates me, but I can see it in her eyes. The love that she still has for me, it’s there, breathing this new life into me. I want to be the best father I can. I want to do right by both of them, but I have no idea how I’ll get her to trust me again. Sometimes it feels like she wants to but can’t,

and I don't blame her. I deserve her hatred. She knows how I feel. Except I haven't told her I'm in love with her. I think it would scare her away, but it's getting harder not to express how I feel when she's right there... right in front of me." I sighed, rubbing the back of my neck.

"You think maybe you could help me with her, Mom? Time's flying by, and Hazel is now six months pregnant. Soon, she'll be in her third trimester, and before we know it, our baby girl will be here. In our arms, in our lives. She's all belly, Mom, and so fucking adorable. Although she's starting to feel uncomfortable in her own body. She even has a cute ass waddle that I love seeing. Just thinking about her makes me smile. Pregnancy really does agree with her. Every day, she blossoms right before my eyes, and I've loved every second of experiencing this miracle with her." I nodded, swallowing hard.

"I want to believe our baby was made out of love. That we had so much love between us that we made this baby out of it. Is that possible? Is that even a thing? I don't know. It feels like it is, though. Anyway..." I kicked around my feet.

"I promise I'll be the man and father you want me to be. My baby girl is all that matters to me outside of her mother. You should see Dad, Mom, but you probably already are. I haven't seen him this happy in a long time. She's your first grandchild, and I hope to give you many more with Hazel." I smiled. "Listen, I'd appreciate any help you can give me with her. I came to see you the night before I flew out to New York, telling you how hard it would be to be in her city and not see her. And then, out of the blue, there she was. I know you did that for me. For us. I can feel it. Thank you for bringing her back into my life, and I swear to you, I'll never hurt her again if she gives me another chance."

Another chill blew through the air.

"She's the love of my life like you were Dad's. I just need a sign, Mom. I need some reassurance that I'm getting through to her. Can you give me one? I'm hanging on by a thread, and I need to know that we'll be together as a family in the end."



I kissed her tombstone one last time.

“I should head back home. I just wanted to stop by and see you. Tell you how much I love and miss you.”

I stood, backing away. It was always difficult to leave her there. Worried she was alone waiting for us.

On the drive back to my house, I thought about the past six months. Overnight, my world completely changed, and I couldn't be more grateful for it. I was given a second chance, and there was no way I was fucking it up.

Anytime Hazel needed me in any way, I was at her disposal. We hadn't had sex, but that didn't stop me from giving her pleasure. I made her come so many times since we began whatever we were doing in the past four weeks, I lost count. Things had changed again between us, and we were in this limbo place that was driving me to the brink of insanity.

I hated feeling so out of control. I was still sleeping on the couch in my room while she slept on the bed. I wouldn't sleep next to her until she asked me to, and she hadn't yet.

As I walked into the house, I put my reckless thoughts on hold when I saw her sitting on the couch by herself on the phone.

“Yes,” she snapped. “I needed those samples to be delivered last week, not this weekend. The fall launch is just around the corner, and I have yet to approve one piece of the designs you were responsible for.” She paused. “No! I don't care about your excuses. If I don't get samples by tomorrow, you're fucking fired.” She hung up as I walked toward her.

“Rough day?”

She jumped, turning with her hand over her heart. “You just scared the shit out of me!”

“Have I told you how sexy you are when you're being the boss?”

She scoffed. “I hate not meeting deadlines. And the worst part is she knows that.”

“Anything I can help with?”

“No but thank you for asking. That helps.”

Without thinking twice about it, I pulled her into a tight hug. “I’m sorry you’re having a bad day.”

At first, she froze but quickly eased into my embrace.

“I fucking missed you.”

She giggled in that cute-as-shit sort of way when I started to rub my facial hair all over her neck.

“Why don’t you make your man a drink?”

“Okay.” She nodded, sidestepping me. “I’ll go find him.”

I chuckled, gripping and tugging her against my chest before wrapping my arms around her from behind. “You mad because I didn’t say please? But look at you, all barefoot and pregnant, just how I want you.”

“You’re such an asshole!” She laughed, swatting me away. Her weak efforts to get free were no match for me.

I spanked her ass, letting her go. “And that’s why you love me.”

She rolled her eyes, shaking her head as she walked over to the bar in the corner of the room. I watched the way she perfectly swayed her ass—fully aware she was doing it for my benefit.

“I’m going to take a quick rinse. I’ll be right back.”

After I finished, I threw on a pair of gym shorts and found her sitting in the living room with my drink on the coffee table. Her tits were getting bigger by the day, showing through the thin white fabric of her tank top.

“No bra today? Are you doing that for me too?”

“Hardly. I need to go buy new ones. Mine don’t fit anymore.”

“You think maybe it’s time to buy some maternity clothes?”

She snickered. “Not until I come out with my own next summer.”

I smiled. “Am I getting you pregnant next summer too?”

She scoffed out a nervous chuckle, realizing what she just said.

“I meant... I mean... I...”

It was my turn to chuckle, sipping on my whiskey. “Don’t worry, sugar. I have no problem with knocking you up again.”

She kept my sincere expression for a moment before sitting in the farthest seat away from me.

“Why so far away?”

Ignoring my question, she grabbed the stack of mail on the end table that Adele left for us every day.

“What’s this?” she asked, trying to hide her amusement with this conversation.

“Exactly what it looks like.”

She beamed. “These are baby magazines.”

“I thought we could look through them together.”

“You subscribed to these?”

I nodded. “Since the baby will be here soon, I thought we could figure out what to do with her bedroom.”

“What?” Her eyebrows pinched together.

“You heard me.”

Her stare wandered from one magazine to the next, biting on her bottom lip to suppress her excitement. For the next hour, we found what we liked and didn’t until, out of nowhere, she loudly gasped, placing her hand on her belly.

My heart dropped to the ground, thinking something was wrong, but when I set my hand on her stomach as well, I felt baby girl kick. It was the first time we did, and the rush of emotions that followed for us both was evident on our faces.

“Hallie,” she murmured to her belly, catching me off guard.

“Hallie?” I repeated my mother’s name.

“Yeah.” She beamed, glancing my way. “I don’t know why I just said that—it just came out, Ledger.”

As if baby girl understood, she kicked again.

I was at a loss for words. “You want to name her after my mom?”

“I think she wants us to name her after your mom.”

With wide eyes, I expressed, “I’d love nothing more than to name our baby girl after my mom.”

She nodded. “I can’t think of a better woman to name her after, Ledger.”

I crouched down on the floor to kiss her stomach.

“Hallie,” I whispered, rubbing my lips against Hazel’s silky soft skin. She smelled of cocoa butter and sunscreen. My favorite scents.

“I love you so much.”

There was no chance this wasn’t my mom’s doing. I asked her for a sign...

And I couldn’t think of a better one than this.

TWENTY-ONE

## HAZEL

I wasn't sure if I could handle all these new emotions Ledger opened up inside me. Each day brought on more guarded feelings in ways I never thought possible. I was officially in my third trimester, and Hallie had made her presence known. I was getting to the point of not being able to get out of bed or off the couch by myself, needing more help from Ledger or his family.

My parents still didn't know I was pregnant, and honestly, I didn't miss them or care that they weren't involved. There were days when I felt like stepping over the invisible line of Ledger's and my relationship, continuing to battle my heart over my mind.

We spent a lot of time together, learning something new about each other with each passing day. It was interesting to peel back the different layers that made Ledger Beckham.

What made him happy.

What made him smile.

What made him laugh.

And one of my personal favorites, what made him horny, which happened to be my pregnant belly. The fact that I felt as big as a house and still turned him on surprised me.

I'd never seen a bond like the one he had with his family. They were all extensions of one another, and I often felt like I was part of their tight unit. Ledger insisted that I was, and I could feel it. They did love me, treating me as if I were one of their own, and I truly cherished that. His father was definitely his role model, and I realized that the more I was around them.

Then there was *me*...

Ledger was like Jekyll and Hyde. He was very charming yet an asshole when he wanted to be. He loved playing with

my hair or rubbing my back and feet. Pretty much anything that involved his hands on me.

He was extremely bright and knew all sorts of random facts about anything and everything. He actually enjoyed watching the news, Discovery, or History channel, saying it was good to know what was happening in the world. He hated the unexpected and had to be in control all the time.

One thing was for sure, the more I was around him, the more I wanted to be around him. He made me feel safe, and for the first time in a long time, I wasn't lonely anymore. Don't get me wrong, I always had my brother, but he had his own life, and we lived in different states. I had friends in New York, but they were mostly acquaintances.

My career was basically my whole world, and I was fine with that. Before getting pregnant, it was my only baby, and I couldn't tell you how relieved I was that being pregnant didn't mess up my work ethic. Yes, sometimes I experienced mom brain, but it was for random-ass things. Like going to the kitchen for a glass of water and forgetting what I was there for. Or where I left my keys or cell phone when they were actually in my hands.

Ledger loved picking on me when that happened. He enjoyed torturing me with his relentless flirting.

"Where are we going?" I asked as he was driving toward I don't know where.

"What part of surprise did you not understand?"

He loved to do this too, surprising me with all sorts of stuff. Bringing me flowers every week had become part of his routine. When I called him out on it, he simply said, "I like seeing you smile."

Reaching over, he grabbed my hand and set it on his lap. Every time we were in his truck, my hand sat pretty on his thigh. He'd rub his fingers back and forth on my hand or sometimes just tap it to the beat of the music playing through the speakers.

He always found a way to have his hands on me in one way or another. At times, it was subtle—his arm on the back of my chair or rubbing my shoulder with his thumb. Or when we were deep in discussion, he'd play with the ends of my hair, listening to every word that came out of my mouth with an intense stare. Or he'd draw pictures on my arm with his finger and make me guess what it was.

All of this just made me miss his touch when we weren't together, which I knew was his purpose in getting me used to his affection. Another personal favorite of mine was when we'd be around other people, and he'd stand behind me while I sat so he could rub the back of my neck by my hairline.

I'd often catch his brothers or sister looking over with amused expressions. However, Haven never seemed fazed by the attention he gave me. She and I became great friends right away. I never felt like she was years younger than me. If anything, she acted much older than her eighteen years of age.

I also grew close to Jace's fiancée, Cove. They were both best friends and added me to their group immediately. We got along really well. Haven's boyfriend, Hayes, who she was living with, owned the downtown bar, The Outlaw. We went there regularly. Haven was the bar manager and helped him run things.

It was super successful, and you could tell they had a great relationship. It was obvious how much they loved each other. Jace was as obsessed with Cove, and they were just as cute together.

What I found fascinating was how different they were despite being siblings. Five guys and one girl and up until Hayes, Haven caught me up on how much they babied her throughout the years. Telling me she wished I'd been around to help her with them.

*I wish that too.*

“Are you kidnapping me?” I smirked, trying to get a rise out of him, which I enjoyed as well.



Ledger could go from zero to a hundred, especially when it came to me.

“Can’t kidnap the willing.”

We drove for almost two hours before he got off on an exit.

“Okay, now you really got me. Where are we going?”

He winked at me. “You’ll find out when we get there.”

About thirty minutes later, he pulled into what appeared to be a ranch.

“Umm... what are we doing here?”

He parked his truck and then showed me a blindfold.

“I’m going to need you to put this on.”

“But for real? Are you kidnapping me?”

“I wouldn’t bring you here if I was.”

“Oh, so you’ve thought about it?”

With a cunning grin, he replied, “Once or twice.”

“How noble of you.”

“It’s just my plan B.”

I jerked back. “What’s plan A?”

“If I told you”—he kissed my lips, joking—“I’d have to kill you.”

He did this a lot now, kissing me whenever he wanted. We weren’t together in that way, but I never stopped him. I liked his mouth on mine.

*A lot.*

“Well, I am pregnant with your baby.”

“So you see my predicament?”

“I do. Quite a bind you’re in.”

He smiled. “Try to leave me and see what happens.”

I rolled my eyes. “Ledger, you know I’m moving back to New—”

He opened his door, cutting me off. “We have to go, or we’re going to be late, and you know I hate being late.”

I followed him out, and he reached for my hand. At the last second, I tried to pull it away.

“Sugar, I’m going to blindfold you. I need to help you walk, or you could hurt yourself. We’re going to be treading through some dirt, and I don’t want you falling.”

“Is that why you made me wear cowboy boots?”

“That, and I wanted to see the girl I grew up with. The one who was my best friend.”

“I thought Chance was your best friend?” I reluctantly shook my head. “And I’m not your girl.”

“I’ll remember that tonight when you’re coming in my mouth.”

My eyes widened.

“You’ve fucked my face too many times to still blush like that.”

“Okay...” I looked away. “On that note, let’s see this surprise.”

He chuckled, wrapping the blindfold over my eyes and then grabbing my hand again before leading the way.

He always knew what I was feeling.

What I wasn’t.

What I wanted to.

It was like he had a sixth sense when it came to me. He was unbelievably perceptive. At first, I thought it was only me, but I quickly learned he was like that with everyone. You couldn’t keep anything from him.

Over time, I quickly realized he didn’t just want to know me...

He wanted to *own* me.

Squeezing my hand in a comforting gesture, he continued to lead the way, telling me where to step until we suddenly stopped walking. I struggled like hell to let go of the resolve I had held on to since I moved in with him. To bring down the wall I'd built so high, so thick with him. I remembered spending hours thinking about the connection we shared growing up, the intensity of it, the way he looked at me, the way he spoke to me, the way he listened, every smile, every laugh. Every word that fell from his lips meant something.

It didn't matter how big or how small.

It was there.

Etching its way into my heart where no one could ever come close to it.

Not that I had ever let them.

For some reason, I wrapped my arms around our baby girl. My mind was running a marathon, trying to figure out where we were and why we were there to begin with.

“You ready, sugar?”

I nodded.

After he untied my blindfold, I blinked a few times to adjust to the afternoon sun. Once I could see clearly, I realized what my surprise was.

“Oh my God!”

I didn't hesitate to rush over to my horse, Daisy. She instantly neighed, bucking her feet. Just as happy to see me as I was to see her.

“Hi, my girl...” I rubbed all around her face with mine. “I've missed you so much.”

We stayed there for a couple of minutes, getting reacquainted with one another before Ledger announced, “We'll take her.”

Our eyes locked.

He shook hands with a man I didn't even notice until that moment. I was too overwhelmed with seeing her again.

“Sounds great!” the man exclaimed. “We can deliver her to your ranch tomorrow morning.”

My mouth dropped open. “You bought my horse back for me?”

He said, “I like to see you smile.”

They turned, going about their business as I stood there stunned with Daisy in my arms. I couldn’t believe he did this for me.

*How did he even find her?*

And where did we go...

From here.

TWENTY-TWO

## HAZEL

“Thank you so much, Ledger.”

We were almost back home.

*Shit! Stop thinking this is your home, Hazel.*

I watched him from afar without him noticing as he drove back to his ranch. We didn't talk much until that point. I was too shocked, and I couldn't form words. I needed time to think, and still, I didn't know what to focus my attention on the most. Question after question tore through my mind at rapid *speed*.

*Where do I keep her after I move back to New York? What did this mean? Why did he do it?*

And the most persistent one.

*Are you still in love with him?*

He kissed my hand.

“How did you find her?”

“It wasn't easy, that's for sure, but I was able to track her down for you.”

“I can't believe you did that for me.”

“I'm one of a kind, sugar.”

“I need to take care of some things for the ranch.” He nodded to his house as he pulled into the garage. “You go in without me. I'll be back in a bit.”

“Okay.”

I went inside and walked through his house, but I took it all in for the first time. From his furniture to all the photos on the walls. I couldn't believe how many pictures I was in, which made me realize how much I was still in his life even when I wasn't. He had me there in the only way he could, through the memories of our childhood.

There I was in New York, desperately trying to forget him while he was on his ranch in Wyoming, desperately trying to keep me in his life as if he never kicked me out of it.

The irony was not lost on me.

I was pitifully keeping my feelings in check. However, it was becoming harder every second. His ranch was starting to feel like my home.

*He was starting to feel like my home.*

This house wasn't mine.

*He wasn't mine.*

The side of him he was openly showing me, I didn't think he had it in him. Not in my wildest dreams did I think I'd witness a man more in love with his daughter than he was. Now that we knew it was a girl, he talked about her all the time. He was such a doting father, and she wasn't even born yet.

I couldn't ignore that.

I couldn't ignore *him*.

His family was just as consumed and excited with our baby girl as we were. I thought about that evening when we told them about her name at his dad's house. Everyone was there, including Chance.

*"We'd like to introduce to you to"—Ledger rubbed my belly—"Hallie Beckham."*

*Haven burst into tears while his dad's eyes rimmed with them.*

*Jace pulled him into a tight hug first. "I can't think of a better name for her, man. Mom would be so happy. She'd be so fucking proud of you."*

*I wiped away a few tears of my own.*

*Chance embraced him next. "That's a damn good name if I've ever heard one."*

*His father was the last to hug him, and the moment he wrapped his arms around his neck, he broke down, crying into his son's chest. It was one of the most beautiful things I'd ever witnessed, and I thanked my lucky stars that our baby girl would be born into this loving family.*

Right then and there, I knew this might not have been planned, but Hallie wasn't a mistake or an accident...

She was a blessing.

For all of us in similar ways.

It was the first time since his mom passed away that I felt her there with us. Her presence filled the room as if she were standing there, alive and present. It was the craziest sensation, and by the expressions on everyone's faces, they felt it too.

Ledger's family stopped by at least a couple of times a week, and I was getting used to being part of their closeness. Our baby girl would be so loved, and despite the way we hooked up, I couldn't imagine a better family for her to be born in.

At least I did something right by her.

I couldn't stop thinking about what would happen after I moved back to New York and how much it would impact their relationship with her. I wanted her to have her family near, and I considered buying my own place and maybe splitting my time in both states. Now that I had my horse, I was pushed in that direction.

*I can't stay here with Ledger, can I?*

I had my own private plane, so I could easily make it work. It was only a three-hour plane ride. We weren't that far from each other, or it was what I kept telling myself. As the delivery date neared, I feared for the future. I didn't want to fuck this up.

Especially for her.

Despite the fact that he gave me pleasure whenever I wanted, we hadn't had sex. Not that I didn't want to, but he wouldn't. He said what he was doing to me was enough for



him. Although, he always jumped in the shower after, and I was aware of what he was doing in there. The thought alone would turn me on all over again.

I knew the layout of his house like the back of my hand. My feet gravitated toward the room closest to ours as if a string pulled me. We spoke about this being the nursery.

I didn't fight it. I went willingly, not sure what to expect or why I was being yanked in that direction, but I needed to find out, nonetheless. Nothing could stop my feet from moving toward that room, spending hours upon hours looking through magazines and catalogs, wanting to make it absolutely perfect for her.

"Oh my God," I breathed out, stopping dead in my tracks when standing in front of the room that was supposed to be Hallie's nursery.

Everything was already there, and I had no idea when he made this happen or how it was even delivered, and I didn't notice until this very second. The room had everything we wanted, from the color of the walls, which were already painted a soft pastel pink, to the crib that needed to be put together, and the accents for decorations, a changing table, as well as the scattered stuffed animals on the floor.

The room still needed to be put together, but everything we wanted awaited us. Our theme was light rose gold with cowgirl touches. Not one thing was missing.

I couldn't breathe.

I couldn't move.

I could barely even stand.

My eyes pooled with tears, taking in the memories flooding my mind. Each one unfolded in front of me, playing out one by one as I made my way around the room. My fingers lightly skimmed everything, needing to make sure it was real and not a figment of my imagination.

My mind played tricks on me.

*“Sugar, baby girl’s room cannot just be pink,” Ledger exclaimed, looking at my iPad screen of what I was thinking.*

*“Why? Pink is a solid color, and it’s not even the same pink. It’s a different shade.”*

*“I like this one.” He pointed at the cream rocker.*

*“We can add cream tones.”*

*“What about this one?”*

*“No, I don’t like that shade of pink.”*

*“It’s the same shade of the pink you want for the walls.”*

*“No, this has a yellow tone. I want more of a cool one. Oh!” I pointed at the rocking horse. “Let’s get that.”*

*“Isn’t she a little young for that?”*

*“Babies grow fast. She’ll eventually be able to play with it.”*

*“Well then, I guess you’re just going to have to give me another baby sooner rather than later.”*

I shook off the way his words made me feel, then and now as my fingers gently glided on the swing. I smiled through the tears sliding down my cheeks.

This was so precious.

So beautiful.

So perfect.

My heart ached from how full of love it was that he did all this for our baby girl.

All of a sudden, the song “Tennessee Whiskey” started playing through the speakers of the house, catching me off guard. It was my favorite song.

“I wanted to surprise you,” Ledger announced, standing by the doorframe. “But you beat me to the chance.”

With every last emotion and sentiment pouring out of me, I looked him in the eyes. Our connection was alive and thriving

like our past never existed. Right along with his love and all the years of turmoil and regret he caused himself.

“You’re just full of surprises today.”

In two strides, he closed the distance between us and pulled me into his arms. With one foot beside the other, he started to dance with me, and I couldn’t help but feel like this was one of the most romantic moments in all my life, and I was experiencing it with a man I’d loved since I was eight years old.

“How do you remember that this is my favorite song?” I asked, needing to know.

“Because the first time we danced to it was at my parents’ anniversary party.”

“That’s right.” I smiled. “I taught you how to dance when we were eleven. You know, you can be quite charming when you want to be.”

“You just caught me on a good day.”

I snuggled into his shoulder, inching closer to him. We rocked slowly to the music, but it was such a sexy song. His face conveyed so many emotions in a matter of seconds, and I paid attention to every last one.

We swayed to the music as he hummed the melody. I placed the side of my face on his chest, wanting to live in this moment with him. Where it was just the two of us in our baby girl’s nursery.

“You want to know something, Ledger?” I whispered in his ear, standing on the tips of my toes.

“I want to know everything, sugar.”

“You make me want to forget the past.”

Nothing about my statement was funny. Not even a little bit. He looked down at me, and I stared up at him. He had this pained look on his face, and I wondered if I wore the same expression as we continued to move.

He unexpectedly spun me around, dipping me, catching me off guard with his lips skimming my neck and then my mouth.

“Life can be simple, Hazel, but sometimes it’s not that easy.”

I faintly nodded.

“I can’t tell you enough how sorry I am for what I did.”

“I know.”

“Do you? Have you forgiven me?”

“I don’t know. I want to, but I just... it’s hard.”

“I’m not asking you to forget. I just need you to forgive me.”

“I’m trying. I swear to you I am. I still can’t believe you did all of this for me today,” I breathlessly rasped, licking my lips like I was preparing them for him.

“I’d do anything for you.”

“Anything?”

Brushing my lips along his, I coaxed, “Be with me then.”

It was what I wanted.

Needed.

And I wouldn’t take no for an answer.

TWENTY-THREE

## HAZEL

“I am with you.”

“No, I mean, I want you inside me.”

He rubbed my belly. “I am.”

“Ledger, please...” I begged, fully aware he knew what I was asking for. “I know you want to.”

“Of course, I do.”

“Then give it to me, cowboy.”

I softly pecked his lips, waiting for his reaction. I moaned, luring him in. It was all he needed to lose control. Though my stomach was in the way, we would make this work. Women had been having pregnant sex for generations.

In one sudden movement, he lifted me bridal style, and I didn't stop kissing him. I pulled him close to my body.

My heart.

My soul.

He kissed me back, parting my lips with his tongue as he carried me to his bedroom and over to his bed. He gently laid me down, spreading my legs to stand between them, hovering above my heated frame for a second before he laid above me and cradled my face. Never once breaking our kiss.

Our connection.

His love for me.

He was above me in a way I'd never experienced with him. Like he was trying to show me a side to him that he didn't even know existed. Tenderly, he kissed me deep as his hands gently ran down my shoulders to pull my dress off my body.

“Ledger,” I nervously rasped, trembling beneath him, and he was barely even touching me.

I had no idea what I was in for.

“Don’t hide from me,” he ordered sweetly.

It worked to ease my worry. I visibly relaxed back into the sheets as he completely removed both my dress and himself off my body.

I inadvertently whimpered, not only from the loss of his touch, but also from what I knew he desperately wanted to see. I could feel his eyes looking at every last inch of my skin for the first time, and I couldn’t help but feel insecure.

I was almost seven months pregnant now and felt huge. When he’d pleasure me, I wasn’t naked like this. Swiftly, he slid my panties off next, and his stare roamed over my breasts, to my nipples, and down to my pussy.

Slowly.

Deliberately.

He took his time.

“Fuck, you’re beautiful.”

I could feel my wetness pooling between my legs from his words and touch. Fueling my need to feel him. He caused another whimper to escape my lips when I felt his hand slowly expose my clit.

I released the breath I didn’t realize I was holding and locked eyes with his hooded stare.

They were foreign.

Unfamiliar.

And everything I ever craved to see.

“I’ve never wanted anything as much as I want you, sugar.”

“Then take me.”

He didn’t have to be told twice. Removing his shirt, he threw it on the floor beside my dress. As he lay down on his stomach, he held my thighs and buried his face between my legs.

My back jolted off the bed, making him chuckle as he moved his head up and down and side to side, using his tongue to vibrate against my core.

“Mmm... Ledger,” I purred, grabbing his hair as he continued his oral assault.

He never stopped working me over with his lips and tongue when he started to glide his finger into my soaking wet, welcoming heat.

“Oh God...” I moaned. Curving my back into the mattress beneath me, I was completely undone by his touch.

He devoured me with his tongue and fingers, making love to me with his mouth. Sucking harder and more demanding with each passing second, to the point I thought I would pass the hell out. His mouth and hand were controlling my body, but my reactions controlled his willpower to stay in control.

A loud, rumbling growl escaped from deep within his chest. He was losing control, which made me surrender to his power over me.

*I came.*

I came so damn hard I saw stars. He didn't let up, making me come repeatedly against his fingers and mouth. I started to convulse, my body moving on its own accord. He instantly locked his arm around my thighs, holding me in place. My back arched off the bed, my hands white-knuckled the sheets, and my body shook with so much force that I thought I would never stop coming undone.

“Oh God... ahhh...” I profusely panted, my body turning on me.

Orgasm after orgasm.

They came hard and fast, one right after the other with no end in sight. At least, not while he was buried between my legs.

“Please... Ledger... please...” I squirmed, begging him to stop, tugging hard at his hair to the point I thought I would rip it out.



He released my clit with an unrelenting groan, not wanting to stop but allowing me mercy. Thrusting his tongue into my heat, he licked, swallowing all my juices like I was his favorite meal.

He slowly sat up with a pleased and satisfied expression on his face. Grinning as he shamelessly wiped his lips and chin with the back of his arm, he showed me precisely how much I came only because of him.

“Your sweet pussy is addicting.”

His filthy words had as much effect on my body as his touch just did. I wanted him to say more dirty things like that to me. I never wanted it to end. He slid down his jeans, letting his hard cock spring free.

He made his way back up to my lips, wanting to claim them again. Grabbing the hair by the nape of my neck, he brought my lips up to meet his, pecking me at first. Teasing them with the tip of his tongue, he outlined my pouty mouth. My tongue sought his out, and our kiss quickly turned passionate, moving on its own accord. Taking what the other needed and vice versa.

He kissed me with everything he could muster. He kissed me until the room stopped spinning, and time stood still. Something about the way we were moving was tormenting—it was urgent, demanding, and all-consuming. We couldn't get enough of each other's taste, leaving us thirsty and wanting so much more.

Wanting everything.

He caressed the side of my face, my breasts, and the back of my thighs as if he didn't know where he wanted to touch me the most. He kissed me like his life depended on it. Like I was everything he ever wanted and so much more. I yearned for him to make us one person in the same way I always had before.

“Ledger...” I moaned in a voice I didn't recognize.

Our bodies moved in sync like they were made for each other. Nothing could ever compare or even come close to this.

I placed my hand on his rapidly beating heart as it pounded against his chest and opened my eyes, staring profusely into his gaze.

The devotion.

The adoration.

The love...

He had for me, spilled out of his dark, dilated, intensely piercing eyes.

“There she is... there’s my girl,” he rasped, slowly thrusting inside me.

“Ahhh... Ledger...”

I felt every last inch of him until he was deep inside me. He slowly, tenderly thrust in and out of me, trying to steady his breathing while I tried hard not to ruin this moment between us.

Stopping, he stared lovingly into my eyes. He contemplated what to say before just whispering, “You’re mine.”

Emotions I’d never felt before flowed through my entire body while sensations took over the ache, relaxing my body a little more. Not only did Ledger make slow, passionate love to me, he claimed me without words. His hips thrust harder and deeper into me with a compassionate, deliberate motion. I couldn’t do anything but surrender to him. Submit to the only man I ever loved with my heart, body, and soul.

With every kiss, every touch, every thrust, and every single breath, he made unspoken promises to me. He adoringly kissed all over my face, along my jawline, my forehead, and on the tip of my nose. The room started spinning like it did when his face was between my legs. My head fell back, and my breathing became heady, urgent, and so good...

He immediately lapped at my neck and breasts, leaving tiny marks all over. I didn’t want to move. I wanted to enjoy the sensation of him being on top of me.

“That feel good, sugar?” he groaned, making his way back up to my mouth.

I nodded, unable to form words. Our parted lips still touched as we panted profusely, trying to feel each sensation of our skin-on-skin contact. I swear the pounding of our hearts echoed off the walls.

“Fuck, baby... Come... come on my cock... just like that...”

Still no words.

I was coming. I was coming from my head to my toes. All he needed was to keep doing whatever he was doing. A faint whimper turned into a moan when he angled my leg up higher, hitting that spot that his fingers did before. Like he could feel my silent pleas, he gave my throbbing nub some much-needed attention.

“You like that, sugar?” he questioned with warm words and passionate kisses to my lips.

“Ledger...” I panted.

“Fuck, Hazel... Fuck... you feel so good... so fucking tight... so fucking mine...” he growled, somewhere between pleasure and pain.

I fell.

He fell.

We met somewhere in the middle. My entire world spun out of control, and so did his as I shuddered beneath him, and his body tensed above mine.

He was the beginning to my end, or maybe the end to my beginning.

It didn't matter because he was my home too.

He would always be home to me.

Lifting his head, he kissed me. “You're the best thing that has ever happened to me. You know that, right?”

“Yes...” I smiled, returning his love.

Nothing existed at that moment but him and me. No one else mattered, and my whole world was right here.

Right in this room.

He made love to me countless times, unable to satiate himself with my body until he let me fall asleep in his arms, in his world. As if I was his whole life, too. He held me so tight like he never wanted to let me go. At some point in the darkness, I felt him thrust back inside me. I was exhausted and sore, but it still felt so right. It almost felt like I was in and out of a dream. Except his lovemaking felt different this time.

More vulnerable.

More powerless.

More urgent and frantic.

“Ledger,” I murmured, trying to open my eyes.

“Mine,” he replied. “Mine,” he repeated in a desperate, desolate plea...

That I’d remember for the rest of my life.

TWENTY-FOUR

## LEDGER

For the first time since Hazel moved in with me, I woke up in my bed with her in my arms. It was the best fucking way to wake up, having her and our baby girl in my embrace, and I never wanted to let them go.

I wouldn't.

I couldn't.

I'd make sure of it.

I was so close to telling her I loved her last night. It was on the tip of my tongue, just waiting to be shared. Although, something held me back, something I couldn't explain or understand. It just didn't feel right, which made no sense because everything felt right with her.

"Mmm..." she groaned, her eyes fluttering open. "I don't know how I'm going to walk today."

"Words every man loves to hear."

She giggled in that cute-as-shit sort of way. "You're shameless. Hallie probably feels like an earthquake happened in there."

"Sex is good for the baby."

"Are you ever going to tell me how you know so much about pregnancy?"

I grinned, gazing down at her. "What do I get if I tell you?"

"Oh, so now you're bribing me?"

"I'd like to think of it as an even trade."

"Hmm..."

"If you keep making sounds like that, then I'll fuck you again."

"That sounds so romantic."

I chuckled.

“Fine.” She smiled. “If you tell me, then I’ll... I don’t know. What do you want?”

“Now that’s a loaded question if I’ve ever heard one.”

“Well, since you have so many demands on your list. How about you request the one you want the most?”

“Alright.” I arched an eyebrow. “I’ll tell you if you marry me.”

Her lips parted.

“I can see it in your eyes, sugar. You want to be my wife.”

“Ledger...”

“I want our baby girl to be born into our marriage. There’s nothing I want more than for you to become Hazel Beckham.”

“This isn’t fair.”

“You asked me what I wanted the most, and I’m giving you a straight answer.”

“I know, but I wasn’t expecting that answer.”

“You know me better than that. We’ve known each other since we were four and are having a baby girl together. Not to mention, you still love me. I can’t think of a better time to get married.”

“I can’t with this right now.”

She tried to get up, but she was stuck. “Ugh! Just know that if I didn’t have this belly in the way, I’d already be standing.”

I kissed her neck before helping her. I was about to continue our conversation, but the doorbell rang.

She smiled. “Saved by the bell.”

I glanced at the clock on my nightstand that read 10:00 in the morning.

“It’s probably your horse.”

“Yes! I’m going to change, and I’ll meet you out there in a few.”

I threw on a pair of jeans and a white shirt, then made my way toward the door. I tried to calm the chaos of my thoughts as I opened it, coming face-to-face with a man I assumed brought Hazel’s horse.

“Hey,” he greeted.

“Hey, is Daisy out back?”

“Who’s Daisy?”

“Oh.” I nodded at him. “I thought you were with the ranch delivering a horse this morning.”

“No.” He rubbed the back of his neck. “I’m just, uh...”

My eyebrows pinched together. I never could’ve anticipated what came out of his mouth next. Not for one fucking second.

“I’m just here to see my fiancée.”



## HAZEL

After getting dressed in a comfortable pastel-yellow maxi dress, I found Ledger at the front door.

It took five seconds for me to realize what was happening.

Five seconds for my heart to drop to the floor.

Five seconds for my blood to run cold.

Beaming, I stepped up beside Ledger. “Where’s Dai—”

Five seconds to see the man I least expected.

I jerked back, gasping, “Johnathan.”

His smile quickly faded, eyeing me up and down and focusing on my stomach. “Hey, baby,” he murmured, taking me in.

My shocked gaze shifted to Ledger, who stood there suddenly pissed as fuck.

He was bright.

Bold.

*RED.*

Seething from the inside out.

His jaw clenched, and his fists tightened.

Ready to go to war.

With him.

It took five seconds...

For me to know this wasn’t going to end well.

With a deadly glare, he snapped, “Your fiancé is here to see you.”

I shut my eyes. I couldn’t believe he was doing this to me.

“Johnathan,” I rasped. Opening my eyes, I was completely blown away this was going down right then and there. “What are you doing here? How do you know this is where I am?”

“Your parents—”

“You talked to my parents?”

“They didn’t know where you were and had no idea you weren’t in New York. I found out from one of your designers.”

“Ugh, was it Betty? I fired her weeks ago.”

Tearing our attention back to him, Ledger roared, “What the fuck is going on? Is he your fiancé?”

“Ledger...” Surrendering, I raised my arms out in front of me. “You think I’m lying to you?”

“I don’t know what to think.”

“I already told you. We’re not engaged.”

He gestured to Johnathan. “He seems to think otherwise.”

“He’s obviously trying to get a rise out of you, and it didn’t take much for that to happen.”

“Baby—”

“Stop calling me that. You know damn well we’re not engaged anymore. How dare you show up here?”

“You’re my fiancée!”

“Don’t you fucking raise your voice to her,” Ledger threatened.

“Or what?”

Ledger got in his face. “Or I’ll give you something to scream about.”

“Oh shit,” I exclaimed, standing between them. Holding my hands on Ledger’s chest, I moved him back. “You need to calm down and let me deal with him.” Shit really hit the fan when I added, “Alone.”

“The fuck I will.”

Ledger always went from zero to a hundred. He had no middle ground. His expression made me sick to my stomach. I recognized it all too clearly.

*Betrayal.*

“You brought him back here?” Ledger questioned, “To our home?”

Johnathan asked, “You live here now?”

I turned, glaring at him. “You’re not helping.”

“Oh, I’m sorry. I didn’t imagine I’d find my fucking fiancée pregnant when she never even told me she was expecting.”

I looked at Ledger again. “I haven’t spoken to him since I found out I was pregnant.”

“It’s because you won’t answer my calls.”

“Fuck him!” Ledger roared again. “What the fuck is he doing here?”

Johnathan roughly grabbed my arm, simply triggering Ledger to react. His protectiveness kicked into overdrive, and he immediately dragged me away from him, securely placing me behind him.

Ledger warned, “Touch her again and see what happens.”

Jonathan’s stare widened, and he looked back and forth between us until his scowl landed on me.

He bit, “You fucking her?”

“She’s pregnant with my baby, asshole.”

In less than a minute, my fears became a reality. My chest rose and fell, and for a moment, time stood still. There was so much I wanted to say.

So much I needed him to hear...

Words failed me.

I couldn’t get my lips to move.

The emotions running between us were high and hitting low, delivering blow after blow to my gut and stirring memories that held me captive.

I blinked, and the years of our friendship flew through our eyes. My core sank, my chest heaved, and I felt my face pale abruptly. I felt like my body was giving out on me. I tried to reel in the sensations that were ruthlessly tearing me apart.

Little by little.

Limb by limb.

Layer by layer.

I experienced agony no one should have to feel.

*“Sugar...” he rasped against my swollen lips. “What are you doing to me?”*

*I didn’t waver, speaking with conviction, “I’m in love with you, Ledger. I’ve been in love with you for as long as I can remember.”*

With a solemn expression and my heart bleeding out for him, I watched our past unfold right before me.

*“You’re leaving tomorrow,” he reminded me in a ragged tone.*

*I looked deep into his eyes and rasped, “So then give me something to come home to.”*

It was him. He was the one to hurt me in the end, and I’d been paying for it ever since.

*He growled, stepping close to my face. “Hazel, don’t fuck with me.”*

*“No, I’d much rather you fuck me instead.”*

Ledger was always there for me to show his support, his love. His good heart continuously shined through all the ups and downs I put myself through. It was as if we were the only two people standing there, drowning in a sea of emotions and not coming up for air.

*“I’m sorry, sugar. I just don’t love you like that.”*

The past.

The present.

The future we could still have.

When, all of a sudden, Johnathan spewed...

“How do you know that baby isn’t mine?”

TWENTY-FIVE

## LEDGER

In the blink of an eye, it all came to a head. We were dragged back to my bedroom where I made the biggest mistake of my life.

Nothing could shake that memory.

*Nothing.*

Not one damn thing.

Through Hazel's eyes, it played out before me like it was happening at that moment.

Our trust.

Our love.

Our devoted friendship no matter what.

Tears pooled in her eyes. She didn't try to hide them from me. Proving how bad I still fucked her up. The tormented expression on her face was a permanent reminder of the destruction I'd caused in her life. Destroying her the moment I decided not to be part of it anymore.

Her lips trembled as the son of a bitch spat, "How do you know that baby isn't mine?"

Clearing my throat, I looked away. I had to. Abruptly, I glared at him. There was no hesitation on my part, I didn't back down. From the second she told me she was pregnant, that baby was mine.

In two strides, I was in his face. "Let's get one thing fucking straight. That baby is mine. I don't give a fuck if her DNA matches yours. Hazel and that baby are mine. Now get the fuck off my property before I do it for you, and trust me, the second my hands are on you, it'll be to do more than just throwing your ass in your car. Do you understand me?"

The dagger wedged in my heart twisted, refusing to let me go. My sadness, despair, and pain were unbearable, thinking Hallie couldn't be mine. It swallowed me whole. I couldn't breathe, gasping for my next breath internally.

“Oh my God!” Hazel hollered. “Johnathan, why are you doing this? We both know we haven't had sex in over a year. Why are you lying? What are you trying to accomplish right now? Do you want to make me hate you?”

This was my nightmare in reality, and all I could do was hang on for dear life.



## HAZEL

Johnathan snidely shook his head, snarling, “I can’t believe I ever loved you. I can’t believe I love you still. It was always him.” He pointed at Ledger. “You’re nothing but a liar. All the times I caught you looking at pictures of him or searching for him online and you’d tell me he was just your brother’s best friend.”

It was true, and I couldn’t deny it.

“He’s always been the reason you couldn’t give your heart to me. I’m a fucking fool for not seeing it. All the times I’d say I love you and you wouldn’t say it. Jesus, even when I asked you to marry me, you looked like a deer in headlights. Why did you lead me on if you didn’t love me?”

“I wanted to. I tried. For years, I tried. It’s why I called off our engagement and gave you back your ring. I couldn’t do that to you. I couldn’t marry you when I wasn’t in love with you. Is that why you’re doing this? To punish me? To make Ledger think I’m nothing but a liar when you’re the one lying.”

“What do you expect?! You drop off the face of the earth. You completely stopped talking to me when I thought we were trying to work things out.”

“I... I...” I sighed. “I thought I could make it work. I thought we could make it work. And then I found out I was pregnant, and it was like a sign that we were totally wrong for each other.”

“You couldn’t have told me that?”

“How did you want me to tell you? I didn’t want to hurt you more than I already had. I was trying to do the right thing.”

Ledger chimed in, “You got back together with him after we hooked up?”

“It wasn’t like that. We were just talking, but as soon as I knew I was pregnant... well, you know what happened next.”

“So you ghost me?” Johnathan asked. “And I have to find out like this? What the fuck? I thought I meant more to you than that.”

“I’m sorry, Johnathan. I truly am. One day you’ll meet a woman who’s perfect for you.”

“Don’t give me that ‘it’s not you, it’s me’ bullshit.”

“In this case, it’s true. I care for you, but I’m not in love with you and never was. It was wrong of me to lead you on. I knew that then, and I know it now. I’m sorry I handled things so poorly, but finding out I was pregnant, and then Ledger and I... I could only handle one thing at a time.”

“So what? You put me on the back burner? After everything we’ve been through? I was there for you when all he did was throw you away!”

“Fuck you!” Ledger challenged. “You know nothing about us.”

“Oh yeah? I don’t know about all the times she cried over some guy who broke her heart? I don’t know about how hard it was to get her to open up to me? I don’t know how difficult it was to get her to trust me? It’s all your fault! You broke her, and I tried to put her back together, but it was no use. Not when she’s still in love with you!”

“Johnathan, please...”

“Do you have any idea how many times I’d catch her crying because of you?! You fucked her over! And now she’s doing the same to me because of you! Now that’s bullshit! You know what?” He glared back and forth between us. “You two deserve each other. I dodged a bullet. Thanks for making me realize she was the worst mistake of my life. She’s nothing but a fucking whore who got knocked up—”

It all happened so fast.

“Ledger, don’t!” That was the last thing I heard before his fist connected with Johnathan’s face.

He flew back, immediately falling to the ground, but Ledger didn't stop. He gripped the collar of his shirt, dragging him up.

“You piece of shit! Get the fuck off my property! Better yet, I'll throw you the fuck out!”

“Get your hands off me!” Johnathan stumbled over his own two feet as Ledger hauled his ass to his car.

Johnathan was not a small guy by any means, and Ledger made it look easy. He was not breaking a sweat in the least. As soon as they were at the car door, he held him back to open it.

Ledger tossed his ass into the driver's seat, booming, “You ever show your face here again, I won't hesitate to make you regret it. Hazel's always been mine, motherfucker. Regardless of how many times you thought otherwise.”

Ledger meant every word he said, I felt it deep in my bones.

Slamming the car door in his face, he stepped back as Johnathan drove away. My state of mind was only in one place. I needed to make things right with Ledger. He was all that mattered to me. I hated that it took me so long to admit it.

I was frozen.

Pale as a ghost.

My eyes were wide, and my mouth was open.

The way he looked at me, felt me, still loved me...

I saw it written clear across his expression. I couldn't hide my love for him anymore. He wouldn't allow it.

Never breaking his intense stare, he spoke the truth, “I gave up the one girl who's ever meant something to me, and it's the biggest regret of my life. I won't allow that to happen again. I know now more than ever that you're the love of my life. I've never stopped loving you. Time, years, distance... it never changed. I couldn't tell you then, but I sure as shit can tell you now.”

He made his way back over to me.

Once he stood in front of my face, he admitted for the first time, “I love you, Hazel. I’m so fucking in love with you, and I’ll spend the rest of my life proving to you how much I love you and Hallie. I’m so sorry I didn’t fight for you then, but I’ll go to battle with anyone for you now. Do you understand me? No one is taking you away from me.”

Staring deep into my eyes, he vowed, “*Especially you.*”

TWENTY-SIX

## HAZEL

I couldn't believe what had just happened.

I stood there shocked and dismayed, trying to process everything that had gone down in such a short amount of time. It was one thing after another, and I couldn't keep up with the turn of events any longer.

Trying to find my bearings, I stayed silent, not knowing what to say or how to say it. I could imagine what he was feeling because I was feeling it too. My heart broke for him. All I wanted to do was comfort him, fully aware nothing could take away the pain he felt for what he put me through. Especially after hearing Johnathan throw it in his face.

To my surprise, he broke the silence between us, expressing, "When we ran into each other at that hotel, I thought this was it. This was our moment to truly be together. For the first time in my life, I believed what you had told me in my bedroom."

I swallowed hard, listening to every word he shared.

"I never wanted to fall in love after that. For years, I had one love, and it was the ranch. I drowned myself in work. Day and night, it was all that mattered to me until you came back into my world. I spent years trying to pretend I didn't love you when, in fact, I was head over heels for you."

Suddenly, a tear escaped my eye.

"I fought against the love I had for you, and in the end, I lost you because of it. When we were kids, the way I protected you, looked out for you, was always there for you was simply because you were one of my best friends. And the truth is, I did love you back then, Hazel. I just didn't realize I was in love with you until it was too late. We were so young, and I don't know... I guess I just made excuses for why you meant so much to me."

I wanted to believe with everything inside me that what he'd said was true. Holding onto that hope only made me realize how much time we'd truly lost with each other.

Finding my voice, I apologized, "I'm so sorry I've been punishing you. I know it doesn't change anything, and we can't get back the years we lost."

Tears fell from my eyes, one right after the other. There was no stopping them. Nothing could have prepared me for this moment and the emotions it'd evoke.

It wasn't Ledger who came to me this time—I willingly gave myself to him. My mouth crashed onto his, and it was all he needed to lose control. Roughly, he gripped my ass, lifting me to straddle his waist.

My big belly was in the way, but he was able to carry me without any restraint.

Our kiss was passionate.

Hungry.

Sending us into a frenzy.

He carried me in the barn, lying me down on a blanket on the hay. This was crazy, but Ledger was always impulsive—going from one extreme to the next.

He cradled my face, never once breaking our kiss. I had no idea what I was in for. Ledger wasn't the man who made love. He seemed into hard, passionate fucking.

This was different—he was different.

## LEDGER

Gripping the sides of her face, I devoured her mouth.

Claimed her lips.

Owned her.

Worshipped her.

Fucking loved her.

For a minute, I allowed her to take my breath away. In my eyes, she'd never looked so fucking beautiful.

So goddamn breathtaking.

So fucking mine.

I gripped her wrists and held them above her head with one hand, while the other slid from her face down to her breasts, kneading them in my other hand.

She moaned. I wouldn't let up. I just kept kissing her, caressing her, and whispering how much I loved her. Using my lips, I wiped away all her tears, tasting her sorrow, her hurt, her love for me.

Tenderly moving my way to her lips while her body continued to shudder from my strong, overpowering love. Overwhelming her emotions and overriding her insecurities the way only I knew how.

By making love to her.

Before another second slipped by, I kissed her for all the years I didn't, for all the months I couldn't, for all the moments I so desperately wanted to but lost her. Losing myself in her. It was almost like I was trying to kiss away how badly I hurt her.

"Do you have any idea how many nights I've dreamed of the things I want to do to you?" I expressed against her lips, causing her eyes to flutter open.



Trapping her gaze with mine, she triggered a carnal reaction profoundly within my core. Her lips were swollen and red, her skin warm and flushed, her hair tousled and flowing loosely all around her gorgeous face. I released her wrists, pulling back a few strands of her hair away from her eyes, wanting nothing in the way of her surrendering stare.

“I can’t lose you again. Please tell me you know that?”

“I do,” she stressed.

I blew out a long breath, one I felt like I’d been holding since she came back into my life, feeling emotions I couldn’t begin to place.

I glided my tongue into her mouth. She stirred, yielding to my fervent embrace, melting into my touch. We kissed for what seemed like hours, just entangled and exploring each other’s mouths.

I hadn’t even touched her yet, and she was already fucking melting, splitting at the seams.

“Ledger,” she panted, strangled and frantic.

I kissed her until her body undeniably conceded to me.

Until she was anxious and trembling, soft and supple in my arms.

Until every muscle pulsated with anticipation.

With need.

With want.

With desire to own every last inch of her flesh.

That was my undoing. I dropped between her legs, dying to taste heaven.

Forcefully yet gently, I slid down her panties and sucked her sensitive clit into my mouth until she was at my mercy, responding to every sensation my tongue inflicted. I inhaled her addicting scent of arousal mixed with the sweet smell of her pussy.

“Beg me, sugar. Beg me to make you come,” I growled, looking up at her.

Through heated eyes, she pleaded, “Please...please make me come...” She arched her back when I plunged my tongue into her opening. “Ledger...” she purred out my name. Fisting my hair, she used it as leverage to stay upright.

I made love to her with my tongue.

Licking.

Sucking.

Eating.

I worked her clit side to side and up and down as she ground her hips in a back-and-forth motion against my mouth. She was going to rip out my hair and made my cock throb so fucking hard. I started to fuck my fist to her as she came down my throat and chest.

I witnessed her unraveling from the inside out with juices dripping out of her core. Possessing every last fiber of her being, I made her come some more.

I taunted, “Whose pussy is this?”

“It’s yours, all yours.”

“One day, I’m going to fuck that tight little ass of yours, but right now, I’m going to make love to you.” I grinned with her clit in my mouth, groaning, “That’s it, sweetheart. Give it to me.”

Her body shook so fucking violently from the pressure and pleasure, screaming out, “Ledger!”

I made her come one last time with my mouth before I moved back up to her face.

“Good. Now beg for my cock.”

“Please...” That was all she could say.

Through hooded eyes, she gave me what I craved. Needing to bury myself inside her, to feel her tight pussy wrapped

around me again. She didn't have to wait long. I positioned my dick at her opening and slowly thrust my way in.

I kissed her all over her face.

Her neck.

Her breasts.

Back to her lips again.

Until I couldn't take it anymore.

I had to look at her.

I had to watch her.

I had to make sweet love to her.

"You're mine," I whispered against her lips.

Sliding my hand between our bodies, I began to rub her clit. I tried to make it easier for her to take my cock when she was already sore from my relentless fucking the night before.

"Your heart. Your soul. Your pussy. It's all mine. You're all mine."

She panted.

She was warm.

Wet.

Addicting.

Feeling an immense amount of pressure on the head of my cock, I started thrusting in and out of her. Her cunt was tighter and tighter with each push and pull of my dick inside her.

Every moan that escaped her lips.

Every thrust against her G-spot.

Every clench of her pussy.

Stirred down to my balls.

Never once did I stop rubbing her clit. Little by little, I could see her begin to unravel for me. I rested my forehead on hers and stared into her glossy, hazed eyes. Our hearts

pounded, our lungs out of breath. Vanished in our abandonment.

In our own world.

“Yes...” she hummed, breathless.

All I could hear was her desire as she encouraged me to go faster, harder, and more demanding.

“Yeah, baby. Take my cock. Just like that...Fuck me harder...just like that,” I rumbled from deep within my chest.

I could feel her cunt tighten, gripping my cock like a fucking vise. Grasping onto the back of her neck, I wanted to bring her closer to my face. Our lips found each other, no longer having any control over our actions.

“I love you, sugar. I love you so much.”

I snapped, roughly gripping her hips. Fueling the need to fuck her till she couldn't think of anything else but my cock tomorrow.

Sore.

Exhausted.

Ready for more.

Both our mouths parted, breathless, riding the high, waiting. Together. I plunged my tongue into her mouth when I felt her pussy throb against my cock, pulsating long and hard.

Her quivering was my undoing.

*She* was my undoing.

She came hard, and I followed her over the edge, releasing my seed as far back in her cunt as I could go. Both of us tried to catch our breath. Kissing her again, I couldn't get enough.

Except one thing was missing...

She didn't say she loved me back.

TWENTY-SEVEN

## HAZEL

A week had passed since the Johnathan debacle, and so many things had once again changed between Ledger and me. Particularly how often Ledger was inside me, telling me he loved me. I had yet to say it back; something still didn't feel right, but I couldn't figure out what it was for the life of me.

"You okay?" Haven questioned, sitting next to me at her dad's ranch.

They were having a party for their clients, and the whole family was there. It had been an annual event since we were kids. At one point, my parents used to attend these.

I shrugged.

"What's wrong? You've been acting weird all week."

"Really?"

She nodded. "Yeah, you're not your normally bubbly self. You just seem quiet, distant. Are you nervous about the baby coming soon? I heard women get scared when they know their delivery date is close. You're only two months away."

"Surprisingly, it's not that."

"Then what is it?"

Needing to open up to someone, I confessed, "Your brother told me he loved me."

If she was surprised, she didn't show it.

"And he wants me to marry him."

Again, no shock whatsoever.

"So when are you guys getting married? Before or after Hallie is born?"

With wide eyes, I replied, "I haven't said yes, and to be completely honest, he hasn't really asked. It's more like he's

demanded it.”

“Oh, I see.”

“Do you?”

“Ledger has always been controlling. All my brothers are. They get it from our daddy. Is that why you’ve been distant?”

“Yeah.”

“You don’t want to marry him?”

“I... I mean... shit... I don’t know.”

She frowned. “What’s holding you back?”

“You see, I can’t figure out what it is. I forgive him and—”

“Forgive him for what?”

I hadn’t told her what happened between us. It just never came up until now.

“To make a long, explicit story short, he broke my heart after I asked him to take my virginity at his graduation party.”

Her mouth dropped open.

“Yeah, I know. It wasn’t one of my finest moments.” I grabbed my face. “Just remembering now makes me want to die of embarrassment.”

“And Ledger turned you down because of Chance?”

“I forget how smart and perceptive you are.”

“You have to be when you’re raised by all men.”

I chuckled.

“Chance seems fine with everything now, though.”

I nodded. “Yeah, he’s coming around.”

“He would have come around back then too.”

“Probably, but your brother didn’t want to risk losing his friendship, so he chose him over me.”

“Is that why you stopped visiting?”

“Yeah.”

“That makes sense, but are you sure you’ve forgiven him? Maybe that’s what’s holding you back?”

“I thought it was that, but it’s not. I can wholeheartedly say that I have.”

“Do you love him?”

I nodded again. “I do.”

“Does he know that?”

I shook my head.

“Why not?”

“I don’t know. I just can’t say it to him.”

“But you can say it to me?”

“I guess.”

“Is there anything I can do for you?”

“You’re doing it right now by just listening to me.”

Cove sat at the other side of the table. “Everything alright?”

Haven responded, “Just men trouble.”

“Ugh! Don’t I know it. Your brother is being extra controlling today. You know he said my dress was too short?”

“Hey,” I remarked, “I made that dress.”

“That’s what I said, but what can you do with these Beckham men. I swear they’re all cut from the same cloth.”

I chuckled. She was right.

“Is Ledger giving you trouble?”

“Not any more than I’m giving him.”

“Do you want me to make Jace kick his ass?”

*I love her.*

“Not this time.”

“Are you okay? You don’t look okay.”



From the corner of my eye, something caught my attention, and it was only then...

I sprang into action.

## LEDGER

“Is Hazel okay?” Jace asked, handing me a beer from the fridge in the garage.

“I don’t know anymore.”

“Trouble in paradise?”

“Isn’t it always?”

“You guys look like you were getting along. You know, in bed.”

I laughed. “You knew?”

“Of course, I did. It’s obvious you guys are fucking, but sex always complicates things. Believe me, I know firsthand.”

“Can’t keep up with your nineteen-year-old bride, old man?”

“Fuck you.” He chuckled. “Most days, she can’t keep up with me.”

“I guess all those years in the military paid off in the end?”

“Something like that.” He opened his beer. “Now tell me what’s going on?”

“You mean aside from telling her I love her and demanding we get married?”

“Huh, that sounds awfully familiar. I guess the apple doesn’t fall far from the Beckham apple tree.”

“Except Cove told you she loved you.”

“Hazel hasn’t said it to you yet?”

“No.”

He raised his eyebrows. “Fuck, man. That hurts. Why is she pretending she doesn’t?”

“She’s not pretending anymore. She just hasn’t actually said it to me.”

“Do you know why?”

“If I did, we wouldn’t be talking about it right now.”

“Do you have any idea why she’s holding back?”

“I thought it was because she hadn’t forgiven me, but I know she has.”

“Ah.”

He knew about what happened. I told him a few months ago.

“Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.”

“Don’t I know it.”

“Hallie will be here before you know it. I’m sure that’ll help.”

“You see, that’s the problem. I want us to be married before she’s born.”

“She doesn’t want to marry you?”

“She hasn’t said.”

“You could always make her.”

“No, I don’t kidnap women like you do.”

“Woman.” He raised his finger. “It’s only been one, and now I’m engaged to her.”

If I thought my relationship with Hazel was a whirlwind, it didn’t hold a candle to their story. She was his perfect enemy turned lover, and now they were getting married.

“I’m sure it’ll work itself out. Maybe just give it some more time.”

“I’ve given it almost eleven years. How much more time does she need?”

“Women are fickle beings. Not to mention, a huge pain in the ass.”

“I’m at a loss. I don’t know what else I could do, and you’re right, Hallie will be here sooner than we realize, and I don’t want her to be born without us being married.”

“You always were a sappy bastard.”

I grinned. “This coming from a man who’s engaged to a woman half his age.”

“Do as I say, not as I do. Besides, I had to lock that shit down. You see Cove. She’s fucking gorgeous. What my girl wants, my girl gets, and for some reason, she loves my ass.”

“Yeah, her taste is definitely questionable, along with her sanity.”

“You’re one to talk. Have you taken a good look at yourself in the mirror? Pot, meet kettle. Your baby momma is literally a mogul who got knocked up by a cowboy. Now that’s two ends of the spectrum if I’ve ever seen one.”

I was about to open my mouth to reply, but I overheard Hazel shout, “What the hell are you doing here?”

I snapped around, imagining it was Johnathan.

It was much worse.

It wasn’t that motherfucker.

Instead, it was...

Her parents.

TWENTY-EIGHT

## HAZEL

I blinked, and Ledger was standing beside me. I placed my arm out in front of him because this wasn't his fight; it was mine.

"Oh my God," Mom stressed, looking me up and down. "It's true. You're pregnant with Ledger's baby?"

My eyes widened. "Who told you?"

"Does it matter? Why didn't you tell us?"

"It was Johnathan, wasn't it?"

She nodded. "At least he told us. I can't believe what you're doing with your life, choosing this man over Johnathan. He's perfect for you."

"Mom..."

"He is! I thought you were engaged. What's going on?"

"We haven't been engaged for a long time."

"It would be nice if you had told us that!"

"You need to calm down," I ordered, feeling Ledger's heat radiating from him. "You're making a scene."

"I don't need to do anything. People need to know that he maliciously got you pregnant to steal you from us! I bet he knocked you up on purpose. This was all planned. I'm your mother! How could you do this to us?"

"Your mom's right," Dad chimed in. "How could you betray us like this?"

I lightly gasped. It was only then that I realized why I couldn't tell Ledger I loved him or why I couldn't say yes to his proposal. It was because of them. It all came back to that.

"I can't believe I've been such an idiot. It's your fault."

For the first time, I understood why Ledger chose Chance over me. It was his loyalty to his best friend, just like it was mine for my parents. It didn't matter that I wasn't involved in their feud. I still took their side without realizing I had. They were my parents, they gave me life, and I couldn't betray them.

"What are you talking about, Hazel?" Mom questioned. "You're speaking in circles."

Shifting my gaze to Ledger, we locked eyes.

"I understand why you hurt me. I get it now."

He frowned.

"I'm so sorry, Ledger. I've been keeping you at arm's length because of my loyalty to them. I didn't even realize I was doing it until right now. It all makes sense, and I need you to forgive me."

He caressed my cheek with the back of his fingers. "There's nothing to forgive, sugar."

Before I put my parents in their place, I had to tell Ledger, "I love you. I'm so in love with you, and I never stopped. It's always been you."

He smiled, brushing the hair away from my face. "I know, sugar. I love you too. You and Hallie are my whole world."

My parents' loud gasps tore my attention back to them.

"Hallie?" Mom exclaimed. "You're naming my first grandbaby after a woman who is our enemy."

I jerked, suddenly pissed as fuck. "How dare you say that to me? His mother meant everything to Chance and me. She's not here to defend herself either!"

"We don't care! That's our grandchild!"

"Well, if you want to meet her one day, then I advise you to get used to it." I didn't back down, adding, "Ledger's my fiancé. We're getting married before the baby is born, so you'll have to deal with it. This is my family now."

"Sugar," Ledger rasped, making me peer at him again.

“Yes. My answer is yes. I want to marry you. I want to be Hazel Beckham. I want to build a life with you and have many more babies. I’m sorry it took me so long to get to this place, but I’m here now, and I want nothing more than to be your wife.”

Ledger was down on one knee in one swift movement, grabbing a ring box from inside his suit jacket. I sucked in a breath, surprised.

“I’ve been carrying around this ring, just waiting for the right time to give it to you, and I can’t think of a better one than this moment. “Hazel”—he opened the box—“will you do me the honor of becoming my wife?”

I beamed, shouting, “Yes! Yes! Of course, I will!”

Without noticing, we had gathered a crowd, and they broke up cheering and clapping. Ledger slid the princess-cut diamond ring down my finger. It was exactly what I always dreamed of. As he was standing, he gripped the sides of my face and kissed me like we weren’t in front of a bunch of people.

After he pecked my lips one last time, I turned to my parents, who wore their devastation.

I didn’t waver, demanding, “You need to leave. You’re not welcome here until you stop whatever stupid rivalry you have with his family’s ranch. They mean you no harm, and they never have. It needs to end, or you’ll never see me or your grandchild again.”

Out of nowhere, Chance was standing beside me. “Or me,” he spoke with conviction, grabbing my hand.

Their wide stares flew back and forth between us, and I added, “If you keep this going, I will do everything in my power to make sure you go out of business. I have all the money in the world to take you down, and don’t think for one second I won’t do that for my husband.”

“I can’t believe this.” Dad sneered, “You wouldn’t.”

“Try me,” I threatened.



Ledger spoke up, “I am willing to put my hatred aside and forgive all the shitty things you have done to us for years if it means that my baby girl will have her grandparents. My mother is no longer here with us. Don’t make Hallie lose another one.”

My heart broke for him. I knew how hard it was for him to express that, but he was doing it for our daughter. Simply proving that Ledger Beckham was a hell of a man. I was so lucky.

“The choice is yours,” I informed. “Take it or leave it. It’s where we stand.”

Neither said a word, standing there in shock. There was nothing left to say because we finally said it all.

My mother stepped forward, setting her hand on my belly for a second. Her torn expression was evident.

“Denise,” Dad stated. “Let’s go.”

I hated that this was happening. However, the ball was in their court. Reluctantly, they spun and left. They gazed back at us a couple of times, making me think that maybe, just maybe, they’d eventually come around. If they refused, I’d buy their ranch if I had to.

No one was fucking with my family.

Not even...

My parents.

TWENTY-NINE

## LEDGER

I watched Hazel pull her hair up off the nape of her neck as she stood in my old bedroom. After her parents left, my family congratulated us along with our clients. My old man wasn't upset about what happened. If anything, he was delighted.

Our clients shrugged off what went down. They were happy for us. Most of them knew about our feud, so it wasn't much of a blow to them. Sometime during the party, it was evening, and Hazel disappeared. I knew my girl. She needed a moment to herself to process the events.

I shut the door behind me, leaning against it.

She didn't turn, knowing it was me.

Instead, she announced, "We're back to where it all began between us."

"Sugar, we started way before that night."

"I know, but this is where it ended for us."

"It doesn't matter anymore."

"I know."

"Are you alright?"

"I think so."

"You sure?"

"I'm not sad, Ledger. I'm just disappointed they showed up here and ruined your company's party."

"Our clients who are here have been with us for years. You have nothing to worry about."

"Okay."

"I'm sorry—"

“Don’t apologize for them. They should be ashamed of themselves.”

“I’m here for you. Just know that.”

“Now that I know.”

Our connection felt stronger than ever. She looked my way, catching me leaning up against the door with my arms crossed over my chest and my head cocked to the side, taking her in as she glistened from the sunset.

“You should go back to the party.”

I arched an eyebrow, grinning. “I have a better idea.”

She narrowed her eyes at me, picking up on the slight edge in my tone.

“Oh yeah?” she breathed out, her voice shaky and unsure. “What’s that?”

I locked the door before heading toward her and reaching her in four long strides. Her back hit the adjacent wall behind her, and I hovered over her small frame, locking her in with my arms on the sides of her face.

Leaning forward, I coaxed, “I want to make love to my fiancée.”

She smirked. “There’s a party outside.”

“Didn’t stop you last time.”

“Ledger...”

“I want to make things right.”

“You did. I love you.”

“Did you think I never noticed you back then?”

“I know you didn’t.”

“I noticed the way your sundresses would cling to your sexy body and how they still fucking do.”

She giggled. “There aren’t many things that don’t cling to me these days.”

“I noticed the way you would dance. The way you would smile and laugh.”

She swallowed hard.

“You know what I didn’t notice, though?”

“Hmm...?”

“How tight and sweet your perfect pussy is for me.”

The sudden urge to make her mine was too overpowering to ignore any longer. The urge to show her over and over again just how much she belonged to me and always would take over.

Consuming me.

I didn’t hesitate to pick her up by her ass. Her belly between us always made me smile.

“I can’t believe you can still carry me.”

“I love carrying you and our baby. I’m going to miss seeing you pregnant.”

I set her on the dresser, and her body was level with mine now. She looked up at me with longing and love. So much fucking love. The heady expression on her face pushed me further over the edge, and I was barely hanging onto my last bit of control. I slowly reached for the hem of her dress, taking it off in one swift movement and freeing her big, luscious tits. Her nipples were already hard, waiting for me to suck them into my mouth.

I kissed my way down her neck, stopping to inhale the scent of sunscreen on her skin that always did things to me. Her smell assaulted my senses, causing my cock to twitch.

I gently sucked one of her nipples into my mouth while my hand caressed and fondled the other. Her breathing escalated. Both of her soft, delicate hands made their way up my chest, gripping my hair as she gyrated her hips forward to the edge of the dresser.

Her silent plea to keep going.

I continued my pursuit of her smooth skin, leaving a trail of desire in my wake. Kissing her belly next, I gazed up at her with just my eyes as she looked down at me, watching everything I did through a dark, dilated, intensified stare.

I grinned. "There's my girl."

She smiled, biting her bottom lip in a sinful yet innocent way that only Hazel could pull off. Her hands let go of my hair to lean back for support while my teeth latched onto the front of her silk panties. My hands went to the sides of the elastic binding, deliberately sliding them down her legs in a slow, tantalizing rhythm before getting on my knees to slide them down her legs.

She still wore heels and was adamant that she would wear them, no matter how big she became with her pregnancy. It was sexy as fuck; she was sexy as fuck.

"You have no idea how many times I've thought about eating your pussy today," I groaned, grabbing her right foot and perching it on the side of the counter as I licked my way to her core.

I leaned back, sitting on my ankles once I was done. I needed to see her sitting there, completely spread open for me. I let my predatory regard do all the talking for me as I admired the view of her wet pussy.

I could have come from that alone.

"I need you to know that you didn't have to do that for me today with your parents."

"I need you to know," she repeated, "that I meant every word."

Making me lose all control.

## HAZEL

I couldn't believe he was doing this, here, in his bedroom of all places, but when Ledger put his mind to something, anything... there was no telling him no.

And I wouldn't have it any other way.

There I sat, completely open for him and showing him every last part of me. It didn't matter that he'd seen me countless times before. Each time he looked at me, it felt like the first. I had always loved his bright green eyes that held everything he could sometimes never say. They always spoke volumes.

The desire.

The thirst.

The hunger.

It was all there.

Especially his love.

He was my home.

*Mine.*

As if he couldn't take it any longer, he lunged forward, almost knocking me off the dresser to devour me.

Licking, sucking, eating...

My hands tangled in his hair, clutching on for dear life while my head fell back and my eyes closed as he devoured me like a starved man who needed food. It didn't take long until I panted and moaned his name, overwhelmed by his sweet torture and coming apart for him.

"Fuck..." he breathed out, and our stares locked. "You taste so fucking good. I will never be able to get enough of your sweet pussy. Does that feel good, baby? Tell me how good."

He didn't give me a chance to answer before his tongue immediately moved to my opening, and he growled the second his tongue dipped inside, licking me clean. He made love to me with his mouth for what felt like hours, like he couldn't get enough of my heat.

After I came for the third time, he kissed his way up my body, latching onto the sides of my face before he slid his tongue into my mouth, wanting me to savor my arousal from his lips.

I heard the rustling of his pants as he let them fall down his thighs, not bothering to remove any of his other clothing. His hands went around to my waist within seconds, and he effortlessly picked me up off the counter like I weighed nothing when that was far from the case.

He laid me on the bed, ordering, "Get on your knees for me, sugar."

I did, sticking my ass out for him.

In one deep thrust, he was balls deep inside me.

"Ledger," I panted, unable to hold it in any longer.

We moaned in unison, taking a moment to enjoy the feeling of being connected as one as we molded into what felt like one person. He held my hips tightly in his grasp.

"Fuck," he growled, grabbing me harder and more demanding.

And with that, he started to glide in and out of me.

"You always feel so deep this way."

"You can take it."

We eyed each other from the mirror in front of us, and I showed him everything he wanted. Everything he needed. How I was his and only his. How I'd always been.

Our eyes remained in tune with one another, watching what the other was giving. It took all my willpower not to let my eyes roll to the back of my head. We were both gasping



and breathless for air. Our moans were getting louder and heavier.

I was worried somebody would hear us, but everyone was outside. His movements became faster and harder, more urgent and stronger. It didn't take long for my body to let go, and I couldn't stop my head from falling back. Giving him the leeway to kiss and suck along my neck stirred more sensations that coursed through my body.

“Fuck yeah... just like that... come on my cock with your sweet fucking pussy that's mine...”

“I'm yours.”

His filthy words were my undoing, causing me to come again and bring him right over the edge along with me.

“I love you,” I repeated, needing him to hear it for all the months I couldn't express it to him.

I owed him so much.

He turned me over, laying me down to kiss my lips.

“I should have done this eleven years ago, and I fucking hate that another man claimed what was always mine to begin with. I'll spend the rest of my life making it up to you. I hope this room no longer causes you pain. Instead, I hope you remember when you became my soon-to-be wife.”

“I can't wait.”

“Neither can I. I love you, sugar.” He kissed all over my face.

“I love you, too.”

He didn't stop there. Once the party was over, he took me home and made love to me all night long. Where I'd become his wife and we're finally...

A family.

THIRTY

## LEDGER

“You sure you’re ready to do this?” Chance asked, standing behind beside me in my backyard.

“I’ve never been more ready for anything in all my life.”

He smiled. “I can’t believe you’re doing this, and she has no idea.”

Six weeks had flown by, and as soon as Hazel finished her wedding dress a few days ago, I put my plan into action. She thought we’d go to the courthouse later this week since Hallie was due in another two, but I would never do that to her. She deserved so much more than a courthouse wedding.

I couldn’t wait to see her face. Everyone who mattered was there in attendance. Her parents still hadn’t come around, but I didn’t let that deter me from what I had to do. There wasn’t anything I wanted more in this world than to have Hazel take my last name.

“Ledger,” she called out, making her way outside.

She stopped dead in her tracks when she saw me standing there with Chance by my side.

“Oh my God!”

Everyone shouted, “Surprise!”

Her hand flew to her mouth, and she burst into tears. “You’re surprising me with a wedding?”

Hazel and Cove rushed to her side. Hazel said, “We need to get you dressed.”

I winked at her and watched them take her away only to bring her back dressed in a lacy off-white gown that was perfect. As soon as I saw my girl coming down the aisle to become Mrs. Beckham, all I thought about was how fucking lucky I was. My eyes never left her the entire time.

She was stunning.

Breathtaking.

Her hair was in soft waves, framing her face, while her train trailed behind her dress and was at least five feet long, blowing in the soft breeze. She was classy, elegant, and so goddamn sexy, making my cock twitch at the mere sight of her.

I smiled a reassuring smile as Chance placed her hand in mine. He was the one that gave her away and then moved to stand beside me as my best man.

“You take care of my sister,” he whispered in my ear. “Just know, I would have forgiven you back then, and I forgive you now.”

It meant a lot to me that he said that. Our friendship was better, and we were getting back to that place we once were where he trusted me, specifically with his sister. They always shared a special bond, and I hated that I may have come between them for a couple of months. Although, you wouldn't know that with how they were with one another now.

The minister proceeded, and when we got to the part where we exchanged our vows, I peered deep into her eyes and shared what was in my soul. “Hazel, I'll be forever grateful to call you, my wife. I don't know what I did to deserve you, but I promise you I will spend forever showing you how thankful I really am that you're the love of my life and the mother of my children. I don't know how I lived without you for so long and I thank God every day that he gave me a second chance with you. You own my heart, body, and soul. I love you. You're my everything.”

She was crying, but she'd never looked more beautiful to me.

“Ledger, words cannot express how much I love you. I never imagined we'd make it here, but that didn't stop me from hoping we eventually would. I can't wait to start this new journey together. You're everything I ever wanted and didn't think I'd have. I will forever stand by your side, not only as

your wife but as your best friend and family. Your family means everything to me and I'm so grateful to have them too. I love and cherish you in ways I've only read about in books. You're my soulmate, my Prince Charming, and happily ever after and I'm—" she grabbed her stomach and seconds later...

Her water broke.

## HAZEL

“Shit!” Chance shouted. “We need to get you to a hospital.”

“Yes.” I pointed at the minister. “But first, you need to finish and marry us.”

“Sugar, we—”

“I am not having this baby until he says the rest of his spiel. Do you understand me?”

Ledger nodded to the minister. “You heard the lady.”

The minister nervously chuckled, stating, “By the power vested in me by the state of Wyoming, I now pronounce you husband and wife. Ledger, you may kiss your bride.”

Ledger gripped the sides of her face, bringing me over to him. I went effortlessly, and he devoured me for the first time as husband and wife.

“Now,” I exclaimed. “We can go.”

Everything happened so fast, yet it played out in slow motion. One minute, we’re getting married, and the next, I’m lying in a hospital bed feeling like I’m being ripped open.

“Ahh...” I panted as Ledger ran a cool, wet wash rag over my forehead.

“Your cervix is one hundred percent effaced, and you are dilated to ten,” the nurse announced.

“Get her out!” I shouted, squeezing Ledger’s hand.

My morning had started off like every other morning, waking up to my fiancé burying himself inside me. He claimed that our baby was two weeks away, and he needed to fuck her out of me. The man was insatiable. It seemed like he was only getting worse with time.

Figures our baby girl would pick today, out of all days, to grace us with her presence. I was thirty-eight weeks pregnant,

so I was full term, and we were safe to have her come into our world.

I went about my morning until I had to leave to meet with a designer downtown and was there for several hours. I never thought I'd be coming home to Ledger surprising me with a ceremony.

I swear the man knew no bounds. There wasn't anything he wouldn't do for me. Everything about it was perfect. I couldn't have asked for a better wedding than he had made for me.

I was a little sad my parents weren't there, but it was what it was. It was their loss, not mine. The most important man other than Ledger was there, my twin brother, and that was more than good enough for me.

"Okay, this baby girl is strong-willed," the nurse stated. "I'm going to get the doctor. It's time."

"Oh, thank fuck. Why did I decide to do this natural again?"

Ledger laughed, kissing my forehead.

"I need drugs. Can you get me drugs?"

"It's too late for that."

"How do you know so much about babies? I kept my end of the bargain, now tell me. I need the distraction before your daughter—" I grabbed my stomach, bearing down. "Ahhh..."

"Breathe. You're doing amazing, sugar. Just breathe."

"Stop ordering me around and just tell me."

"You're bossy when you're in labor."

"I'm allowed to be. I'm about to deliver our baby, and you haven't done a damn thing."

"I did my part, or we wouldn't be here."

After the contraction had passed, I demanded, "Tell me. You said you couldn't until I was ready. I'm ready. What is it?"

“I’ve always wanted to be a father, so I started learning about pregnancy probably a year before us.”

“Why?”

He shrugged. “I think my mom was preparing me for you.”

I winced, loving his reply. “That’s the sweetest thing I’ve ever heard you say.”

“You weren’t ready to hear it then, and I didn’t want to scare you away.”

“Babe, if you’re stubborn, controlling ass ever did, trust me, it wouldn’t have been that.”

Ledger nodded, kissing my forehead one last time as Dr. Malone walked in.

“Are you ready to be parents?” she asked, examining me.

“Yes! Please... take her out. I can’t do this anymore... she needs to come out... now!”

Just when I was about to tell them I couldn’t do it anymore, another surge of pain shot all the way through me. Unbearable sensations I wasn’t sure I was strong enough to handle.

My hand squeezed Ledger’s again. “Ahhhh, ahhhhh, ahhh!” I screeched, huffing and puffing out through the agony. “Aaarrggghhh...” The torture consumed me.

“Push!” Dr. Malone ordered. “You’re doing great. Keep pushing, pushing, pushing. And relax,” she praised. “The baby is crowning. A few more pushes and you can meet your daughter. Whenever you are ready, Hazel.”

Ledger brushed my hair away from my damp forehead and kissed my lips. “You’re doing great. I’m so proud of you, sugar. You look so beautiful.”

“Shut up...” I demanded, feeling pain in a way I didn’t think was possible. “I need drugs! Please...”

“We’re long past that. Come on, Hazel. You’ve got this. Now push,” Dr. Malone urged.



I shot her a death stare as I tried to govern my breathing while pushing.

“Just need to get past the shoulders, and it will be smooth sailing,” Dr. Malone soothed, looking up at me.

I spent the next few seconds doing nothing but pushing and breathing, breathing and pushing. I’d never been so nervous in all my life. Never had an adrenaline rush quite like this before, pumping wildly through my veins and straight to my heart. I felt as though it could beat right out of my chest.

Things moved pretty quickly after that.

“Push, push, push, push!” Dr. Malone guided. “Good. And relax. Okay, you’re doing great, Hazel. Are you ready to meet your daughter? Here we go again. Push, push, push, push!”

I would never forget the look of pride on Ledger’s face when we heard a loud, piercing scream coming from Hallie.

“She’s so perfect, Hazel. Just like you.” He kissed all along my face before they placed her in my arms.

I tried to listen to everything they said, but I was beyond enraptured by the baby girl in my arms. This would be a day I’d never forget. Everything about it was embedded into my memory, becoming just as much a part of me as my family.

The loves of my life.

When she started fussing, I brought her closer to my face, murmuring in her ear, “Shhh... Hallie... shhhh...”

Ledger took off his shirt to hold her and do skin to skin, and the moment I saw Hallie in his arms for the first time, I broke down crying again.

“I love you, sugar.” He kissed me. “I love you, sweet pea.” He kissed her.

This was why women got pregnant again. Seeing him with her made it all worthwhile. The love and devotion I felt for her was immediate. It was crazy how fast we fell in love with her.

The past didn’t matter anymore because this was only the beginning of our...

Love story.

# EPILOGUE

## HAZEL

“Whoever said babies were exhausting wasn’t kidding,” Haven declared, walking back into the kitchen.

“Tell me about it.”

It had been six weeks since she was born, and we were slowly adjusting to being parents. However, Ledger was a natural and made it look easy.

“I don’t think I’m ready for kids.”

“You’re only nineteen, I’d imagine you wouldn’t be.”

“I am totally ready for kids,” Cove announced, grabbing a water out of the fridge. “I can’t wait to be a mom.”

Haven shrugged. “You guys can have all the babies. I’ll be ready in like maybe five years.”

“How’s my girl?” Ledger cooed over the baby monitor, and we all grinned at each other.

“Daddy missed you today. Let’s not tell your mommy that I woke you up.”

I shook my head.

“I thought you weren’t supposed to ever wake a sleeping baby?” Haven asked, still smiling.

Not even a second later, we heard her cries.

“Told you,” she added. “On that note, we’re going to get out of here.”

I chuckled. Ledger had just gotten home from work. The girls hugged me and left.

“Shhh... shhh... sweet pea... you have to fall back asleep for me, or Mommy will have my balls, and we can’t have that, now, can we? You need a sibling. What do you think? A brother or a sister?”

I shook my head again. We just had a kid, and he already wanted another, but just like that, she whimpered for a few seconds and stopped crying.

“Unbelievable,” I said to myself as I made my way into our bedroom with the baby monitor.

I loved hearing their private conversations. He talked to her about the most random things. The other day, he told her that her mommy wanted Daddy to take her virginity, but Daddy said no because of Uncle Chance. It was truly ridiculous how much he shared with her, saying she wouldn't remember a thing.

“Daddy loves you so much, Hallie, but if you keep crying like this every night and not allowing me have my way with your mommy, then how am I going to give you another sibling?”

I laughed.

I lay down on the bed, staring up at the ceiling. I was exhausted. Between running my business and taking care of Hallie and my husband, my time was run thin, but I wouldn't have it any other way.

Before I knew it, I must have fallen asleep. I woke up to Ledger's face between my legs.

“Do you know what today is?”

I played dumb. “No, I don't. Is something supposed to happen?”

“Yeah.” He sucked my clit into his mouth, making me moan.

“I can finally make you come. First, it will be with my mouth and then my dick. What do you think about that?”

“Hmm... I think I can fit you in.”

He chuckled, “Barely.”

This was what I always wanted.

Ledger Beckham as my husband.

The father of my children.  
And the love of my life.

## LEDGER

There wasn't a place on Hazel's body that I didn't kiss, touch, or suck. There wasn't one moan, pant, or I love you left for her to say after I thoroughly made love to her the way she wanted.

I had everything I ever wanted.

Everything I ever hoped for.

I didn't care how long it took us to get to this place because all that mattered was that we were there.

Together.

*Forever.*

"Mmm..." she groaned, her eyes fluttering open as I licked her pussy after she came down my face.

"I want another baby," I simply stated.

She smiled big and wide.

"You think you could do that for me?" I asked, sucking her clit into my mouth again, moving my head side to side. "Hmm..." I hummed.

"I mean, seeing as you have super sperm, that could very much be a possibility," she sassed, and I gently bit down, causing her to squirm.

"Let's make one right now." I pushed two fingers into her warm, wet pussy. Her back arched off the bed when I hit her sweet spot while I fucked her with my mouth. "That feel good?"

Her breathing hitched, and her legs trembled.

"What?" I pushed deeper, sucking faster.

Her legs tightened so fucking hard around my head as she came all the way down my face again. I savored her taste against my tongue, swallowing every last drop before I kissed her clit one last time and made my way up her body, stopping

when I was fully on top of her. I enclosed her with my arms, positioning my cock at her entrance.

I would never be able to get enough of her sweet, sweet pussy.

*Mine.*

I slowly thrust all the way inside her, and her eyes rolled to the back of her head as I kissed along her neck and down to her breasts with her heart pressed against mine.

Where it belonged.

“Do you feel me inside you?” I growled into her mouth.

“Yes.”

“Give me another baby.”

She smiled. “I love you.”

“Prove it.”

I angled my leg higher, making her leg incline. Our mouths parted as I gently took what was mine. It didn't take long until we were both panting profusely, clinging to every sensation of our skin-on-skin contact. I felt myself start to come apart, and she was right there with me before I came deep inside her, her pussy squeezing my cock so fucking tight.

I kissed her one last time and looked deep into her eyes.

“There's my girl.”

She beamed and announced, “You didn't use a condom.”

I didn't waver in speaking with conviction...

“I know.”

THE END

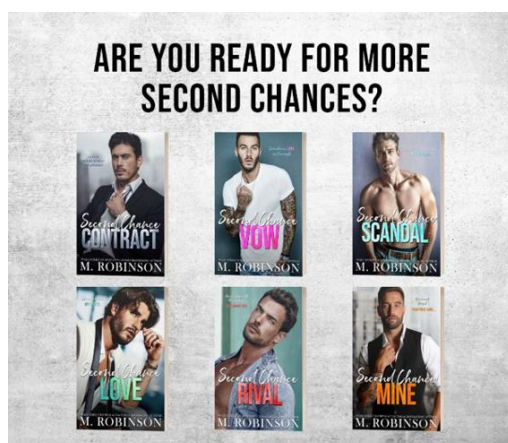


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# MEET M. ROBINSON

M. Robinson is the Wall Street Journal and USA Today Bestselling author of more than thirty novels in Contemporary Romance and Romantic Suspense. Crowned the “Queen of Angst” by her loyal readers, you’ll feel the cut of her pen slicing through your heart as your soul bleeds upon the words of her stories with each turn of the page.

Most notably known for the Good Ol’ Boys, M’s newest venture has graced her with the #1 Bestseller on Apple Books with Second Chance Contract. The Second Chance Men are powerful, intelligent and will sweep you off your feet and leave you weak in the knees—every woman’s wildest dreams.

M. lives the boat life along the Gulf Coast of Florida with her two puppies and real life book boyfriend, the inspiration for all her filthy talking alphas, Bossman.

When she isn’t in the cave writing her next epic love story, you can usually spot her mad-dashing through Target or in the drive-thru of Starbucks, refueling. Yes, she’s a self-proclaimed shopaholic, but only if she’s spending Bossman’s money.

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