

ALL THE *Jingle* LADIES



Soothed

BY THE **DOCTOR**

VONNE B

SOOTHED BY THE DOCTOR

ALL THE JINGLE LADIES



VONNE B





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Cover Design: Last Chapter Press LLC

Editing: [Like a Goddess Boss Editing](#) and Last Chapter Press LLC

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SOOTHED BY THE DOCTOR INFO

She doesn't have time for games, especially with a playboy like him. He's young, cocky, and used to playing the field but he see what he wants and it's her. With his heart in his hand, he's asking her to trust that what they have is real. Will she let him in or will she show him door?

Velma

Do I believe in love at first sight? Yes. But it's not for me and certainly not with CJ.

I love my job as Customer Relations Manager at Coldwater Cabin Resorts, ensuring that all our guests have the vacation of their dreams is what I excel at.

But there's one who's making my job and life difficult - CJ Jacobs.

He's got it in his head that I belong to him and it's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard.

He's only here temporarily and I'm not into flings. Plus, he's way too young for me.

But then I discover his visit is anything but temporary. Not only is he our town's new vet but he plans on staying here for good.

Now my lips and hands keep winding up places they shouldn't be and I'm having a hard time remembering why any of this is wrong.

CJ

Do I believe in love at first sight? No. But I do believe in my gut and it's screaming that Velma is the one.

This move to Coldwater Ridge was supposed to be temporary. A year or two max so I could get the hands-on training I needed to open my own large animal veterinary office.

All that changed when I met Velma. One look at her and tossing aside my playboy ways and planning on a future in this small mountain town.

There's only one roadblock in my way and it's the woman herself.

Velma's not on the same page. She thinks I'm too young and nothing but a bed warmer.

But I never give up and definitely not this time.

Determination has always been my strongest trait and I will use every ounce I have to show Velma that we're meant to be together.

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CHAPTER 1



VELMA

“YES, MA’AM I’LL BE SURE TO MENTION TO THE PARK RANGERS that your son tends to wander.”

Why don’t you keep an eye on your badass son yourself? The Rangers aren’t babysitters. Is what I wanted to say to the lady on the phone but instead, I pasted on a smile and told her what she wanted to hear.

That is my job in a nutshell... feeding already delusional people more delusions to keep them happy. And I’m good at it.

Leaning against the front counter, I twirl the phone cord around my finger as Mrs. Escot goes on and on.

She hasn’t even arrived at the resort yet and she’s already getting on my nerves. Her list of demands is growing by the second, each more ridiculous than the last.

Her latest one has me pushing off the desk in disbelief, startling my coworkers, Georgie and Tacie. They’re not used to me being frazzled.

“I apologize, Mrs. Escot, but I believe I misheard that request. Do you mind repeating it?”

She sighs, clearly upset and now convinced that I’m a bumbling fool but that’s okay because there is no way she said what I think she said. She repeats her request and... holy shit. This is a first.

“Yes, ma’am I understand. Bears can be frightening, however, I will not be able to remove them from the mountain.

It's their home... they live there," I say, but I can admit my tone could have been less amused.

Why on earth would you book a vacation in a mountain resort when you don't like mountains or the wildlife that lives there? I can already sense a vacation in my future just to recover from her visit.

Great. She's yelling now, so loud the entire lobby could probably hear her. Thank goodness it's empty. The last thing I need is for our current guest to be witness to this nonsense.

Georgie and Tacie are now fully vested in the conversation, each taking space on one of my shoulders. I don't blame them. I'd be doing the same thing but it's a bad look.

Attempting to exert some control over the rapidly deteriorating situation, I shoo them away as Mrs. Escot continues her assault, demanding to speak with a supervisor. Too bad for her— and me at the moment— that would be me.

Once I tell her that little tidbit of information, she goes into a rage, swearing that I'm lying. I have two options now. Lie by saying that I was lying and hand her off to Thomas, the General Manager or de-escalate the situation myself.

I didn't get to be the Customer Relations Manager by shirking my responsibilities. And right now, fixing this cluster is up to me. Double-checking her information on the computer I see my solution.

"Mrs. Escot, I apologize. I failed to fully understand the situation. Bears roaming around during your morning walks would certainly pose an issue. I see here that your reservation is for Christmas week which luckily is three weeks from now. By then all the bears will be deep in hibernation for the winter. And if any remain awake, I'll have the rangers deal with them."

They won't do a damn thing. Seeing a bear out during the winter is not entirely unheard of but she doesn't need to know that.

Mrs. Escot concedes this round with a warning that her cabin better be top tier or else, which slightly offends me. All the accommodations here at Coldwater Cabin Resorts are top tier. We might be small on design but we pride ourselves on excellence. Mr. Dufort, the owner, expects nothing less. Even though he lives less than an hour away, we rarely see him, which makes his surprise visits that much more stressful.

“What did she expect us to do? Round up all the bears and then what?” Tacie asks as soon as I hang up.

“Put them in her cabin. That’ll probably keep her ‘wandering’ son in place,” Georgie quips. “Can I cancel her reservation?” Georgie is my biggest headache. She would cancel Mrs. Escot’s reservation if I let her.

Tacie giggles and then shushes her. They’re sisters and watching them interact, you would like that Tacie is the oldest with the way she tries to mother Georgie. In reality, she’s the youngest and sweetest. Georgie, the oldest, on the other hand, is loud and full of sass.

I shake my head at the pair then go full manager mode, assigning them the task of straightening the counter and checking if all the guests due to arrive today have checked in, before heading back into my small office behind the front desk. I keep the door open and my eyes and ears peeled in case things get too out of hand. You never know with the feisty McClains.

“Whatever Tee,” Georgie says, still going while she scrolls through the booking system. “Sometimes it takes a good bear mauling to loosen some people up. Maybe you could use one.”

Tacie’s face twists in confusion. She doesn’t know what Georgie is alluding to but I do. With her clever wordplay, she’s talking about Bear, the oldest McClain and the only male of the bunch.

Their family dynamic is different than most in Coldwater Ridge and easy enough to follow once you’re made aware. Tacie is adopted and Bear is the other sister’s half-brother. My parents think it’s strange that the McClains would adopt an African American girl but I didn’t see them rushing to the

rescue when Tacie's grandmother passed. No. What their real issue is, is that Bear is in love with her.

They say it's immoral but the truth is they had high hopes for Bear and me getting married. A match between us would have united two of the oldest families in Coldwater. Bear is attractive but I never saw him as anything other than a friend. And the same goes for him.

As if sensing my thoughts, the man himself comes strolling in and Tacie becomes flustered. Taking it out on the desk by knocking over a stack of key cards and a container of pens. In her attempts to right things she somehow manages to destroy a section of the garland I'd spent hours hanging around the edge of the counter.

Bear reaches the desk and stills Tacie's hand, rubbing tiny circles on her palm. "You okay, babygirl? Georgie not giving you any shit, is she?"

I'm jealous of the way his deep rumbling voice goes soft whenever he speaks to her, of how much emotion shines in his eyes. For once I want a man to speak to me that way... look at me like I'm the most important person in the world.

Pushing thirty-six, I'm beginning to think it's a little too late. My last, and only, serious relationship ended over ten years ago. We dated for almost the same amount of time and never once did he treat me that way.

His name was Roger and we were high school sweethearts. After we graduated, our relationship just kept going out of convenience until we both finally decided to call it quits. He's married now with children while I'm alone.

I continue to watch as Bear slips between the swinging doors splitting the large oak desk and helps Tacie straighten things back up. When I was first hired as manager, I tried to put a stop to that but nobody keeps Bear away from his babygirl. How she doesn't realize he's crazy for her is beyond comprehension.

Georgie stomps over to her brother, hands on her hips. "I'm not doing anything to your 'babygirl'. And why don't

you have a nickname for the rest of us?" she smirks, fully aware as is the rest of Coldwater why he doesn't.

"I do. It's 'Tease'." He smirks back, which sets Georgie off.

Tacie joins in for the fun of it and now I have half of the McClain siblings bickering at my front desk. I let it go on for a minute, enjoying their back and forth. The lobby is clear so there really isn't any harm. I can't be a taskmaster all the time. Managing is all about balance.

My sister, Irina, and I have our fair share of arguments but nothing like them. I'm eleven years older than her so we have more of a mother-daughter relationship. I boss her around and she ignores me, doing what she pleases.

Thinking of her puts me in an even lower mood. She's in a small mountain town in Montana called Black Timber Peak with a fiancé and a baby on the way. Another sign that I'm way behind in life.

A gust of wind hits the desk, blowing papers across it, and draws my eyes to the front door. A guest has arrived which means it's time to break up the party.

"Guest," I loudly hiss.

The trio pulls apart and turns toward the door.

Satisfied, I go back to making the schedules for the rest of the month. December is always the hardest with Christmas and then New Year's Eve right after.

Suddenly, I hear Tacie mutter, "Good gravy," and Bear growls.

I glance at them and spot Georgie patting Bear on his shoulders. "Don't worry, big guy. I got this one." She pushes out her already ample chest and saunters to her computer.

Whoever headed our way must be good-looking. Better than average if he made Tacie notice. I get back to work not interested in some temporary resident, no matter how handsome.

Georgie coos, “Welcome to Coldwater Cabin Resort, handsome. It’ll be my pleasure to check you out... I mean in today.”

I roll my eyes. Tease is the right word for Georgie. With her curvy body, long brunette hair, and come-hither eyes, men are always throwing themselves at her. And she’s always willing to catch them. But what few people don’t know about her is that she’s a virgin. She might flirt like a pro but that’s as far as it goes. She’s left many men literally holding their dicks.

To my surprise, my body tightens in my lower region, which I thought was dead, clenches when a husky sex-filled voice responds.

“Why hello, beautiful. I would love to be checked out by you. But only if I can do the same.”

I look up to see the man the voice belongs to. The one that has my body in such an unusual state.

Good gravy is right. The man standing in front of Georgie is a snack and a half. He’s a beast of a man, tall with broad shoulders. The sweater he’s wearing is tight, showing off his muscular chest. My eyes travel up to his smooth face and intentionally messily styled short dirty blonde hair. I drop back down to his hazel eyes filled with promises of a night you’ll never forget. God help me I want to take him up on that promise but it isn’t me he’s looking at. And why would he?

I’m curvy like Georgie but nowhere near as attractive. Plus, I look every bit my age while she sports the same twenty-something appearance as him.

Not to be outdone, Georgie giggles and then shoots him with, “You, sir, just earned yourself an upgrade. You just let me know what you need and I’ll be sure you get it.” She tosses in a wink for extra measure.

His full lips part, probably ready to come back with something as equally provocative when his eyes catch mine, freezing him in place. His whole demeanor changes as he takes a step to the side, placing me in full view.

I'm powerless to move, trapped in his sight as his eyes travel my face. Gone are the playful twinkle and lustful gaze. It's all been replaced with sheer determination then fire. This is the look of a man who's seen what he wants and refuses to allow anyone or anything to stop him.

Confused and more than a little turned on, I drop my head under his intense stare. That look can't be directed to me, can it? No. I'm too old for a young stud like him. Besides, he has 'just for fun only' written all over him and I'm not in the market for a fling. Or anything for that matter. I have goals to reach before I turn forty and a man would only get in the way of them. At least that's what I tell myself to justify my loneliness.

"Sir?" Georgie asks, hoping to regain the mystery man's attention. "Would you like to check in now?"

From the top of my eyelashes, I see him slowly turn to her then frown. "You said you'll get me whatever I need, right?"

"I did," Georgie carefully says. She, along with everyone else present, can tell that the winds have shifted. Bear and Tacie are glancing at me in amusement.

"Perfect. I want her then." He points at me. "For the foreseeable future."

CHAPTER 2



CJ

I NEED TO CALL MY SISTER AND GET HER OUT HERE ASAP. She's an event coordinator back home and I'm sure she can put together a wedding quickly. Because if I don't get a ring on that stunning woman hiding in her office and her hot curvy body under mine by the end of the day, I just might lose my mind.

When I was hired at C. R. Veterinary Clinic, I figured I'd be here for two maybe three years tops before moving on to greener pastures. Not that there's anything wrong with a small town. I grew up in one myself, but owning a practice is something I've dreamed of since I was twelve. But if I have to give up that dream for the woman currently staring at me like I have three heads, then so be it.

Dr. Jones, the sole veterinarian here, isn't looking for a replacement or even a partner. She only took me on so that I could gain experience since most of mine has been in the city. I studied to work with large animals and wildlife and you don't find much of those out there. Hopefully, I can convince her to let me stay on permanently because I am not going anywhere now.

"Umm, Mr..." The woman helping me at the desk tries to get my attention but pauses at my name. That's right, I didn't even give it to her before we entered into a battle of innuendos.

I glance over at her and smile, a less charming one than before. I don't want my angel to get the wrong thought. My one-night stands and short-term relationship days are over for

good. Besides, while sexy with a body made for sin Georgie here, if her name tag is correct, is also a virgin— and a tease. I could tell by the way her eyes never fully matched her words. She likes to play is all, so I gave her a worthy opponent.

“Jacobs. CJ Jacobs,” I say, then look back at my angel, who is no longer stunned by my early statement. Instead, she’s frowning and her brown eyes look sad and I can’t have that. “And I meant what I said. I want her.”

I point again but this time with my eyes, and I’m knocked with the same onslaught of emotions as the first time I laid eyes on her.

I almost missed her, focused solely on getting checked in so I could get some sleep. My flight from Florida was late so I spent hours in the airport scrolling through my phone until it died. Being that bored can tire a person out. Plus, I’m hungry and that’s never a good combination.

When I walked into Coldwater Resort I wasn’t on my game. I did, however, notice how done up the lobby is, full of decorations exclaiming that the holidays are here. Two enormous Christmas trees are flanking the large lit fireplace, each decorated in a different color, one silver and one gold. Clear twinkling lights mixed with silver, gold, and green dangled from the shelves lining the walls and the edge of the front counter. It was right on the edge of being overdone but they somehow managed to pull it off.

Once I arrived at the desk, Georgie batted her pretty eyes at me and my natural instinct to play along kicked in. That is, until I spotted her from the corner of my eye.

The moment I did my heart slowed then sped up and threatened to fly out of my chest. And that’s how I knew.

My heart never enters into these matters. I see a woman, my cock twitches then it’s off to bed we go. I’ve had my share, all of which knew it wasn’t meant to last. Lust never does. But this woman... this woman managed to wake up my hibernating heart with one look.

Good Lord she's stunning, was my first thought followed by she's mine not two beats later. I was struck by her glowing light brown skin and dark eyes that sparkled even in the harsh fluorescent lights. Her hair was pulled up in a tight bun that I ached to loosen and spread out on my pillow.

The longer I stared the harder her generous chest heaved, causing my dick to press against the zipper of my jeans. Poor thing was upset. He wanted to come out and play with his new owner.

It's a wonder poor shocked Georgie didn't kick me out when I demanded she hand my woman over like she was her guardian.

But I meant what I said, and I want... no, need my angel out here, closer to me.

"Well, are you coming out or not?" I ask her directly, and then come up with a much better plan. "You know what? It's probably best that you stay there and I come to you. Wouldn't want your employees to see you fall apart in my arms."

I step towards the swinging door in the middle of the huge counter intent on making good on my words. That gets her moving. She rushes out of the office and comes to a stop at the computer in front of me, pushing Georgie out of the way.

The two at the computer on the other end of the desk laugh. I'd forgotten about them. Truthfully, I was afraid to even glance their way. The big guy who, judging by his uniform, is a park ranger, growled at me when I walked in and pressed his body closer to the cute shapely African American woman beside him. "Message received," I thought. "That one is yours."

He doesn't have to worry now. In fact, the entire female population is safe. CJ Jacobs is officially off the market.

"How can I help you, sir? Is there an issue with your accommodations?" Her voice is sweet just like I knew it would be. There's a hardness to it too, letting me know she's not the kind to put up with bullshit. God help me, I love an assertive woman.

I sweep my eyes down her body before answering. Whoever chooses these uniforms is a freaking genius. The navy pants and white blouse perfectly showcase her rounded belly, wide hips, thick thighs, and ample breasts. Gorgeous. Just like I knew she would be. I like a woman I can hold on to and her body is built for exactly that. The name tag on her matching navy vest says Velma. I like it. It suits her classic looks.

“Well, angel. I haven’t checked in yet so I can’t say if I have any issues or not.”

She fidgets, embarrassed that she made such an obvious mistake. “Right, well I can assure you, sir, that you won’t. Coldwater Cabin Resorts is the premier mountain resort in Georgia. It boasts...”

Nervous, she launches into a spiel made to sell people vacationing here, not for those that already have reservations. She goes on about their set-up. They only have a limited number of cabins available to prevent the area from getting too congested. They’re all located off of one mountain trail that rides along Granny Smith Creek.

“Wait,” I interrupt. “Granny Smith Creek?”

“Yes, but we call it Granny for short. Coldwater is an orchard town.” I love how haughty her tone is, like I should’ve known that fact already. I smile as she continues. “Apples are how we got our start. We also breed some horses.”

The horse part I knew. It was one of the main reasons why I wanted to work here but the apple bit is new.

“Well, I suppose you learn something every day don’t you, Ambrosia?”

Velma’s face twists in confusion as her eyes dart to the trio now obviously listening in.

“I think he’s calling you sweet, Velma. In a very Coldwater way,” the big guy says, attempting but failing to keep his laughter inside.

“He is not, Bear,” she scolds him, and then focuses back on me. “Are you?” Her voice is so small and full of hope it

kills me. Hasn't anyone told her how perfect she is? Their loss is my gain is all I can think.

"I am."

"Oh. Well, thank you, sir. I think you're..." she nibbles her plump bottom lip, unsure of what to say next. "Sweet as well." She cringes then shakes off her blunder and slips back on her professional mask. "Now that you know all we have to offer, would you like to book a cabin?" Poor thing. I should just fuck her right here and end her misery. Obviously, she's too keyed up to think straight.

Georgie snickers at her flustered state and I shoot her a hard look. I don't want anyone making my angel feel bad.

"Velma baby, I already have a cabin," I softly say. "I'll be staying for a week." The position came with accommodations right above the veterinary office. But there was a leak and some flooring had to be replaced, so I needed to find someplace to go until then. I'm not upset though, not now. If I had moved right in there, who knows how long it would've taken for me to meet Velma.

"Right... right. Sorry," she mumbles, then asks for my credit card.

A few minutes later I'm all checked in, keycard in hand.

"Umm... would you like to join our rewards program? You know, for your next visit?" Velma stammered through her question clueing me in on the fact there is no such thing as a rewards program. I could tell her that I'll be moving here permanently and there's no need but I want to see what her angle is.

"Do we have a rewards program?" A small voice asks. It wasn't Georgie because there was nothing small about her voice. Must have been the other one whose name I haven't learned.

"No Tacie, we don't. Velma has lost her damn mind," Georgie loudly says, confirming my suspicions.

"We do too!" Velma snaps at Georgie. "I started it today. As Relations Manager, I have the authority to start any

initiative I want.”

Okay, so we're riding this lie out. Can't wait to see where it's going.

“I'll bite. What do you need from me and what are the perks?”

Velma stares at me for a moment and I can see the conflict going on in her head. She knows what she's after but she's not sure if she should be doing it.

The group has gotten closer, as curious as I am as to what her master plan is.

“I only need your date of birth. So we can send you a free... stay.” Another cringe. I don't think she's authorized to give away free stays. Not for imaginary reward programs.

“Date of birth, huh?” I grin. Now I know what she's up to. She wants to know how old I am. If I told her she'd probably freak out.

Velma looks to be in her mid-thirties, which puts her around ten years older than me. While it might not bother me it could spell the end for us. But I'm no quitter, and our age difference is bound to come out sometime.

“Nineteen ninety-seven,” I answer, giving her the only part she cares about.

Sure enough, a fleeting look of disappointment crosses her eyes and she nods her head muttering, “Too young.”

Hell no. I'm not letting her push me away. Count us out before we start. I march through the swinging doors and grab her by the waist. By instinct, her hands fly to my shoulders, brown eyes wide with shock, and her mouth in the cutest O shape.

I slant my mouth over hers and... fuck me, my angel tastes like sin. The type you'd commit without a second thought then do it again just because. She's sweet and spicy all rolled up in one delicious package.

I slip my tongue inside and run it along the roof of her mouth, causing her to tremble and moan. Then she attacks me,

roughly sliding her hands up my neck, gripping my hair to pull me closer. I drop mine to her round ass, squeezing and testing its fullness and I'm rewarded with another moan.

Velma's leg slowly creeps up, headed for my waist and I grip her tighter to help keep her balanced. Perfectly lined up now, I give her a shallow thrust, just enough to let her know what she does to me— age difference or no age difference.

“That's a mauling, Tacie. Something everybody needs at least once in their life.”

It was like cold water poured on Velma's head when Georgie spoke. She jumps back, pushing me away then running to her office and slamming the door, only to immediately open it back up. Hands on her hips and her face set in stone, Velma rigidly stands in the doorway, suddenly remembering she was the manager and needed to get this situation under control.

“Anyone not employed by Coldwater Cabin Resort must vacate the premises immediately.” Voice tight, Velma glares at the top of everyone's heads, and points at the door.

“I guess that means us. I have to get back to work. You be good, babygirl. And Georgie, please try not to tease Velma too much.” Bear chuckles. That name does suit him. He's about as big as one.

I nod at Georgie and Tacie then follow him out. But before I exit the door, I toss out a few parting words.

“I'm coming back for you, Velma. A smart man would never let a gorgeous woman like you slip through his fingers.”

I was valedictorian in both high school and college so she better heed my warning. Because when I make my brilliant mind up, I'll stop at nothing to make sure she knows that I'm keeping her.

CHAPTER 3



VELMA

SATURDAYS AT THE LAST STOP ARE ALWAYS BUZZING WITH activity, stuffed full of customers speaking over half-eaten plates and yelling greetings to those grabbing their orders to go.

This diner and its excellent food is a staple in Coldwater Ridge, owned by the O’Neal’s, a family mine is privately feuding with— same as the McClains. I say privately because neither family is aware of the feud. They treat us as they would any resident of Coldwater, with kindness and respect. Mine, on the other hand, spend most of the evening comparing our accomplishments to theirs and gossiping about their children.

My mom hates the comfy down-home vibe of The Last Stop, calling it tacky and cheap. The holiday decorations are her least favorite.

The O’Neal’s always go overboard with lights, multicolored tinsel, and big fluffy bows. Right now, the walls are so heavy with paper snowflakes they almost completely cover the pictures of the town’s residents hanging there.

It’s a tradition to bring in a new picture every year and major event. Weddings, babies, birthdays, anything they chose to bring in. The one thing they all have in common is that they’re candid casual shots— except the Freeman’s. Ours are staged, a smiling family set against a beautiful backdrop. Appearances are everything and yesterday I let myself and my parents down.

The nerve of that man coming behind my counter and grabbing me like that! And the nerve of my body for responding. Although it has been years since I've been touched. I probably would've acted that way with anyone.

Yeah, keep telling yourself that until you believe it.

"Tell me again how he kissed you," my lunch companion dreamily sighs, pulling my focus back to the table. "Was it full-on open mouth or just little nibbles on your bottom lip?" A glob of ketchup goes flying by my head, smacking the back of the booth I'm sitting in. I'm not surprised. Ivette gets very animated when she talks.

She mumbles, "Sorry" as I scrub the black cushion clean, then shovels the fry in her mouth, eyeing me expectantly.

I stare at my overly eager friend from across the booth, debating if I should answer her ridiculous question or ignore it—and her—altogether.

When I asked Ivette to meet me at The Last Stop for lunch, my plan didn't include delivering a play-by-play of the disaster that was yesterday. I figured I'd give her a high overview, breezing past the embarrassing bits, like how my body reacted to his voice and how out of control I felt when his lips touched mine. None of that is important. What is, however, is CJ's unacceptable behavior.

But apparently, my best friend of three years didn't get the memo. She'd rather discuss how much pressure he used or where his hands were. Way too invested in the how and not the big question—*why?*

Maybe I didn't explain it well enough and that's why the poor thing is confused.

"Ivette, focus please," I hiss. "A man younger than you assaulted me yesterday!"

She's only twenty-five and still thinks love will conquer all.

How we even became so close with our ten-year age difference is a mystery in and of itself. I've known her for years due to her friendship with my sister and somehow along

the way we connected. It's nice sometimes to have a younger perspective on situations. But this is not one of those times.

"Last time I checked, a kiss isn't an assault, sweetie."

Okay, maybe I was being a little harsh. It wasn't actually an assault in the strictest sense of the word.

"And what does his age have to do with anything? If he was older, would it have been okay?" she challenges me.

That's a good question and one I don't have an immediate answer for. I mull it over as I poke at my sandwich.

Men haven't been on my radar for years so I'm not sure how I'd handle an age-appropriate one. What I do know without a shadow of a doubt is that CJ Jacobs is too young and too virile for me. He probably thinks with my advanced age I know a trick or two. Well jokes on him. I've only been with two men in my life and I'm not too keen on making the third some stud who believes in the power of a one-night stand.

"Well?"

"Well, what, Ivette?" I snap. "Once again you're missing the point."

"And what is the point, Velma? That you liked it a little too much? That you almost climbed him like a tree?" If I wasn't a lady, I'd smack the smirk right off her stupid face.

"It was Georgie, wasn't it?" I tell Ivette more than ask, narrowing my eyes. "I'm firing her first thing Monday." I knew this would happen. One of those three was bound to talk and now the whole damn town will be gossiping about 'that horny Freeman girl' by dinner.

"You're not firing anybody. And it wasn't Georgie. It was you... just now. I added the climbing thing for fun and you took the bait." She laughs, waving her arm, sandwich in hand.

More food is flung my way, landing on my now abandoned plate. This time it's bacon, which doesn't stay long. Ivette reaches over and snatches the thick slice up and crams it back into her sandwich.

“You sneaky b...” I trail off, snatching the sandwich out of her hand halfway to her stupid big mouth. “This touched my plate, therefore it’s mine.” I pull the bacon back out and shove it in my mouth. I’ll be looking for a new best friend tomorrow.

“Aww, angel if you want more bacon, I’ll get you some. No need to steal your friend’s.” I know that voice. It’s the one I went to bed with and did unspeakable things to. That voice is a menace and must be avoided at all costs.

“What are you doing here?” I ask around a mouth full of bacon. I quickly swallow and then frown at the man looming above our table.

Being in his presence does terrible things to my insides. All my common sense flies out the window and I turn into the queen of horniness. Already my panties feel damp.

“Well, I was told this was the best place to eat. But had I known you two lovely ladies were here, I would’ve come sooner. Looks like I barely caught you as it is.” CJ nods at Ivette and I’s almost empty plates. Then he turns to her, hand extended out, and says, “I don’t believe we’ve met. I’m CJ and you are?”

Ivette, the traitor, turns bright red and giggles, “Ivette.”

Their handshake lasts way longer than it should and I have to stop myself from punching my former best friend. Instead, I shoot her a dirty look which only makes her laugh harder.

“Since my food isn’t ready yet and all the stools are taken, I guess I’ll...” he trails off and I assume that meant he was leaving but I was wrong.

“Don’t sit down!” I shout when CJ appears to be doing just that.

Using all my meager strength, I attempt to block his descent, but he simply pushes me out of the way with his hip. Having lost this round, I scoot over as far as I can, almost hugging the damn wall.

I’d forgotten that CJ fights dirty. He grabs my thigh, pulling it towards him until I’m practically on his lap. I try my best to move away but his hold is too tight.

“I thought I told you not to sit.”

“You did. But obviously, I didn’t listen.” CJ loosens his grip and starts drawing circles on my thigh.

As his hand travels up, all thoughts of breaking free fly from my head, leaving only room for dangerous lust-filled ones. My legs involuntarily spread, inviting him to go up a little more and over to where I need him the most. I’ve been wet and achy since yesterday, my fingers a poor substitute for the pleasure I know a man like him could give me.

His hand answers my silent plea, drawing the circles higher and higher until it reaches the crease where my thigh and sex meet. My breathing slows and I stare at his hand as he slides it over and gently cups my core.

God, am I really letting him do this to me? In public?

He tightens his hold when my hips shift, as if to say this is mine and don’t you dare try and take it away. A moan threatens to escape but I swallow it when CJ whispers in my ear, “You let these fuckers hear you and I’ll have to go to jail, baby.”

Then he calmly turns to Ivette. “So, tell me, what secrets does my Velma hold?”

“Why... why are you asking her? I’m right here.” I pray Ivette doesn’t notice how shaky my voice is.

And when did I become his?

“Oh, I know where you are, angel.” He rocks his hand against me. “But I also know you won’t tell me anything if I ask so I’m pumping your friend for info.” He’s right. But if he keeps rocking against my pussy like this, I’ll tell him anything.

Meanwhile, Ivette has developed a serious case of the giggles and her eyes keep darting to CJ’s hidden arm. I can see the wheels spinning as she tries to figure out exactly where his hand is resting. I’m so glad my distress is causing her so much amusement.

“Well, there really isn’t much to tell. Velma has lived here all her life, except for the four years she went away for

college. She worked for her parents until the resort opened. I guess that's about it. Oh, no wait! She quilts."

Two sentences, if you don't count that quilting nonsense because... how embarrassing. Ivette has managed to summon up my life in two short boring sentences. Sure, there's more to tell but not much. It's sad really.

With his free hand, CJ snags a fry off my plate and thinks while he chews. "Sounds about right," he finally says.

"What does that mean?" I ask, afraid that my patheticness is on display for the world to see.

CJ takes his time answering, twisting his upper body to study me with his speckled eyes. "It means, my little Honeycrisp, that you're perfect."

Honeycrisp? CJ has taken Coldwater's practice of naming things after apples to a whole 'nother level. I roll through my dusty apple variety index to figure out what this one means and come up short. My parents have a plot in the town's orchard but they sure as hell don't work in it.

"Honeycrisp? Oh my." Ivette is blushing so hard you'd think he said it to her. "Sweet and juicy. I wish someone would say that about me."

My cheeks heat up and I'm grateful that my darker skin tone hides my body's reaction to his words.

"Somebody will," CJ tells her still, staring at me like Bear does Tacie. "Damn, Velma, you're so beautiful it hurts."

His hand slides from my sex and curls around my waist, pulling me closer. I wasn't prepared for the onslaught of emotions when he slants his mouth over mine, kissing me so sweetly tears pool in my eyes. The diner and its occupants disappear, as I cling onto him, falling into the bubble of us that CJ creates whenever his lips touch mine.

"Your order is ready Dr. Jacobs... if you can pull yourself away, Velma." Someone laughs but all I hear is a buzzing sound, which I ignore.

CJ sighs and slowly pulls away like it pains him to stop, then leans his forehead against mine. “One day I’m going to kiss you and not be interrupted. I hope you’re ready for that, angel,” he murmurs against my lips.

His words make no sense to me.

One day? Why not today?

Balling his sweater in fists, I try to get his lips back where they belong.

“Velma Freeman! Let that poor man go! If your mama could see you now.” That does it, freeing me from the spell CJ has me under. I push him away, feeling like a teenager caught down at Empire Lane making out. We seriously need to stop naming stuff after apples.

Mrs. O’Neal shakes her head, the tiniest of smiles on her lips. “You work fast Dr. Jacobs. A handshake is the furthest most men get out of Velma.”

“Velma knows a keeper when she spots one,” CJ replies, pulling me back into his arms.

I go without a fight, too embarrassed to pretend I wasn’t practically in his lap a moment ago. I’ll ride this out and then focus on damage control later.

Mrs. O’Neal says her goodbyes and then walks back to the counter where a line has formed. Not that anyone minds the wait. A quick survey confirms that I’m the star of this afternoon’s lunch show. All eyes are on our table, the patrons loving the fact the good Freeman daughter was caught with her hands where they don’t belong. They’re used to Irina being the wild child, not me.

I glance at Ivette, who hasn’t said a word this whole time. My abandoned plate of fries is in front of her now, being eaten one by one as she watches CJ and I like a movie.

“Ivette, stop eating my food!”

She shrugs and pops another fry into her stupid mouth, not all remorseful. “I had to do something while you were occupied. Georgie is right... he does maul you like a bear.”

I know it! I glare, all my anger and embarrassment pointed in her direction. “Georgie needs to learn to keep her big mouth shut. I’m firing all of the nosy-ass McClains. And you can just forget my number because...”

I’m lashing out, flustered that I behaved so slutty in public with a man clearly younger than me.

Two fingers land on my cheek, softly pressing until I’m facing him.

“You okay, angel?” CJ looks so concerned I almost tell him yes, almost fall into his arms again.

But I hold strong. What he’s doing to me isn’t right. Making promises he can’t possibly keep. We both know I’m too old for him and he’s too playboy for me. It’s time I put this stud in his place.

CHAPTER 4



VELMA

I GIVE CJ A HARD SHOVE, CREATING SOME MUCH-NEEDED space between us, and almost send him off the oak booth. Then I let loose a tirade fueled by embarrassment and just a dash of crazy.

“No, I’m not okay! You keep shoving your tongue down my throat every time we meet. It’s disgusting... and I hate it. I refuse to be your bit of fun while you’re on vacation.”

When did I turn into such a dirty filthy liar? I would have swallowed him whole if Mrs. O’Neal hadn’t stopped me.

“And furthermore, you, CJ Jacobs, are a cad,” I spit out for my big finish.

“A cad? Jesus, how old is Velma?” Someone from behind us says. Laughter rings out and I’m ready to dive under the table and hide. My mother is going to have a field day with this one.

CJ growls, a loud aggressive one that silences the room, then slides over, invading my space and trapping me against the wall. My traitorous body responds as he snakes his arms around my waist, adjusting my position to face him.

“Doctor,” he says, smiling at me with what I imagine love to look like. Which is insane because love has nothing to do with whatever’s going on in his one-track mind. “And I’m not on vacation.”

“What?” I blink, bewildered by his statements. What does he mean doctor? Wait. Didn’t Mrs. O’Neal call him Dr.

Jacobs? Fine, he's a doctor then but that doesn't explain why he's staying at the resort if he isn't on vacation.

"I'm a doctor. A veterinarian to be specific. My apartment is being renovated, that's why I'm staying at the resort. I'm going to be working with Dr. Jones down at the veterinary office. So if you're going to yell at me, please use my proper title. I worked hard for it."

He winks then his hazel eyes turn serious. "Same as I'm going to work hard for you. Because you, Velma Freeman, are mine. Knew it yesterday when I met you... know it today and will continue to know it all the days after. And I'm not a cad. A playboy, maybe, but I've never treated a woman poorly. They've always known the score. And yes, I'm younger than you but I swear to God I'll treat you like a queen. You are it for me, Velma. So much so, I'm setting down roots here in Coldwater and I want them entwined with yours."

Holy shit.

If I wasn't so intelligent, I'd think this man was serious. Or maybe I'm not as smart as I think I am because I want to believe him. I want to believe that Christmas has come early for me.

"If she doesn't want your roots I'll take 'em," several women say in unison. Ivette being one of them. The whole damn diner is in heat.

"That was a lot," is all I can think to say because my goodness it was.

Is this how my sister Irina felt when her husband Yannick told her he was keeping her? All warm and bubbly inside? Like the world could end this very second and it wouldn't matter as long as his eyes stayed on hers? Because that's how I feel right now.

"It was. And all of it is true." He eases his arms from around me and slides back. I instantly go cold and follow, craving his warmth. "Now, stop yelling at your best friend and finish your lunch. I'll see you at my cabin tonight."

"Tonight?" I squeak.

He's out of the booth now, plastic to-go bag in hand. He places one large hand on the table, the other on the back of the booth, the bag dangling from his waist and leans over. "Yes, angel, tonight. I'm tired of waiting. You belong to me and it's time I show you." Speech over, he leaves but not before hitting me with a searing kiss that knocks me on my ass.

"Tired of waiting? We just met yesterday!" I yell at his retreating frame once I've recovered.

"Yep," he says without turning around. "And you should've been under me then."

Under him? Lord help me I want that. I want to be under, on top, and beside him at all times. If I didn't know any better, I'd say I've fallen for one Dr. CJ Jacobs.

The diner has gone back to its usual boisterous self, our little show forgotten. Ivette is doing her silent act again, staring at me with suspiciously bright green eyes.

"Oh Velma, honey. You are in so much trouble. You can for sure kiss your self-proclaimed spinsterhood goodbye."

The crazy thing is I think she's right.



"VELMA LOUISE FREEMAN! DID YOU LET A CHILD KISS YOU IN front of God and everybody? You are a Freeman, Velma. A Freeman! Your father and I worked too hard to elevate our position and uphold our reputation in this town to have you tarnish it with your... urges. Heaven knows your sister didn't do us any favors by getting impregnated by two gay men and then marrying some mountain recluse. Now you're spreading your legs for someone old enough to be your son."

Okay, so I was wrong. That was a lot. Not CJ's speech at The Last Stop. And so much of it incorrect. Let's start from the top, shall we?

First while admittedly young, CJ is not a child. Children do not kiss like that. I can still feel the way his tongue caressed

mine, the way it made my pussy wet. Hell, it's hours later and I'm still damp.

Second, Irina selflessly offered her womb so that her two best friends could have the family they always dreamed of. Unfortunately, they died, leaving her pregnant and her life uprooted.

So, she went to Montana to live with our aunt and uncle and regroup because our parents are ridiculously close-minded. Not that I can talk. I didn't handle the news well myself when I first heard it but she quickly put me in my place.

Due to circumstances beyond her control, when she got to Black Timber Peak, she had no place to stay so Yannick graciously took her in. And the rest is history.

Third, and so absurd I can't believe she said it, CJ isn't old enough to be my son. Brother maybe, but not son. And I haven't spread anything yet—but I'm rapidly running out of reasons not to.

I smile imagining it. The way it'll feel when CJ finally makes good on his threats.

“Oh. Am I boring you, Velma? I'm sorry the ruination of our family legacy isn't interesting enough to hold your attention,” my mom sniffs.

I plaster on a well-practiced expression of contriteness. “I'm sorry, Mom. You were saying?” That little snippet of sass should keep her busy for a minute while I figure out a way to calm her ass down.

I get comfortable in one of the overstuffed chairs my mom insisted on me having despite it being too large for my minuscule living room. I watch as she circles the sturdy wooden coffee table her heels wobbling a little on the plush carpet. She's back to lecturing full steam, all worked up and throwing words like harlot and jezebel my way. No wonder I say shit like ‘cad’.

And to think when I left The Last Stop and pulled into my apartment parking lot twenty minutes later, I was relieved,

counting on some time alone to sort the mess I'm in out. Instead, I was greeted by my mom's Buick and the woman herself sitting inside my home.

My parents own the apartment complex I live in, the only one in Coldwater, so obtaining a key isn't an issue for them. Neither is invading my privacy it would seem.

I look around the staid apartment and vow once again to move. This place is the pits, old and outdated. My parents almost qualify as slumlords. The walls need to be scraped and painted over again, the insulation is nonexistent, the carpet is worn and musty and the plumbing is awful on a good day. I can't believe they have the nerve to charge the exorbitant amount of money they do for this shithole.

My mom has stopped pacing, opting instead to hover angrily over me, wisps of her graying stylish short hair clinging to her damp forehead. Physical exertion has never been her strong suit. The slightest whiff of work makes her sweat.

“Where is your mind at, Velma?”

I have an answer, but she won't like it.

“Well?” she snaps when I fail to reply in what she deemed was a timely manner.

I stare at her, seeing for the first time the ugliness and contempt she normally reserves for others —my sister included— thrown at me.

I've always done what was asked of me, always towed the proverbial line. But not this time. I might have reservations myself concerning CJ but however I decide, it will be my choice.

Without moving from my relaxed position, I tell her what I should have years ago. “Well... I guess I'm thinking about why you broke into my home. I'm also wondering how who I do or don't sleep with is any of your business.”

“Velma!”

“You might want to save the shock because I’m not done. I turned down a damn good position at that hotel in Lockton and came home after college like you asked me to, only to work in some stuffy office ‘watching’ over Daddy’s and your stupid investments. It was a bogus job. I didn’t do anything but run errands for you. I hated it but being old dependable Velma, the good daughter, I did it. Well, I’m not doing that shit anymore, Mom. You pushed Irina away with your nonsense and if you keep going, I’ll follow in her footsteps.”

I didn’t raise my voice, kept a smile on my face, and hell, I still haven’t moved from my seat. But my mom knows I’m dead serious. I only got away from her fake job because of the resort being built here. It looked good to have a Freeman working there. In my parents’ minds, it gave them more clout. And since I went to school for hospitality, I was a shoo-in for the Customer Relations Manager position, answering only to the General Manager, Thomas. I love my job and not just because it got me away from my parents. The hospitality field has always interested me, that’s why I got a degree in it.

My mom blinks at me for a minute, stunned by my harsh words yet cool demeanor. Finally, she slowly walks away and sits on the loveseat opposite me.

“She’ll come home, won’t she? I’ll get to see my grandbaby, right?” Mom blinks back tears as she gazes at me, her voice trembling. She cares. It’s just hard to see underneath all her arrogance.

“Maybe if you stop calling the baby ‘it’, and your grandchild like you just did, she will,” is my honest answer.

It’ll take a little more than that but it’s a start.

She nods and then smiles. We talk for a bit longer about Irina and how happy she is. Then I lay out some hard boundaries including not coming into my home unannounced — or uninvited.

She leaves a couple hours later and I feel lighter. We made some progress today and I hope to continue it.

Alone, I stew over my other problem, CJ. He's expecting me to come to his cabin tonight and I don't know if I have the strength to deliver.

It would be so easy to chalk his attraction to me up to boredom or something. You know, like he's tired of females his age and wants to see what an older woman would be like. Once he's done exploring, he'll go back to tight twenty-somethings. And I'll be alone again.

But the way CJ looks at me, as if I'm his world says otherwise, and as much as I want it, I'm not sure if I can trust it. What if I'm wrong and he's just a really good actor? With the way I feel now, without having had a complete conversation with him, he could break my heart in two. I like him way too much to be normal. Maybe old age has made me desperate and short-sighted. What am I going to do?

Four hours later, it's nine PM and I'm pacing outside CJ's door, kicking myself for making the trip. After tearing my hair out and pacing my floor, I decided to 'just go for it' and slipped on a pair of my sexiest pajamas then hopped into the car. A decision I now regret.

It took me almost an hour to get up the mountain from town and the whole way here I debated turning around. Somehow, I convinced myself to keep going— or rather my vagina threatened to rebel if I did. So here I am... about to knock on a door I have no business being at wearing boy shorts and a tank top underneath a winter coat. Sexy I am not.

I pull my coat tighter and check my surroundings for the millionth time, ensuring no one is out to see me and my fall from sanity. The cabins are spread apart but one can never be too careful. Besides, it's embarrassing enough that CJ is about to see how horny and desperate I am, no need for the other residents to witness it as well.

I come to a stop and raise my hand then jerk it back, staring at the taunting gateway to paradise. Turning my back to it, I mumble, "This is ridiculous, Velma. Just go home and love yourself. You've been doing it for years and it's worked out just fine."

Right. I'm leaving. This was a bad idea and thank God he'll never know. Being lonely is not a good reason to sleep with a guest. No matter how attractive they are.

I take two steps towards the stairs and then I'm flying backward, letting out a loud shriek.

“Stop screaming, baby, or you'll wake the bears.” A deep husky voice whispers.

Holy shit, a kidnapping should not make me this wet, is my only thought as CJ tightens his hold on my waist and drags me into his lair.

CHAPTER 5



CJ

“THIS IS HIGHLY INAPPROPRIATE, MR. JACOBS. I SIMPLY CAME by to ensure the cabin was sound and you take it upon yourself to kidnap me.”

Bullshit. She was outside my door mumbling and pacing for several minutes until I couldn't take it anymore, knowing heaven was only a wooden slab away, and finally yanked her ass inside.

It's hard to be snotty when you're pressed against the wall clutching the shoulders of your captor, but Velma is giving it her all. She even has her cute nose turned up like the princess she is but the rest of her body has no shame. Her stomach is lifted in the air, her hips swaying, calling me like a naughty siren's song.

Being a gentleman and not a fool, I answer by tightening my hold on her waist and then pressing my lower half into hers, wedging her between me and the wall. She gasps, then wiggles testing the waters. Her eyes widen and then glaze over as she realizes what I have in store for her later.

“Oh really? That's why you're sneaking around in the woods in the middle of the night?”

Not giving up without a fight, Velma snaps back. “Nine pm is not the middle of the night and yes... that is why. As Customer Relations Manager I have a duty— oh, God,” she moans as I lick a path down the slope of her neck.

I lift her arms off my shoulders and raise them over her head, capturing both wrists in one hand. The heavy coat she's

wearing opens enough for me to get a glimpse of the outfit she's hiding inside. With my free hand, I pull one side away to reveal the rest.

My cock rises to full mast, tenting my sweatpants as I take in her glorious curvy body encased in the tiniest pajamas I've ever seen. The deep blue shorts barely cover her mound and the matching tank top is so tight I swear her tits are suffocating. They're spilling from the low neckline, begging to come out and play with me.

The top has risen above her rounded stomach and I watch as it flexes with every choppy breath Velma takes.

"Fuck me, angel. You were gonna walk away and deprive me of all this? I don't think so."

I drop her hands and seal my mouth to hers. Like always, Velma curls her arms around my neck and pulls me closer, moaning her pleasure.

I break away before things get too heated and push off the heavy coat covering my treat then kneel to the floor, eye level with her center.

Peeling her shorts off I run my hands down her smooth thick brown thighs. The inside of her thighs are coated in her sticky juices and it fills my chest with a caveman-like pride.

Unable to resist with all that glorious skin in front of me, I kiss and lick a path across her stomach. Velma trembles and grips my shoulders again.

"I'm about to taste you, angel." My voice is husky as I lay out what's about to happen. "This is your last chance to back out, Velma. Once any part of me enters you, that's it. You are mine— forever."

Despite her earlier nonsense, Velma was with me up until then. The word "forever" had her doing a double take and now she's staring at me like I have two heads.

"Forever is a long time for a fling, CJ. You've been in Coldwater for like twenty-four hours. There is no way you want forever with me. We might be a small town but there is a plethora of females more in your age range for you to go out

with. I'll agree to a fling and nothing else." There is a finality in her tone that I don't like. I also don't like how she's questioning my feelings.

"I have had all the flings I can stand. What I want now is the real thing. And that is you. I love you, Velma, and nothing will change that." Looking into her beautiful yet apprehensive brown eyes, I practically beg her to believe me.

She shakes her head and loosens her grip, almost removing her hands completely. "Let me repeat. Twenty-four hours and not to mention the age difference. These all spell fling— not forever."

The fire I built earlier while waiting on Velma roars in the background as I absorb her words. I was so sure she would come tonight that I set the stage for a romantic sex-filled evening. I purchased a bottle of wine to toast our new relationship and some snacks to replenish our energy. Flowers are waiting on the couch behind us and a surprise for later waiting underneath the Christmas tree I purchased earlier today. I counted on some pushback and had hoped the project I cooked up for us would help alleviate her fears. Looks like it's time to put that theory to the test.

Standing, I lift her in my arms bridal style then walk down the short hall to the bedroom. Once there I gently lay her on the bed. I almost didn't let her go. The feeling of her plump ass rubbing on my chest was enough to almost set me off. Then there were her nipples poking through her shirt, just begging me to drop my head and suck one into my mouth.

"Wait here," I instruct, then head back out the door, leaving Velma staring at me in confusion.

When I return, she's still in the same position, leaning back on her elbows, legs bent at the knees, her legs pressed together.

My arms are full of supplies that she recognizes immediately. She shoots up and swings her legs over the edge of the bed, forgetting she has nothing covering her lower half.

“Why do you have batting and all those basting pins? And for the love of all that’s holy... a stupid seam ripper?” She scrunches her nose up at the seam ripper. The lady at the craft supply shop had the same reaction when she placed it in my pile.

“I don’t know why you quilters hate this thing so much. I think it’s great. Helps you correct your mistakes.” I shrug, waving the small offending tool around.

“My stitching is perfect! It’s the fabric’s fault if it doesn’t come out straight.” Wow.

“Understood.” I nod, putting the tool on the nightstand.

I lay the rest of my load on the bed beside Velma and she cautiously eyes it, poking at the container of pins. “You haven’t answered my question. Why do you have a shit-ton of quilting supplies?”

“Because we’re making a quilt— together.”

When Ivette told me about Velma’s hobby today a plan formed in my head. What better way to show Velma how serious I am than making a quilt that showcases our life together? It’ll be a project we can work on for years.

I went to the craft store and loaded up on the basic tools we’d need. I’m not stupid. I know Velma already has this stuff, but I wanted to show her how serious I was about this.

Velma’s eyes widen and her mouth falls open. “A quilt! Are you insane?”

“Probably but does that matter?” I ask, dropping to my knees at her feet, and spreading her legs open. Her tight moist slit distracts me for a minute but I shake my head and carry on. This is too important.

Grabbing both of her hands I peer into her soft eyes. “I love you, Velma, and I’m not going anywhere. From now on I’m going to collect the pieces of our story and you, my love, can put them in any order you see fit. I don’t care what it looks like as long as it never ends.” And because I can’t help myself, I run a finger down her slit, gathering the juices pooled there.

Velma jumps and then spreads her legs even wider. “CJ,” she whines. “Touch it again.”

“Give me what I want. What we both want.” My angel is holding back and I don’t like it. I know she’s afraid but she has to believe that I’ll never let her fall.

Nibbling her plump bottom lip, Velma stares at me. So long that fear grips my heart.

“Please give us a chance,” I beg.

“Okay,” she finally says. “But I’m calling it a fling until proven otherwise.”

I’ll take it. It’s not perfect but I’ll take it. I’ve proven myself time and time to people who doubt me. And I’ll do it again this time.

With no other words, I get to work satisfying my baser needs, licking at her pussy like a starving man. Spreading her lower lips open and slip my tongue into her tight pink hole, lapping at the sweet cream inside. The flavor that hits me is intoxicating. Ambrosia is the right name for it.

When the well runs dry, I thrust two fingers in and pump for more. I need all the juicy goodness her hot little body can produce.

Velma has a death grip on my head and moves her hips to the rhythm of my fingers, building up to a release.

Her moans and whimpers fill the room as I dive back in and enjoy the result of our combined efforts coating my tongue.

My cock is dripping pre-cum, making a mess in my pants. But it will have to wait. This first time is going to be quick so I need to draw out the foreplay.

Somewhere along the way Velma had shed her shirt, her large breasts on show and taunting me with their dark stiff peaks. I slid a hand up her stomach and gently cupped one, pinching the nipple between my fingers then switching to the other side.

“Yes,” Velma cries out, arching her back to give me better access.

My actions produce more cream which I greedily lap up. My cock throbbing so hard I can feel it all over. I need to get inside her— and soon. With my free hand, I strum her clit, vibrating the swollen nub until Velma throws her head back and moans deep and long, her orgasm rocking her body.

Without my usual finesse, I rip off my shirt, pull down my pants freeing my aching rod then slam into her sopping wet pussy. Every thrust I give her sends her release higher and higher. Velma keeps coming and coming, her spongy walls pulsing around my sensitive cock.

“Fuck, baby, you feel so good... your tight pussy hugging my cock. It knows who it belongs to. Who it wants to keep forever.”

The sounds coming out of Velma are almost animalistic, nothing but grunts and groans and a jumble of intelligible mutterings.

I’m no better. Sweat dripping off my forehead onto her chest, breathing so heavily it feels like my heart is going to explode.

I begin to feel a tingle in my spine so I grunt, “I’m not going to last. Tell me now if I need to pull out.” I’m kicking myself because I didn’t put on any protection. I didn’t want to. My baby in Velma’s belly and a ring on her finger is the ultimate goal but it has to be her choice.

When she doesn’t answer me, I tell her again, spearing her with my gaze.

It takes several beats before she answers. “Do it. Fill me up.” It could be the orgasm talking but I’m taking this chance.

“Oh, I’m going to fill you up all right. Your body will take my seed then I’ll feed it more,” I say, pistoning my hips. “If you’re not pregnant by the end of the night don’t worry... it won’t be long until you are.”

I slam my lips on hers, pouring every bit of love I hold for her into it as I pour cum into her pulsing sex.

Empty and exhausted, I muster up what little energy I have and push the quilting supplies off the bed and fall beside her.

Once I can breathe without sounding like I've just run a marathon, I gather Velma in my arms and place a light kiss on her sweat-dotted forehead.

“You okay, baby?” I ask.

“Yes,” she pants. “Did you mean what you said?”

I know what she's asking. Did I mean the whole baby thing?

“I'd like to have a baby with my wife and that's you... so yeah.”

Velma rolls her eyes but I spot the tiny smile she tries to hide. It may not happen as soon as I'd like but mark my words, Velma Freeman will become Velma Jacobs.

CHAPTER 6



VELMA

“VELMA. YOUR DOCTOR SAYS THERE IS AN EMERGENCY AT HIS cabin. One only you can fix,” Georgie announces a little too loud for my liking. Especially since I’m standing right next to her. Several of the guests gathered by the fireplace tilt their heads in our direction, intrigued by her words.

I bet there’s an emergency. His cock is probably hard and is looking for a hole to fill during his lunch break. And since when did CJ become “mine”?

Since you slept with him. God, my life is such a trainwreck. What self-respecting person does the walk of shame out of their own job? I’m lucky no one was up when I snuck out of CJ’s cabin in the early hours of the morning. I’m not positive but I doubt that sleeping with the clientele is in the Customer Relations Manager description. It feels like the sort of thing the owner of Coldwater Cabin Resorts would frown upon.

To make matters worse, I don’t even have a good reason for falling into bed with him like I did or one for letting him come inside me. The best I could come up with while I was berating for my reckless behavior was drunkenness. I was drunk off of the way he made me feel. Like I was a precious gift to be cherished, cared for, and loved. I haven’t felt that way since... well since ever. Must have been some kinda playboy charm spell.

“Did you hear me, Velma? CJ says he needs you... now.”

“Of course, I heard you. The whole damn lobby heard your loud mouth.” A gasp sounds from the fireplace. Perfect. As if my slutty behavior isn’t enough, I can now add cursing in front of the guest to my growing list of infractions. From a stellar employee to on my way out the door in less than four days. That has to be a world record.

Georgie smirks at me, delighting in my downfall. Remembering my job, I put on my best fake smile and apologize to the room focusing mainly on the scandalized woman. After soothing all ruffled feathers, I head out to see what the big emergency is. Minutes later, I’m at CJ’s door, ready to give him a piece of my mind. As if he had been waiting on me, the door swings on and a shirtless bossy vet appears.

“Why are you naked? What are you doing in there?” Jealousy is a bitch and it’s scrambling my brain. There are any number of reasons why CJ would be shirtless in the middle of the day but I jump to the worst one possible. “Is your so-called emergency? That you need a third for your filthy orgy?”

This time I’m not dragged into the cabin. I march inside with CJ following. Pissed and crazy as hell, I scan the living room for signs of another woman. All I find is his ridiculous quilting supplies and a take-bag from The Last Stop on the coffee table.

As I come to a stop beside the table, CJ smoothly slides in front of me. I force myself to avert my eyes because if I stare at his hard chest for much longer, I might embarrass myself.

“An orgy takes more than three. I think a filthy *threesome* is what you meant to.” I really don’t need the patronizing smile he’s giving me. I’m already kicking myself for flying off the handle like I did. I may have just met him but I know in my heart CJ would have never invited me over if had someone here. My insecurities are rearing their ugly head and I hate it. I agreed to a fling and I should at least trust that he’ll honor that.

“I wouldn’t know. I don’t sleep around,” I shrug with an air of haughtiness. I might be in the wrong here but that won’t

stop me from throwing some sass CJ's way. I don't like being summoned.

"I don't either. At least not anymore," he smiles. This one is different. It's sweeter and holds a meaning I'm not ready to face. "A horse took a liking to my shirt, so I had to toss it. I was in the middle of changing when you showed up. Do you have another vest with you?"

The sudden change of topic throws me for a loop. Why does he want to know if I have another vest? "I do. Why?"

CJ doesn't answer. Instead, he steps closer and then bends down. I feel a sharp tug and that's when I notice the scissors in his hand. He moves so quickly my brain didn't have time to process what was about to happen until it was already too late.

In disbelief, I lift one side of my vest and peer through the space where fabric used to be. "Did you just cut my vest?! My work vest? The one that's part of my *uniform*?" Nothing this man does makes any sense.

"I told you I was collecting pieces of our life together, silly." He taps my nose. "This is the vest you were wearing when we first met. Well, maybe not the exact one, but close enough." How can stay mad at him when he's so adorable? And sexy. But seriously. Who does crazy shit like this? Does he pull out this memento trick with all the women he sleeps with? Something tells that he doesn't— and that's a scary thought.

"Now sit," CJ orders, gesturing to the couch. "I only have an hour for lunch and the food is getting cold."

There is no way in hell I'm eating with this man. No matter how good the food smells or how hungry I am. Our relationship is purely sexual. Eating together will feel too much like a date. When whatever this is, is over I have to leave with my heart intact, and getting to know him will make that harder. Despite being berating myself for sleeping with him it's more about *where* I did it than the fact that I did it. Truth is, if I let myself, I could care about the man standing in front of me.

CJ grabs my hand, drawing my eyes back on him. “Velma. All I’m asking for is a chance. A chance to show you how good we could be together. I know that you’re it for me and I need you to know it too. I’m going to put on a shirt then we’re going to have lunch and talk.”

Fuck me this is a bad idea but I’m going to say yes. The only part of me that doesn’t want to stay —the rational side of my brain— is getting quieter and quieter.

With a huff and an eye roll just because I cave. “Fine. You get dressed and I’ll let Georgie know I’m at lunch.”

“Thank you. I promise you won’t regret it.”

God, I hope not. All I have to do is ignore the feelings that are trying to creep in, and everything will be fine.

CHAPTER 7



I GIVE THE MARE I JUST FINISHED EXAMINING A TREAT FOR HER troubles then address her waiting owner.

“Yep, you were right, she’s pregnant.”

Mr. McAvoy chuckles and gives the beautiful Irish Draft tucked away in its stall a few strokes. “Didn’t think she had it in her. Wasn’t even trying to breed her. She’s knocking on eighteen, you know.”

“Eh, don’t count her out. She still has some good years left in her yet.” I reply.

“True...true,” he drawls, then his eyes gleam with mischief and I know whatever coming next I won’t like. “So does Velma. Hope you’re taking precautions or else you’ll be saddled with an old lady and a baby.” He laughs, shaking his round belly.

I roll my eyes. The people in this town, while nice can be a tad judgmental. Plus, I don’t know who Bill is calling old. If he’s not in his sixties, I’ll let him examine me like I did his mare.

I lean against the gate of the empty stall next to Beauty’s, the mare, and look Bill straight in the eyes so there’s no mistaking my words.

“Velma isn’t old, she’s just right. And when we do have children, I’ll be the happiest man on earth.” Lord knows I’ve been trying to get her pregnant for the past month.

Mr. McAvoy nods and smiles, seeming to respect my answer. Done with his poor stand-up routine, we walk out of the stable and head toward the edge of the wide field where my truck is parked, going over what he should expect. He's a horse breeder so it's a quick conversation. Hell, with his years of experience I learned some things from him.

Visit over, I wave goodbye and climb into my truck. Nothing is going on in the office and my next appointment isn't until one and it's only ten so with time to kill, I decide to make the forty-minute ride to the resort. Only this time it's not for quick a nap or a bite to eat. My days of staying there are long over. I've been in Coldwater for a month now and have settled into my apartment nicely. Not that I'm there much. I spend most of my nights at Velma's place. As small as her place is, mine is a virtual shoebox.

Our time together has only solidified my resolve that she's my forever, not that I had any doubt. With every new thing I learn I fall in love with Velma a little bit more.

Our quilt has grown, with scrapes of fabric representing our journey. Pieces of clothing, a cut of the tablecloth where we had our first official date. Mrs. Caldwell, the manager of Gala, the swanky restaurant located by one of Coldwater's many lakes, wasn't too happy about that but since Velma's family owns the restaurant there wasn't much she could say. I bought some material designed with apple varieties and their meanings and carefully cut out the ones I've called her so far. Velma mock-complains with every new piece I gather, claiming she'll never get it done if I don't stop. But I remind her that's the point...our story will never end.

Christmas is next week and I'm nervous about the small box I plan on placing under our tree.

It was a task convincing Velma to buy one. She insisted that her apartment was too small, which is true, but even a decorated potted tree is better than nothing. The only sign of the holidays in her home was a festive wreath on the front door. Her apartment desperately needed some cheer and once I found out that she was the one who had decorated the resort's main office, I pressed her into doing something for herself.

While searching through the meager selection, most people already had their trees since Thanksgiving, we ran into her parents. They call it a coincidence; I call it bullshit. One of their spies, I mean friends, was at the farm getting a new wreath and phoned them the moment they saw us. Velma wasn't too keen on doing the whole 'meet the parents' thing so she had been trying her hardest to avoid them; agreeing to go out during hours she knew they'd be in or too busy to pop up.

How she came from such cold pretentious people I'll never understand. They weren't shy about their disdain for me and more than once Velma had to give her mom a hard look. At first, I thought it was the race difference but quickly realized it had more to do with my age and occupation. The age I get but to tell me a veterinarian isn't a legitimate doctor is baffling. I went to school and earned my Ph.D. same as those so-called real doctors. However, by the end of the terse conversation, I had somewhat won them both over.

Thinking about the package I received in the mail last week, I wonder what they would say about my plan. I probably should ask Velma's father for her hand, but his opinion doesn't seem to matter much, if the way she kept huffing and rolling her eyes whenever he spoke was any indication.

It took some doing to get her ring size. She doesn't wear jewelry on her hands and is a very light sleeper so I had to pull out all my bedroom tricks to wear her ass out, then slipped on plastic ring after plastic ring until I landed on one that fit.

I ordered the light green, emerald-shape ring from Lockton, a midsize city a few hours away. I had traveled there to attend a presentation my second weekend here and decided to go shopping. Why wait when you know? Velma still hasn't given me the words and treats what we have as just a fling but eyes tell a different story. They sparkle with love even though she tries to fight it. I hope a Christmas proposal changes that. My mom and sister seem to believe it will and can't wait to meet Velma.

The trip to the resort passes by quickly and soon I'm at the front desk asking Tacie about my angel's whereabouts.

“I’m not sure, CJ. All we were told was that she was sick and would be out the rest of the week.” Tacie fidgets as she speaks, unsure if she should be divulging this information. Which makes sense. As Velma’s man, I should have known this already and it upsets me that I didn’t.

It’s Monday so that means Velma plans on being absent for at least four more days. That is not like her. She loves her job and has to be at death’s door before calling out, let alone be out that long.

Thinking back, she said she felt ill yesterday morning and asked me to leave so she could rest. I didn’t want to and argued but she almost cried so I gave in with a warning I would be back later. When I did she only let me stay long enough to drop off some soup from the Last Stop, claiming she didn’t want to get me sick. I know I shouldn’t have listened. She could be seriously ill and all alone. Why the hell didn’t she call me?

“Thanks, Tacie. I’ll go check on her.” I say keeping my expression calm. No sense in worrying her more than she already is.

“Good,” she smiles. “Merry Christmas.”

“Merry Christmas. And tell Bear I said hey.” I’ve gotten to know him and a couple of the other park rangers a little better. They’re a good group of people dedicated to preserving the mountain range’s wildlife. I also made a friend of the carpenter named Moore who lives deep in the mountains. He and his brothers who live out there as well are an interesting bunch but fun to be around. I’m planning on having a cabin built for Velma and me and he’s helping with the interior and some of the furniture. It won’t be cheap but I have some savings and Velma is worth it.

Tacie nods and I leave. I might be late to my next appointment but I have to go check on my angel and see what’s going on.

CHAPTER 8



VELMA

“IVETTE, PLEASE STOP HOVERING OVER ME LIKE THE GRIM reaper. Go sit in the chair. Or better yet go home.”

“I think you meant like a mother hen. The grim reaper doesn’t hover.”

Prying one eye open, I rotate my head and glare at her as best I can which fails to make the impression I was going for.

The motion causes the towel on my forehead to slip, almost sliding to the floor. I manage to catch it at the last moment and set it back in place then shut my eyes again.

I’m dying. And on the most uncomfortable loveseat known to man. I should move to the bedroom but it took all my strength to let Ivette in. No way I’m making it back there, even if it’s only a few feet away.

A hand lands on my stomach and starts moving in a circular motion.

“For the hundredth time, stop rubbing my belly, Ivette!” Okay maybe I shouldn’t have shouted but if this is what I have to look forward to, the constant touching of my stomach, for the next eight or so months, I’m never leaving my house... or letting anyone in for that matter.

Not bothered by my outburst, Ivette lifts my legs and slides underneath them. I guess she was tired of hovering from afar and wanted to get closer. If she lays her head on my stomach I’m kicking her ass— dying or not.

“There’s a baby in there Velma and I wanna feel it. A baby you made with CJ.”

Of all the idiotic...

“Of course, I made it with CJ. How many men do you think I’m sleeping with?! And could stop sounding like some kinda dippy teenage girl in love? It’s embarrassing... for us both.”

Quick as ever she smugly snaps back with, “My mama says if you’re bitch while you’re pregnant then your baby will turn out mean. So if I were you, I’d watch my attitude.”

Pregnant. I am freaking pregnant.

Who would have thought a month of unprotected sex with a virile man would cause this to happen? Obviously not me. No... that’s a lie. I knew this would happen. He told me it would every time I let him come inside of me. But damn it nothing compares to skin-on-skin contact. And I’m a whore for his cock so here we are.

I had been off for the past week and my breasts seemed tender but in full denial mode, I chalked it up to nothing. The body is a mysterious entity. Then I missed my period which should have started last week. I’m never late, my monthly is on a strict timetable. After claiming to be sick and kicking CJ. out yesterday morning, I hauled ass to Adkins, the next town over, and bought a test.

Buying one here was not an option. My mom would have heard about it before I made it home. I am not in the mood to deal with her brand of crazy. While our relationship has gotten better and she’s calmed down a teensy bit, this would set her off.

The towel on my head has grown lukewarm and my stomach feels better so I sit up, swinging my legs to the floor.

“What am I going to do, Ivette? This thing between CJ and me is supposed to be temporary. A baby is permanent.” I feel my bottom lip wobbles and I bite down to keep my emotions in check.

“Liar. I’m pretty sure CJ told you the only way you can get rid of him is by death do you part. Those five words are in wedding vows by the way.” Softly smiling, she bumps my shoulder.

“He’s said that and so many other things. What I don’t understand is why he’s trying so hard. I’m sleeping with him, aren’t I?” And have been for weeks. A month to be exact.

“Clearly.” Ivette dryly says because now she’s a comedian.

I want to toss back a clever comeback but I’m all out of sassy so instead I groan and drop my head into my hands.

What started as a fling, at least on my end, is rapidly turning into something all-consuming. I see CJ every night, talk to him throughout the day and when I’m not near him, he’s all I think about. My apartment smells like him and everywhere I turn there are pieces of CJ in my view. It’s a good thing he’s not paying rent at his place because he’s never there.

The funny thing is... it doesn’t bother me. I like it in fact. I look forward to his knock on the door after a long day. He doesn’t have a key so if his day is short, he’ll hang out with me at the resort until I get off. Speaking of work, it hasn’t suffered like I thought it would. The employees seem to enjoy working with me now. They say I seem happier and not so uptight. It’s not that I don’t care about doing a good job and advancing, it’s that I have realized that work isn’t life. Some people can live that way and be happy but I’m not one of them. I’ve spent more nights than I care to remember longing for more but felt that it was outside of my reach. Now it’s here and I’m afraid it’s pyrite.

Ivette wraps her arms around my bunched shoulders. “Remind me again why we’re anti-loving CJ?”

Still being stubborn despite my inner thoughts, I scoff, “Because what would a relationship or God forbid marriage between us look like?” I mumble into my palms. “When I’m forty he’ll be thirty-one and when fifty he’ll be—”

“Forty-one. Yes, I know. That’s how math works. He’ll always be nine minus whatever age you are.”

Smug bitch. What was her mom like when she was pregnant with her, I wonder.

“Why am I even friends with you?” I ask shaking her arms off me. I flop back on the couch and slouch in the most unattractive way.

“I ask myself that daily. But we are despite a ten-year age difference, we’ve managed to make it work. Why can’t you and CJ?” Is life that simple when you’re in your twenties? You just ignore the obvious issues and jump head-first into love?

“Yep,” she says popping the ‘p’.

I frown at Ivette. Can she read minds now?

“Your pregnancy brain made you speak out loud.”

“Pregnancy brain doesn’t make you speak out loud. It makes you forgetful. And it’s too early for that anyways.” Awesome comeback, Velma.

“So you forgot to keep your inner thoughts... in. And Irina always said you were an overachiever.” Ivette shrugs then turns her light green on me, her voice dropping low. “You love him... you know you do. And have from the beginning. The Velma I know doesn’t let strange men kiss her, let alone for the whole town to see.” She chuckles and then continues. “The wonderful thing is that he loves you... and you know that as well. It doesn’t much simpler than that. If you’re looking for more or better, you won’t find it.”

“Yeah,” I whisper wiping a tear from my cheek.

Ivette envelopes me in a bear hug then pats my belly with a giggle.

“Now that we’ve got the heavy stuff out of the way— can I make your wedding cookies?”

Ivette runs a cookie business on Main Street, or as we call it Orchard Road. It runs from the highway, around the communal orchard, and straight through town to the mountains.

Her cookies are the softest and moistest ones you'll ever taste. Being as tender as they are you'd think they'd crumble as soon as you bite into one but they stay intact, ensuring no piece is lost to the ground.

“Of course. Who needs cake when you can have cookies... with icing.”

We laugh, in good spirits as we head into the kitchen to grab something to eat. Hopefully, my stomach wasn't playing a sick game and will cooperate this time.

Ivette helps me fix some sandwiches and we settle back down on the sofa. My eyes drift over to my unusable two-seater dining table covered in quilting supplies. CJ. has brought so many scraps it's ridiculous. Every piece of fabric we come across means something to him. I did draw the line at my panties though, because...gross. My favorite is the apple squares. They make me feel cherished and as if he's really laying down roots in Coldwater by embracing our weird apple fetish.

As we eat, Ivette and I plan my wedding... because yeah, I've given up fighting, fully accepting, and loving the fact that I'm about to marry a man nine years— no. I'm about to marry the man I love; age has nothing to do with it. Technically he hasn't officially asked me yet and doesn't know about the baby but I can feel a Christmas proposal coming— along with an “I'm pregnant” announcement. Luckily Christmas is tomorrow and we don't have to meet with my parents until the evening.

We're halfway done with lunch when a knock on the door sends my heart racing. It's him. I haven't spoken to him since last night when he showed up at my door with soup. I told him I was still sick and didn't want to give it to him.

Lies. I had taken the test and was reeling from the results. Hell, I didn't call Ivette until this morning. I couldn't talk to anybody. Now CJ is at my door.

“Want me to answer it? You know who it is.”

“No, I don’t know who it is, Ivette. I can’t see through walls. You seem to think I know everything. You know this and you know that. That’s all I’ve heard from you today.” When did bitch become my second language?

“Well, I was taught my elder knew everything. I see in your case that isn’t true.” Seriously how awful was her mom because Ivette is a terror. “Stop glaring at me and open the door before someone calls the sheriff.”

She’s right about someone calling the sheriff. CJ. is banging on the door loud enough to wake the dead.

After a couple of calming breaths, I rise to greet the father of my child and my future husband. On my way I pass by the tree he made me get and smile. My apartment wasn’t Christmas enough for CJ. It’s not like I dislike the holiday I just feel like it’s for kids. But since I’m having one I better up my game

“Hey, baby. What are you doing here? I thought I wouldn’t see you till tonight?” I casually ask. Damn, he looks good in his khaki pants and blue polo, the words C. R Veterinary Clinic embroidered across the chest.

CJ gives me a funny look then shakes his head and pushes his way inside.

He draws me into his chest and then pushes me at arm’s length still holding my waist. “I went by the office to see you but they said you had called out for the week. What’s going on Velma? How sick are you and why didn’t you call me?” Hazel eyes roam my body, looking for signs of distress and I instantly feel like shit. I’ve been avoiding him all morning and he’s walking around thinking I’m seriously ill.

“Don’t worry CJ. I’ve been looking after our girl here but now I shall pass her off to you.” Ivette says, gathering her things. She waves and winks at me on her way out.

“What was that about? Why did she wink at you?” CJ’s brow is lined with concern and his voice has lost that hard quality I’ve grown to love. It’s now filled with apprehension.

I don't think I can wait until tomorrow. He's stressed and my news will calm his nerves.

"She winked because she's weird." I take his hand and pull him to the couch. "Sit down. I have something to tell you."

"A good something or a bad something? Should we be at the doctor's office and not your living room?" His eyes are clouded now and the worry lines on his handsome face are more pronounced. I better move this along.

"No doctors— at least not yet. And it's all good news." I take a deep breath and carry on, gazing into his eyes. "I love you, CJ. And I'm pregnant."

"About fucking time," he says before I'm knocked on my back and my sweatpants are ripped off in record time. Skill like that only comes from copious amounts of practice.

Oh well, hope you enjoyed it while you had him ladies because this stud is now all mine.

But something is off. I figured he'd respond like Ivette and start rubbing my belly but instead, he's kneeling between my thighs and staring at my pussy like it's lunch. This is not the reaction I expected to my big news.

"Wait," I moan when he runs a finger down my slick folds. "Did you hear what I said?"

"Fuck yeah, I heard. You love me... and it's about time you admitted it. Now I need to get inside you so you can shout it as I make you come."

Filthy beast.

His head disappears between my legs and oh God his tongue is doing wicked things to my sex. If I don't stop him now, I never will.

"CJ wait. You didn't catch it all. I'm... oh shit," I moan as he thrusts two fingers inside me and then curls them to rub along my sweet spot. He flattens his tongue, swiping it slow and steady against my swollen nub then sucks hard and deep into his mouth.

I was right. After a month of learning each other's reactions, it doesn't take long for me to get lost, waves of pleasure hit my body and I let go.

"I'm pregnant," I scream instead of the declaration of love he demanded. The words were still on the tip of my tongue and I just let them fly.

CJ freezes, his fingers stopping mid-thrust. He lifts his head and rears back, locking his eyes with mine.

"What did you just say?" He blinks.

I pull myself up and lean on my elbows, resting my hands on my stomach. "I said I'm pregnant." I pant, still coming down. "I told you earlier but you only listened to half of my sentence. We need to work on your listening skills. Kids talk a lot and you gotta catch it all or you might agree to some nonsense."

"Our baby's in there?" He nods at my stomach.

"Last I checked which was yesterday." CJ hasn't moved an inch, just stares at my belly in awe. If I didn't know any better, I'd be nervous but he wants this baby more than anything.

CJ drops his head again, this time resting it on my rounded middle. I wonder how much bigger it's going to get. They're going to have to stop calling me big-boned and go straight to plain old fat.

"Don't talk about yourself like that. You'll be swollen with child, not fat."

Yep, it's official my thoughts are leaking out. If I don't get this under control, it's going to cause a problem when dealing with guests.

"Swollen with child sounds ridiculous." I laugh, wiping the tears from my eyes. This is what I expected. This tenderness. But the orgasm was much appreciated.

"How about swollen with my seed?" He raises his head and winks.

"How I love you I'll never know." I sigh. "Are you happy?"

“Do you love me?”

“Absolutely.”

“Then how could I not be? The woman I love not only loves me back but is giving me the most precious gift. I told you we’d be forever, Mrs. Jacobs.” A little premature but I’ll take it.

“That you did, Mr. Jacobs. That you did.”

EPILOGUE



VELMA

“HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU.” A VOICE SINGS FROM THE doorway of the bedroom. This man.

Ignoring it, I finish slipping on my dress and then sit at the vanity to fix my hair.

We’re going out tonight to celebrate my birthday and I am less than thrilled. CJ has picked up on my foul mood and hides in the safety of the doorway.

I wanted to stay in and spend the evening with family and a few friends. But CJ firmly believes that turning forty is a milestone and deserves to be made a big deal out of. So tonight we’re going to Gala for dinner, the restaurant my parents own. A place we could go anytime seeing as it’s the only semi-fancy restaurant in Coldwater.

“Are you going to pout all night angel?” CJ asks, keeping his distance. He can stay there all night for all I care. It’s my birthday and I don’t understand why he’s the one calling the shots.

“Maybe,” I say more to the mirror than him. “Is Mom here yet to get Ashley?”

“Do you even have to ask?” He laughs.

He’s right. She’s probably been parked in our driveway for hours, just waiting for the time to come get her grandbaby.

It took a couple of months after I announced my pregnancy and subsequent wedding for her to accept it. She did attend CJ

and mine's wedding but had a tight-lipped smile the whole way through.

But something happened around the five months mark. Either she accepted that this wasn't going away or realized nobody cared but her. Whatever it was she did a complete three-sixty and brought my dad along with her. Now I can't keep them away from Ashley. And Ashley loves spending time with Mimi and Papaw.

"Are you that mad at me, angel?" CJ asks slowly creeping into the room. He pauses behind me and smiles into the mirror.

How can I stay mad at that face? That's the face I fell in love with four years ago. Besides, if he wants to do something special for me, I shouldn't pout.

I push back my chair and rise to my feet then wrap my arms around his neck. "Depends on what you got me." I smirk.

With a seductive smile, CJ answers my question by cupping my bottom cheeks and pulling me into his solid body. I can feel his "present" pressing against my core.

"Oh yeah? Why go to dinner then? You can give me that right here." I purr in his ear.

"I could," he whispers back then nuzzles my neck. "But then you wouldn't get the rest." The rest? Now I'm intrigued.

"Do tell."

"I rented our cabin for the weekend. You know how hard it is to get for our anniversary."

Hard isn't the word for it. Damn right impossible is more like it. We got married in January which is in our busy season.

I'm still the Customer Relations Manager at the resort. I decided that was as high as my ladder will go. The position affords me time with my family, and I like it.

"You just want to stay in a cabin again." I tease him.

After discovering I was pregnant, CJ moved in with me, with the understanding we would eventually relocate to the cabin CJ was having built for us. When complications arose

and I was deemed a high-risk pregnancy, we decided to get a house in town.

“I do. You’re at your freakiest in the mountains. Must be the air.”

My mouth drops in shock and before I can form a word, CJ slides his tongue inside, laying a kiss on me that makes my panties useless.

When he pulls away, I follow but he shakes. “Hurry up and get dressed so I can get you naked again. We’re getting dinner to go.”

Happy birthday to me.

Thank you for reading. We’d love to hear what you thought in a review! [Soothed by the Doctor](#).

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Wilder

As the oldest St. James sibling, I'm used to everyone relying on me.

When planning the company Christmas party gets added to my already overfilled agenda, it's too much.

I yell at my mom and stomp around my office.

Everyone thinks I'm a boss behaving badly.

Until I see her.

She changes everything overnight and now the company Christmas party planner is number one on my to-do list.

Ivy

I spent every summer in Star Mountain and now I've moved here permanently.

Everything is falling into place - except I can't find a job.

Luckily, my best friend got me a holiday party planning job with her family's company.

It will also get my foot in the door for a design job at their firm.

The only problem is my boss.

He should be off-limits, but I can't get him out of my head.

If you enjoy safe reads with instalove perfection, strong men, spicy scenes, and a solid happily ever after with no cheating or cliffhangers, then this series fits your wish list.

Grab a mug of hot chocolate and settle into your favorite reading place to fall in love with *All the Jingle Ladies*.