

A photograph of a person's legs from the waist down, wearing denim shorts and white high-top sneakers with red and blue stripes. The person is walking, and the background is plain white. The text 'Sweet on Her' is overlaid in a large, black, cursive font across the middle of the image.

*Sweet
on Her*

Victoria Stevens

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Dedications

My debut book is dedicated to all of the strong women that helped me become the person I am, including my Momo, Gramma, and Mom. Thank you for showing me how to live and how to love.

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Chapter 1

Cat

As I walk up the steps to my new reality, I can't help but wonder how long it will last. Everything I can take in with a half-hearted glance screams pretentious assholes. I don't fit in here.

Is this a high school or a fucking country club?

The stares I encounter on my way up the sprawling steps leading to a giant grey stone building covered in ivy tell me they are all wondering what the hell I'm doing here.

Me too peeps, me fucking too.

The sprawling campus is surrounded in perfect landscaping. Large oak trees and immaculate flower beds are scattered throughout the grounds. I notice some separate buildings toward the back and a massive football stadium with a lion painted on the back of the stone backed bleachers. The lake sits behind and can be seen in the distance. Typical upper-crust Texan set up.

When I was placed in my latest foster home two months ago, I was sure it was a mistake. Matthew and Amelia Bennett were a smiling middle-aged couple with a sweet little girl named Posey that lived in a glass mansion overlooking Lake Travis. An honest to God mansion.

This was a far cry from the modest homes hidden in the middle to low class areas of Austin I had been shuffled around since I was 10. Some were ok, just people looking for some extra cash to house a kid that had nowhere else to go until they decided I wasn't worth the trouble for the measly checks they received. Some were fucking nightmares I had pushed to the back of my brain.

This place, this family, was a new experience I was still trying to figure out. They had set me up in a huge room and, for the most part, left me to my space the whole summer to get used to them, I guess.

What was the deal? Did they need a babysitter? Were they trying to impress their high-class friends? Were they another nightmare I would come to discover after getting comfortable?

One thing was for sure - I would find out. I was tired of being someone else's meal ticket, eye-candy, or punching bag. I had one more school year before freedom and I was fucking ready for it. Until then, I had been placed in this utopia I feared was teeming with poisoned fruits.

My case worker assured me that the Bennetts were a nice couple that were happy to take me in and they assured her I could live with them to complete my senior year here even though I turn 18 in a couple weeks.

I guess they were intrigued by my colorful case file. I had been held back a year in 6th grade when I entered the foster system, and had been kicked out of a few schools and homes for fights, a generally bad disposition, and some crimes I was never charged for, but were necessary to get myself out of a bad situation.

After that first rough year, I strived to maintain the only thing that mattered to me – my grades. People could call me trash and think the worst of me and honestly, I didn't give a damn, but they could never refute my talent or hard-work. That was on me, and I took it seriously.

The Bennetts enrolled me in this school, with what I was sure were lofty ideas of enrichment and personal growth in hopes that I would better fit into their world. They would be sadly mistaken. I had made it clear when they offered to take me school shopping that I wasn't a dress up doll and I had no desire to try to fit in with these people.

I would serve my time here, lock down a solid GPA, get my diploma from the prestigious Lakeview Prep, hopefully a scholarship, and get gone.

I still wasn't sure of their motives for being so generous, and I didn't want to owe these people anything. Lakeview Prep was a stepping stone that I would use to my full advantage.

I had the brains. I was told that I had a lot of potential from teachers I had before this place - if only I would just apply myself. They didn't know I tried, honestly I did, but sometimes our environment doesn't allow for success. In the past, even when I was in a tough situation, I always figured out a way to get A's. I wasn't always able to have access to a computer, or books, writing materials, or fuck, even a safe space to study. If I needed to work to get those things, I would calculate how many days I could miss without drawing attention, I figured out what assignments were worth the least so I could skip them and aced my finals to ensure I kept my GPA up.

The system was flawed but that wasn't my problem, I was just streamlining my efforts.

I recognized immediately that this place would be where I could seal the deal. Even if they came with strings, I had the tools I needed now. No matter what, I was determined to get a scholarship, work my ass off in college, and finally be on my own.

The Bennetts might be using me - for what was still to be determined - but you better believe I was using them too.

"Wow, enrollment must be struggling. Looks like they are letting in strays now." I hear a blonde girl with fake lips, lashes and boobs whisper to her gaggle of groupies as I walk through the doors and into a giant entryway that's three stories tall. The other carbon-copied wanna-be queen-bees giggle with enthusiasm at the stupid words leaving the girl's plastic lips.

This place is like a museum filled with wax figures, I muse as I take in my surroundings.

I give her a wide, creepy smile that she recoils from, and keep walking without a stutter of a step in my torn-up Converse and a roll of my eyes. I seem to interrupt the first day excitement of the other kids as they turn their heads, taking in my faded, cut-off jean shorts, ripped Johnny Cash Tee, and usual resting bitch face, as I make my way down the marble floors following the signs to the office where Amelia

said they were expecting me so I could get my schedule and a quick tour before my first class.

Sidelong glances, whispers, and straight up stares follow me as I keep my steps sure and strong while weaving my way through the halls with my hands gripped to my backpack straps trying to avoid contact.

I hate being touched, I hate being crowded, shit - I hate people in general.

I spot a sign for the office with an arrow pointing left, follow it, and as I turn the corner, I ram face-first into a hard body. Bouncing back like I've run into a wall. I land with a grunt on my ass.

"Oh shit, sorry!" A giant hand appears in front of my face and I look up with a scowl into a pair of sea green eyes that stop my oncoming curses in their tracks.

Wow.

I stare silent for a few seconds, taking in his tall, muscular frame, sun-kissed skin and thick, light brown locks pushed back from his face and shaved short on the sides.

I hear snickers begin around me and snap out of my trance with a shake of my head.

"It's fine." I reply as I take his hand in mine for help up.

A jolt of electricity flies up my arm and butterflies fill my belly as he hoists me back up with ease until I bounce back to my feet.

What. The. Hell. Was. That?

I let go of his hand quickly and start to side step him with my blazing cheeks pointed down to avoid his notice when he shuffles in front of me with his chin down, bending at his knees to try to coax my gaze back to his.

"For real, I'm sorry, I should have been looking where I was going." He says genuinely with a wave of his phone in his hand as a way of explanation.

His tone sounds curious and I look up, quickly nodding my head in reluctant acceptance of his apology. I'm trying to avoid too much eye contact because, for some strange reason, my stomach can't take it.

I need to get the fuck away from this guy.

As he locks eyes with me, his gaze widens a bit and is followed by a curious twinkle in his sea glass eyes. He rolls his full lips in to hide a smirk.

Jesus Christ, can't this guy just let it go?

"Yeah, like I said, no problem, I gotta go." I reply tersely as I continue toward the office a few doors down.

I hear him swivel around quickly in his fancy sneakers as I walk past him.

Shit. Shit. Shit.

"Hey, are you new here?" he calls behind me as he follows along.

Obviously.

"Yep." I answer curtly.

I do not need a complication with stunning green eyes getting any ideas that I'm interested. I do not have time for that.

Move along pretty boy.

"I'm Noah." he says trying to pull me into conversation. I sigh in exasperation.

"I'm late. Gotta check in. See you around Noah." I reply as I pull open the door to the office with a fake smile back to him.

"Yeah, see you around." I hear him whisper as I step through the door.

I chance a look back as it slowly clicks closed separating me from the haunting green eyes locked on mine.

Chapter 2

Noah

“Hey, did you guys see the new girl?” My kind-of friend Devin asks everyone at the lunch table and my ears perk up at the topic.

“Fucking hot.” He supplies. Nope. Not my friend.

“Oh yeah, she’s in my English class – Cat I think.” My best friend, and best tight-end a QB could ask for, Luca adds.

Cat. I wonder what it’s short for.

“I love me some fresh meat – especially with tits like that.” Devin adds.

What. An. Asshole.

Not that he’s wrong, I felt them press against me this morning and after catching a glimpse at the gorgeous face they belonged to, I was hooked.

“You’re gonna have to get in line, man.” Terrance, our star wide receiver replies.

“Heard everybody’s been trying to get a piece all morning and she ain’t biting.”

Good. Fuck those bastards.

“Please, none of these girls can turn away from a future NFL star. I’ve got this on lock.” Devin answers with a puff in his chest.

Yeah, he’s a damn good offensive lineman, but besides the usual jersey chasers, he hasn’t been too successful with the ladies. It’s probably got something to do with his ugly mug or shitty attitude.

“Oh shit, here she comes!” he says sitting up taller.

We all turn to the entry leading into the lunchroom as she walks in, head up, gathering her surroundings.

Damn she’s pretty... and tiny.

She can't be over 5'2" – which is an entire foot shorter than my 6'2" frame – but she's all curves and flawless golden skin. She's dressed like she doesn't give a damn and owning it. Big, dark curls surround her heart shaped face. She's got bright honey eyes lined in long, dark lashes that I was lucky enough to get a closer look at earlier. Her full pouty mouth is covered in dark pink lipstick and is pursed tight like she's not interested in conversation.

She heads to the line for food as we all follow her steps gawking.

I notice Becca, the Cheer Captain and annoying pain in my ass, whisper to her friends with a smirk and they all laugh as they wait at the salad bar while Cat passes them to head for the pizza line.

Why girls think it's cute to chew on leaves when there is perfectly good food around, I will never understand.

As a matter of fact, I don't really understand anything about the social climbing chicks in this school, nor do I care to try, but this new girl is different. She doesn't seem to be fazed by the whispers or want to follow the status quo here and that intrigues me.

“What do u think QB?” Terrance asks with a shit-eating grin.

“You think Devin's got a chance?”

“Sorry Dev, not a chance in Hell. I'm going in.”

He looks at me with a scowl as I rise from my seat and make my way over to her.

“Guess she's gotta load up before she heads back to the projects. She better watch it or it will go straight to her ass” I hear Becca say with a sneaky smile and a raised voice as I walk up.

And what an ass it is.

When Becca notices me approaching, she turns in my direction and her bitchy demeanor drops as she pops out her fake tits with a smile.

“Oh hey Noah! Looking good in practice this morning, I can’t wait to cheer for you at State this year!” she says while she twirls her hair around her finger trying to look enticing.

Not enticed.

“Yep, going all the way this year.” I reply without a second glance as I continue to walk toward my target.

Becca’s smile fades to confusion when she sees where I’m headed.

“Can I get two slices of pepperoni, please?” Cat asks the server politely with a smile.

Wow, she has a great smile. I’m a little jealous of the old lady behind the window for getting a real one out of her before I did, as she hands Cat her plate.

“Hey Late, how’s your first day going?” I ask as she turns, her eyes widening and smile slipping as if it were never there.

“Huh?” she looks confused, and not amused, as I had hoped. She keeps walking to the register line past me.

“This morning... I told you I’m Noah... you said, you’re Late.” I remind her, hoping to get a proper introduction.

“Oh yea. Um, I’m Cat. See you around Noah.” She says dismissing me as she hands the cashier her money and heads to the tables.

Oh no, not this time Little Cat.

“Well, I’m around now, Cat. So, how’s your first day going?” I repeat as I sit across from her at an empty table.

She glances up with a silent stare for a couple seconds before sighing as she looks down and grabs her pizza.

“It’s been interesting.” She replies before taking a bite.

“Oh yeah? Interesting how?” I ask trying for more.

She has a low raspy voice. Sure and smooth, not sugary sweet and fake like most of the girls that try to talk to me. I want to hear more.

“Different I guess, I’m not used to people like this.” She answers honestly. I like that.

“What are you used to?” I wonder.

“Real people.” She answers automatically then looks down quickly with a grimace as she takes another bite as if she is trying to keep herself from saying anything else.

“Well, I’m real Cat.” I implore.

She seems so lost. I want to show her we aren’t all like Becca. She looks up, chewing slowly, with her golden eyes squinting as if searching me for lies.

“Are you?” she wonders softly.

I want to continue to try to convince her but just then we are interrupted.

“Hey there Sweetness, where’d you come from?” Devin asks as he, Luca, and Terrance sit down next to us.

Their huge frames dwarf her and she seems even tinier surrounded by us. She snaps her gaze from me and narrows her eyes at him, steeling her spine.

Small but mighty. So cute.

“I’m not sweet and I’m definitely not interested. Move along.” She sneers at him with a shooing motion of her hand as she bites into her pizza again.

Terrance snickers with a hand covering his smile and Luca just smirks shaking his head.

She surveys the new arrivals doubtfully. Her gaze flips to mine for a second trying to deduce where I fit in with this group before dipping a fry forcefully into her ketchup.

“Hey, just making conversation,” Devin cajoles as he raises his palms in a calming motion as if he’s taming a wild stallion.

“I just wanted to welcome you to Lakeview properly.”

“Fantastic. Consider me welcomed.” She retorts sarcastically in an attempt to get Devin to shut up.

“I see you’ve met my good buddy Noah here,” he continues anyway with a slap to my shoulder.

Good buddy is quite a stretch.

“I’m Devin, this is Terrance and Luca.” He says waving his hand at them like a fucking sultan speaking to his minions. They give a quick wave.

“We make up the best offense in Texas.” He continues, spreading his hands on the table as he leans back in his chair and nodding as if she should be grateful for speaking with us.

I almost want to jump in to try to salvage the conversation but decide to let Devin bury himself instead. She looks up at him blankly with a slow blink before she gives a small snort and shakes her head.

“Of course you do.” She says shooting a disappointed glance at me.

She dabs her plump lips with a napkin and throws it on her plate as if disgusted. Without another word, she grabs her tray, stands, and walks away, curls bouncing above her perfect peach ass, to trash her plate.

“What the fuck is her problem?” Devin scowls.

“Guess she’s not interested, man” I reply with a chuckle.

The guys laugh and I smirk at him even though I’m pissed he ruined my time with her. At least she put him in his place. She’s fiery for such a little thing.

“She’s a bitch.” He says following her steps with narrowed eyes.

“She’ll come around though.”

“Just leave her the fuck alone, Dev.” I shoot him a warning look.

“What? You sweet on her already?” he volleys back with a tease.

Terrance and Luca look back and forth at our exchange like it’s the ping pong championships.

“You can have your pick of prime meat in this school, leave the scraps for the rest of us.”

This girl is not even close to scraps, and he fucking knows it.

“It’s not about that – just give her a break, she’s fucking new man.”

I try to reason with him, even though I know there isn’t a snowball’s chance in hell I’m giving any asshole in this school a fighting chance with her. She’s the first girl that has ever caught my interest so quickly.

He laughs with a knowing tone while shaking his head.

The bell rings and we get up to go to our next class.

As I watch her walk out the lunchroom doors, wild hair blowing back at the wind hitting her from the courtyard outside, I know, I’m more than sweet on her, that girl will be mine.

Chapter 3

Cat

Well, this day has been the shit show I knew it would. All day I've been approached by a variety of self-important trust fund boys with smarmy smiles and, what they assume, are slick words. Not even close.

Most of the girls eye me warily, not happy with new competition to obtain said trust funds on lock. Keep 'em ladies, you're doing me a favor.

The remainder of the student body is maintaining a wide berth, not wanting to associate with what they assume is trash in their eyes. I don't fit in with their designer clothes and handbags, highlighted hair that's been blown out and straightened within an inch of its life, and cakey Instagram makeup to hide their ugly insides.

Not my problem, I couldn't care less what these people think. Not even the one handsome stranger who had me going before I realized he was just priming me for his friends, probably thinking I was an easy target, as they all looked on with fake smiles.

All football guys are the same in this town. They float through life with a superior attitude because the guys think they're Gods, the girls all want a piece of the future pie, and the teachers assume they are all upstanding citizens of the school.

I have been hit on by guys like this since I grew tits in seventh grade and can recognize their disingenuous interest from a mile away. They put on fake smiles and flirty looks that lead to touches that they think they are entitled to whether you want them or not.

I will not be fooled by pretty eyes and a hard body, even if he did seem ok at first.

As I walk into my seventh period government class, I am spotted by King Smarmy himself. The giant dick from lunch.

The guy's got to be like 250 pounds.

Ugh, what was his name? Derek? Kevin? Something pretentious...

Steering clear of him, I stick to the opposite side of the class and sit to wait for the teacher to arrive. I lean down to take my notebook and pencil out of my bag as I hear the chair beside me groan under the weight of the ginormous asshole I was trying to avoid.

The class has quickly filled and I realize there isn't an available seat further away as the teacher strolls in unloading his materials from a leather bag onto his desk.

"Hey Cat, glad I got to see your pretty face again. I think we got off on the wrong foot earlier." Kevin says with a slow perusal up from my shoes to my legs before meeting my eyes with a lick of his thin, crusty lips.

Gross.

I turn away with a grimace as the teacher walks behind his desk to take a seat.

"Morning class, take out your books and flip to chapter 7." The tired looking 50-something man in a sweater vest and wire framed glasses begins.

I try to pay attention to his opening statements as King Ding-a-Ling settles into his straining chair, happy as a clam to have claimed a seat that invades my space.

"Seriously, Cat, maybe I can take you out so you can get to know me better." He whispers leaning over with a whiny tone.

My, my, how generous and completely egotistical of you.

The teacher stands up front writing his name on the board. Mr. Pearson, with a name just as boring as he seems to be, drones on seemingly unaffected by the students paying him no attention.

"I'm sure I'm too busy Kevin." I answer quickly. RBF in full effect.

“It’s Devin.” He responds with a look that reveals he’s surprised I wouldn’t remember. His blue eyes are bugged out and he swipes an unsure hand through his short blond hair.

Yep. I knew it was pretentious AF.

“I could show you around town, introduce you to the right people to get you started here.” He continues, as if I didn’t already shoot him down.

“Shut up Devin, she said she’s not interested and I can’t hear!” A girl with thick, brown hair pulled tight in a ponytail turns around from the seat in front of me and whisper shouts at him as she looks back at me with bright blue eyes and a sympathetic smile.

“Mind your business, Sabrina.” He retorts without breaking his gaze from my tits.

He lifts his eyes to mine, completely unashamed that I caught him gawking, with an incredulous shake of his head and a point in her direction as if to say ‘the nerve of this girl’.

“*Books* acts like we can’t learn all this crap from Google. Anyways, what do u say?” he asks again, after trying to pull me in on his unoriginal nickname for her like an inside joke.

Real clever, dumbass.

“Like I said, and she reiterated, I’m not interested. If you can’t understand that, maybe you should Google it.” I answer bored with this circling conversation.

He rears back from the close proximity he was slowly inching toward me like I’ve slapped him. Sabrina lets out a giggle still looking forward.

“Fine, offer stands when you’re ready to have some fun. You’re a cute girl, people like *that* are *not* your way to fitting in here” he says with a thumb pointing to Sabrina’s back that stiffens with embarrassment.

Like I give a shit what you think.

“I’ll take my chances.” I respond. Sabrina’s shoulders relax slightly as the teacher clears his throat.

“Grab a partner and make a list of the functions of each branch of government.” He says with a flick of his wrist while turning to the comfort of his cushy desk chair.

He is obviously the busy work type of teacher, I gather. Easy A.

Devin turns toward me with a smirk as I turn away and lightly tap on Sabrina’s shoulder. She turns around with a shy smile.

“Wanna partner up?” she asks slightly nervous.

I smile at her as Devin glares in our direction. I am suddenly protective of this little outcast that stood up for me. I recognize a single kindred spirit in this place dripping in plastic and pretty lies.

“Yeah. Yeah, I do.” I respond. Maybe I can salvage this day after all.



“Devin’s a jerk. Don’t worry about him though. The only reason he has any friends is because he is a football player.” Sabrina explains as we walk out of class.

“They’re not all bad though. There are a couple nice guys on the team. A little eye candy at least.” She says with a blush. Please tell me she is not interested in one of those tool bags.

“Noah and Luca are nice. Terrance is ok but a little obnoxious...” she starts naming them all off and I cut her off quickly.

“I’m not worried, not about him, or any other football player for that matter.” I tell her.

“Not my crowd.” I add.

“Yea mine either.” She says with a shrug. Maybe she does have some backbone.

“I’m just trying to survive this snake pit until I can get to University next year.”

“Yeah, I hear you.” I agree.

“So, what’s your last class?” She asks as we walk down the hall side by side.

“Journalism.” She looks surprised so I explain.

“I was able to get in with my grades and a recommendation from the last school I was in.”

I’m actually looking forward to this class. I’ve always enjoyed writing and researching. Uncovering secrets and laying them bare is my specialty.

“Cool, I’ve got Choir so I better head to the auditorium. See u tomorrow?” she asks, still trying to gauge if I’m actually interested in speaking to her. These people must be real assholes to her.

“Yea, of course.” I reassure her.

“Here, take my number, maybe we can arrange a table to meet at for lunch tomorrow?”

“OK great!” she brightens as I hand her my phone after unlocking it so she can input her number.

Amelia gave it to me yesterday and I’ve never actually had a phone so I’m really slow at using it.

“See you Cat!” she smiles handing me back my phone as she walks quickly away to wherever the auditorium is, I assume.

I follow the room numbers down until I reach my Journalism classroom and walk in with a little more pep in my step after meeting at least one good person today.

Chapter 4

Noah

She's here.

I was disappointed at not seeing her all day in any of my classes and I'm pleasantly surprised as she walks in with a small curve in her lips.

God, what I could do with those pretty pink lips.

This class is pretty exclusive and I figured, as a new student, there was no way I would see her here.

My mouth spreads to a warm smile as her gaze flits around the room looking for a seat until she meets mine.

Her eyes glaze over like an invisible wall is put in front of them and she heads to a chair several spots away from the desk I'm perched on.

Damn, that's OK.

Little does she know these seats are just suggestions in this class. Ms. Geiger isn't a stickler for formalities and encourages us to discuss and work around the room comfortably as we plan articles for the school paper together.

The other students filter in slowly, taking out snacks and chatting excitably about the new school year.

Cat surveys the atmosphere and slouches a bit in her chair observing and listening. I walk over slowly hoping her easy demeanor continues. She stiffens again as I sit next to her with a smile.

"Hey Cat." Is all I can manage to say, once again taken aback by her amazing golden eyes in such close proximity.

Smooth Noah, try not to be an idiot.

She looks up at me and I can see the yellow and reddish chestnut flecks that make up that beautiful color. Her curly hair looks so soft and bouncy. My fingertips itch to rub a strand between them.

“Hey.” She replies shortly still surveying the room around us.

She seems more interested here than I’ve seen from her in other common areas we’ve been in. We, there’s no we – yet.

She must be pretty good at writing though if she’s in this class, so I try to capitalize on a common interest.

“You’re gonna love this class. Ms. G is really cool and she likes fresh views on things.”

She loosens up a bit and meets my eyes again.

“I hope so. Some of my previous teachers weren’t all that happy with my ‘views.’” She says with a little smirk and quotation marks with her fingers. Progress. I smile back.

“You won’t have that problem here. As long as you can back up your opinions with facts, Ms. G welcomes innovative thinkers.” I reassure her. She looks at me quizzically.

“I’m surprised to see you here. I don’t think I’ve ever had a football player in any of my journalism classes.”

Ouch.

I guess she assumes I’m just a meat head jock. She’s in for a surprise. I worked up to the editor position in one short year and earning the spot as a Junior was almost unheard of. As a senior, I’m excited to be given the editor position two years in a row, and plan to make this year’s newspaper the best it’s ever been, but I won’t elaborate on that just yet.

“Yeah, I’ve been working on the school paper since sophomore year. I love it.” I respond easily, not letting on to the sting of her assumptions.

“Hey guys!” Ms. G says as she breezes in with her torn up satchel and giant cup of coffee.

Her brown hair is frizzy and she rubs at her eyes as she makes her way to her desk with a smile. Three years with her and she has never changed. She always complains about getting no sleep, but I’m sure her giant afternoon coffees don’t help. Even if a little quirky, Ms. G is still my favorite teacher. She stands and heads to the board at the front of the class.

“Great to see you guys again! I hope all of you had a good summer and are ready to work. We have some great topics – oh! I forgot!” She startles as she spots Cat.

“We have a new student! Cat Garcia, right?” she asks her.

“Uh yea, hi. I’m Cat.” She says with a smirk and a little wave to the class.

Not shy, I observe, just quiet. I like that she doesn’t feel the need to fill a conversation with unnecessary chatter. Even if I do wish I could get a little more out of her. Her voice is so fucking sweet to my ears.

“You come highly recommended! Welcome to the team.” Ms. G explains to the curious eyes of the class. They give skeptical looks but Cat responds unaffected.

“Thanks. Glad to be here.”

Fucking adorable.

“So! Let’s discuss people!” Ms. G starts up our Monday brainstorming session as we plan for this month’s issue.

After she writes a hefty list of possible topics on the board, she starts doling out assignments.

“Noah, as editor, I’d like you take Cat under your wing this month. Show her the ropes. How about you guys take on the story about our underpaid cafeteria staff?”

Cat looks at me with wide, startled eyes.

Surprise.

“Sure, Ms. G. I’m sure we can get people to notice, leave it to us.” I reply confidently.

Now there’s an Us.

Yep, Ms. G is definitely my favorite.

“Awesome.” She moves on with a nod continuing to assign topics to the other students.

Cat squirms a little in her chair and I look over to her with a wink.

“We got this.” I confirm and she answers with a tight smile.

“Okay, get to work everyone!” Ms. G encourages with a shove of hands as she heads back to her desk to finish her coffee and browse the local news websites on her computer as usual.

Cat and I discuss angles and make plans to interview some staff. She’s sharp, efficient. Just when I think she can’t intrigue me more, she surprises me. We brainstorm some more until there is a lull in ideas.

“So how long do we have to gather info? A month seems like a long time to write one article.”

“Oh, we don’t just write. We usually get a week to gather info and brainstorm a plan, and a week to interview and get any photos needed for the paper. Then, the next week, we write, format, and edit our sections, confirm our facts and sources, and the last week we put everything together to perfect the final layout before the paper goes into production.”

“Oh wow, I didn’t realize we were involved in all the aspects of the paper.” She responds looking a little worried at the timeline.

“Yeah, Mrs. G thinks we should experience all sides of production to help us hone our skills.” I respond.

“Don’t worry, I’ll walk you through everything, but we will have to work on our off time as well to keep on schedule so it’s probably best if we exchange numbers to coordinate.” I suggest with a little hitch in my chest.

I’ve never asked a girl for her number before. It’s usually either practically thrown at me when they find out I’m a Caldwell, or seductively tucked into my pocket with a wink when they want a good time.

She looks taken aback for a second then shakes her head slightly.

“Alright, I guess you have a point.” She agrees slowly.

I try to contain the excitement at my luck as we exchange information, her clicking away at her phone with a furrow in her cute little brows.

I got her number. Okay, it's for school purposes, but I've got it.



We walk out of last period together as we join the halls filled with students rushing home and to extra-curriculars.

Football practice is 6:30 every morning and we have two-a-days twice a week on Tuesdays and Thursdays so I'm free this afternoon.

"Hey do u need a ride home?" I ask.

The lakefront homes surrounding Lakeview Prep are scattered around large lots and winding roads. I don't know if she has a car but, if not, I don't want her walking around alone in a new area. It's nice here, no doubt, not a lot of crime, but still...

"I'm good. I'm staying just a couple miles down. I like to walk." She reassures me.

Nope. Not gonna happen on my watch.

"You walked a couple miles here?" I ask incredulously.

"No, my - um - foster mom said she can drop me off in the mornings but she had a meeting this afternoon and I told her I'd find my way back fine. Just until I can figure out a more permanent means of transportation. I'm assuming there's no bus lines around here?" she says with a little snort.

Foster – huh – interesting.

I don't comment on it since she seems a bit embarrassed and is starting to ramble.

"There's the school buses but you don't want to have to resort to that – believe me. Come on, let me drive you. I don't mind."

I really, really don't mind.

She bites at her cheek while she debates.

Come on Little Cat, throw me a bone...

“Um alright, just for today. I’ll figure it out, and if not, I really don’t mind walking.”

“It’s your first day, let me treat you.”

We walk silently to my custom-painted metallic blue Land Rover Discovery at the front of the lot. Early practices mean prime parking. She stops short when I make my way to open the passenger door for her, glancing at my ride and chewing on her pink lips.

Yum – I would chew on them too if she let me.

“This is your car?” she asks with a defeated tone.

“Yep. Sixteenth Birthday present from the rents. Sweet right?”

I try to appear nonchalant. If she’s a foster kid, I don’t want to put her off with my standard of living. It’s not like it’s my money, my dad is the one that works his ass off for it.

I barely even saw either of my parents that birthday except for the obligatory social media pics they snapped of me as they gave me the keys in the morning before my dad headed off to work all day and my mom to attend to her daily brunching schedule.

Last year’s Birthday was pretty much the same. I turn 18 next month, so it’s a toss-up if they will let it pass quietly, or throw a huge party and make an event out of it. Honestly, I’m hoping for the first option.

“Yea, sweet.” She mumbles quietly as she gets in the car. I close the door and walk around to the driver’s side to get in.

As I close the door, I’m surrounded by the soft scent of roses and cotton and I wonder how I didn’t notice before. I was trying to keep a respectful distance at school so I didn’t run her off, but now, there’s no escaping that fucking scent.

Ho-ly shit that’s nice.

My cock twitches in my jeans.

Stay cool man, stay cool.

Yes, I talk to my cock sometimes, it’s not that weird.

“Alright, where to, Little Cat?” I ask.

She stares at me, stunned for a second and then fumbles in her bag for her phone. She didn’t close up with the slipped endearment, baby steps.

“Um, sorry, I can direct you, but it might be easier if I pull up the address really quick.” She says sounding embarrassed while swiping through her phone furiously.

She seems to have trouble navigating so I reassure her.

“No rush, take your time.”

“Sorry, it’s a new phone and I’m still getting used to where the apps are. I saved it on a note somewhere...” she says still clicking away.

“So, you have foster parents?” I ask gently. “Who are they? Everyone is pretty tight around here, maybe I know where they live?”

“Yeah um, the Bennetts? Matthew and Amelia?” she questions pleadingly.

“No shit? Yeah, I know them, they’re close with the parentals. I can take you there, no problem.”

I start backing out of the parking space wondering when the hell the Bennetts decided to foster.

I thought they were trying to have more kids. I remember my mom gossiping about how unfortunate it was that it was taking so long with the other brunchers poolside last year.

It stuck with me because they always seemed like good parents and I thought it was a shame.

Mom didn’t seem all that concerned, to be honest, more so just happy to have something juicy talk about amidst her mimosas and French pastries.

I don’t think she understands the desire to expand a family. Once she nabbed my dad and secured a spot by his side with the obligatory heir, she was content to close up shop.

“Okay, thanks.” Cat says pulling me from my musings.

“So how long have you been staying with the Bennetts?” I ask as I pull onto the winding road taking us up to the residential area surrounding the school.

“Two months.” She clips out, not expanding.

“Oh wow, so you are *new new* huh?”

“Yep, a shiny new toy to mold I guess.” She says with a snort as she brushes at her cut offs indignantly.

My gaze follows her hands, down to her smooth, shapely thighs then snapping back up to the road before she notices.

Don't be a creep, man.

“Nah, the Bennetts are cool. Amelia is one of the few working moms around here so she doesn't hang with the socialites too much. And Matthew seems cool. He works with my dad a lot since he's the best architect in the state, apparently, and my dad is a developer.”

Honestly, when it comes to families in the area, this girl lucked out.

Amelia has never really fit in with the brunchers since she owns a popular boutique downtown that they can't even fathom putting the effort into, and Matthew seems like a decent, hard-working guy. I've seen him doting on his daughter around town. Not like my parents. Not at all.

“Hmmm.” she muses, thinking deeply and biting her cheek. I drive along wondering how to find out more about her.

“So, are you from here?” I ask.

That's not too invasive, right?

“Yep. Born here. Been all over.” She replies with a haunted look.

Hmmm. What's the deal? I hope she's ok. If I find out something's happened to her, I will lose my shit.

Woah, that was an intense reaction.

“Yea? Whereabouts?” I probe trying to get some answers with a nonchalant tone.

“Look, I appreciate the ride, but I wasn’t expecting an interview.” She snaps.

The ride is silent for a minute.

Too far, dude, take it back.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to pry. You just seem interesting is all.”

“Well, you can report back to your football buddies, that no, I’m not interesting, and my past is no one’s business but mine.”

Uh what? She thinks I’m fishing for dirt on her?

“I don’t report to anyone, Cat.” I respond with a soft tone.

“And you’re right, it’s no one’s business but yours. I wouldn’t sell you out like that.”

“Look, I know how your little boy’s club works. Devin or Kevin, or whatever the fuck his name is...”

I snort because it’s fucking hilarious that she doesn’t remember his name.

“thinks getting the friendly QB to butter me up will get him some points or whatever while u gather info for him. As I told him already, I’m not interested, so you can drop the act.”

“What do u mean? He asked you out?” I ask with a flare of jealousy in my gut.

That fucking bastard.

He saw me stake my claim. He knew I was interested in her even if I didn’t admit it.

“Yea. In class today? He didn’t tell you?” She asks gauging my reaction with searching eyes.

“Fuck no he didn’t tell me, and he wouldn’t anyways.” I answer honestly with a growl.

“Why not?” she probes with a confused look as I turn towards the street to her house.

“Because he fucking knows that I...”

I stop short, not wanting to continue that sentence and reveal that I'm fucking obsessed with this girl after day one of meeting her.

“Look, I told him to leave you alone after you left the lunchroom today. It's obvious he was bothering you and I didn't want him to give you any shit.”

“Oh.” She says quietly as I pull into the circle drive in front of the Bennett's huge, modern home covered in glass and sleek wood and metal accents.

Nice digs. I've been here a couple times for “family dinners” that are really just business dinners for my dad to pretend he gives a shit about stuff like that. Beats the stuffy colonial my parents purchased to keep up with the Jones's.

“Well, um, thanks for trying I guess, and thanks for the ride. See you around, Noah.” She says, gathering her things and pulling at the door handle.

“Definitely. See you around, Little Cat.” I answer noticing her cheeks pink as she climbs down from the SUV and heads to the front door.

I wait to make sure she makes it in safely, taking in those luscious curves and big curls lifted by the breeze coming off the lake.

As she closes the door behind her I know I'm fucked because I already can't wait to see her tomorrow.

Chapter 5

Cat

I enter the fucking mansion I currently house my meager belongings in confused and exhausted by my exchange with Noah.

This is exactly why I tried to keep my distance from him. A whole class period followed by a quick car ride and I'm spent with the thoughts that were whirring through my mind. I do not have time for this.

He is distracting, for sure, those probing green eyes and soft voice spouting cute nicknames are trying to break through my defenses, I can tell. But why? What does he want? Surely the star quarterback of some fancy ass prep school can't be interested in a girl like me?

Don't get me wrong, I know I'm pretty, if you like my type, I guess. The sleaze-bucket footballers on the East Side definitely made their interests known, my disgusting excuse for an ex-foster-brother in particular, but not a guy of this caliber.

Noah seemed genuinely pissed that his friend would try to pick me up. He seems like a nice guy – not the typical jock, but who knows, I've been fooled before. And why would he hang out with a douchebag like Devin if he was?

I decide that I can't waste any more time thinking about stupid high school crap and that I need to hit the books so I walk up the metal stairs to my room.

Amelia set up my room in the upper right corner of the house. It overlooks the lake with a wall of windows to the back that butt up to the closed off right corner that offers some privacy from the street. I've got a big queen bed against that wall and a huge closet with my dozen or so outfits hanging that just make it look sad. An attached bath to the left of the windows offers privacy which I can appreciate after enduring the drooling gazes from former foster dads and brothers

staring as I walked out of a shared bathroom after a shower. Thank God.

I settle into the desk that faces the lake view up against the windows and get to work. About an hour in, I hear commotion downstairs and the clomping of little feet up the stairs heading in my direction.

Posey bursts through the door, as if she was afraid I wouldn't be here and I swivel my chair in her direction to be greeted with a big, relieved smile and bright blue eyes.

"Hi Cat." She waves shyly as she stops right inside my room. Amelia comes bounding up the steps and I look up to her worried face covered by her copper-red hair as she softly chastises her daughter who looks exactly like her.

"Posey, I told you, you need to knock before coming in Cat's room. It's not polite, Love."

Love. No one has ever called me that.

"Sorry, Cat." She says looking down shyly, her red curls covering her face.

"Oh, it's cool Posey, I was just studying." I can't help but be nice to this girl. She's just so sweet. Untainted by a life that hasn't hit her as hard as mine did at her age.

Kindergarten is supposed to be a time when the world expands into exciting changes for most kids. Mine, not so much. That was about the time my mom died and my whole world fell apart.

"How was your first day?" Amelia asks tentatively standing in the door frame. "Did you get home ok?"

"Yea I caught a ride back here." I respond making sure not to call this place home. "School was fine." I say, not wanting to expand. I'm not playing the happy family game anymore.

Too many times I let my guard down to be burned in the end. 9 homes in almost 8 years with a couple little stints in the prisons they call group homes for the in-between stages. Had I not been held back a year in school, I would probably be on

my own by now, but if I can fly under the radar, lucky number 10 will set me up for success.

“Oh good, I’m so glad.” She says with a smile that turns worried.

“So, you got a ride home? From who?”

I contain rolling my eyes. She’s probably afraid I called some hood friends to come pick me up and case the place before she got back.

“A boy at school. He said his parents know you. Noah?” I respond to ease her worries before she breaks out in sweats, ruining the stylish skirt suit that hugs her svelte figure.

Posey strolls around my space quietly brushing her fingers over the few personal things on my bookshelves and bed that I have managed to carry along with me throughout the years. A stuffed bear, an old necklace, and a framed picture of me and my grandmother among my prized possessions.

“Noah Caldwell? Oh yes, I know him and his parents. He seems like a nice boy...” she probes for information.

“Yeah, I guess. He was in my last period so he offered me a ride.” I say simply.

“Well, that was kind. We can get you a car worked out if you’d like. Wait, do you have your license?” She asks as if it just occurred to her.

“Uh no, not yet.”

When in the hell would I have had time to practice and get a license while being moved from home to home? And is she serious about a car? That seems extravagant for a foster kid she doesn’t technically even have to provide for in two weeks...

“Well, we will work on that first, then.” She says easily, as if it’s not a huge step to freedom I never thought I’d be able to obtain until I was on my own.

I hear the front door open and keys drop onto the entry table as Matthew calls out.

“Baby? Where’re ya’ll at?”

“I’ll go start dinner. Come on Posey, leave Cat’s things alone. You can help me with the spaghetti.”

“Yay spaghetti night!” Posey exclaims, and then scurries downstairs to greet her dad.

“We will leave you to finish your studying. An hour ok?”

“Yea thanks, I’ll be down in a bit.”

“Hey Daddy!” I hear Posey downstairs.

“Hey Posey-Pie you miss me?” she breaks out in a fit of giggles.

I catch the daddy-daughter exchange as Amelia softly closes my door and feel a punch to my gut.



We sit at the dinner table and I wring my hands together underneath it, waiting while Amelia places plates in front of us.

So weird. Even a couple months in, I still can’t shake the uncomfortable feeling of sitting at a dinner table every night like it’s not a foreign experience to me, especially surrounded by total strangers.

I was lucky to even *get* a dinner at most of my foster homes and even before that, I usually had to fend for myself.

“So, Amelia said you had a good day?” Matthew asks while digging into his spaghetti.

“Um, yeah, it was fine.” I reiterate.

“Meet any friends?” he asks casually.

I begin to wonder if Amelia mentioned Noah. Is he trying to see if I’m some kind of easy lay? Is he interested genuinely or personally? Ugh I hate this.

“Yeah, I met a nice girl in government and guy that says his dad works with you. He gave me a ride home.” I say taking a bite to close the conversation.

Damn, this is good. Amelia can cook, I'll give her that.

"What's his name?" Matthew asks with a little stiffness in his broad shoulders.

He's a looker for an older guy. Blueish-green eyes and dark blonde hair with a constant scruff on his defined jawline. He and Amelia make a striking couple.

"Noah. And the girl was Sabrina." I add pointedly, unsure why they are so damn interested in Noah.

Like I said, he wasn't the only person I talked to.

Matthew relaxes visibly in his chair as he continues eating.

"Oh yeah, Chip and Ana Caldwell's boy. He's a good egg. And that Sabrina must be Grace and Adam Trevor's girl. She's smart as a whip, I hear." He supplies in his southern drawl.

"Yeah, seems like it." I reply surprised at his interest and knowledge of the families around town and confused at his newly relaxed demeanor. Huh. He didn't seem possessive, that's always a red flag, just concerned maybe?

"Looks like our Cat is a good judge of character so far." Amelia supplies to the conversation.

Our Cat.... What? I can't even respond I'm so taken aback by that statement. *Am I in the fucking twilight zone?*

"Mommy, can I have another breas-stick?" Posey asks.

"May you, and yes, you may have another breadstick, sweetie." Amelia annunciates with a smirk while placing one on her plate.

"Cat said she was interested in getting her driver's license. I thought we could look into how to get her started as soon as possible." She tells Matthew with a little smile and glance my way.

"That's a great idea, Baby." He tells her with a twinkle in his eye.

"You don't want to have to resort to always taking rides when we are in a pinch. Noah's a good kid, but I'm sure you want to be self-sufficient." He reasons.

Well yes, yes I do.

“Thanks, I’d appreciate that.” I reply quietly as I finish my food, wishing I could lick the plate, but not daring to ask for seconds. That never goes over well with foster parents.

“You want a little more, Cat?” Amelia asks, already dishing out a little pile of noodles on my plate with a smile. Maybe these people aren’t so bad.

Chapter 6

Noah

She looks gorgeous today. I'm staring at her in lunch again, just like I have all week. She's got her hair high up in a huge ponytail and her big curls are everywhere. She's wearing ripped jeans and a band tee with bright red lipstick that accentuates her perfect lips and makes me think unholy thoughts.

She's so different.

She looks fun and happy as she laughs with Sabrina Trevor at their table. I want to know what they talk about. I want to know *her*.

I've been picking up on things about her personality and everything I notice draws me closer to her.

She's really fucking smart. She's in a lot of advanced classes and has proven herself an asset in Journalism already with her fresh viewpoint and out of the box suggestions.

She's real. She never eats the salad, only real food, and she digs into her tacos without finesse today. It's working for her.

She's hot as fuck. Her soft curves are a welcome change from the emaciated girls that fill this school to the brim. I am quickly realizing that her body is, apparently, my ideal because I can't keep my eyes off of it.

She's loyal. She only hangs with Sabrina, who before didn't really have many friends and mostly stuck to herself. She seems to have taken Sabrina under her wing and Cat has no qualms about putting any assholes in their place that try to tease her friend.

She has no interest in any guys so far and seems to brush them off just as quickly as they flock to her. Unfortunately, her unattainable status just seems to breed more and more fuckers hoping that they are her type when the last guy isn't.

She doesn't like being crowded, often finding spaces away from everyone to study or eat, and keeping a good foot or two of space from everyone but Sabrina.

And me, I think smugly.

She sits next to me in class comfortably now. The first few times we brushed against each other she would quickly retract but she is slowly beginning to come around. She even smiles at me from time to time in class. Never in the halls or lunchroom when I try to force her gaze with my own, but when we are alone, she slips.

Luca follows my gaze and lingers for a second before looking back to his plate with a smile. Terrance chats it up with a couple of girls hovering near our table and Devin is talking football with some other guys.

“What?” I ask Luca quietly.

“Nothing, man.” He replies looking bored. He waits a couple of beats before elaborating.

“You like her.”

Not a question, just a statement of fact. Luca's got this way of speaking like he doesn't give a shit how you answer so it puts you at ease to speak honestly. No judgement, but also no opinion. He's infuriating sometimes.

“Yeah, so?” I probe. This guy is my best friend, I'm curious to know what he thinks, even though it doesn't really matter. That ship has sailed, I'm in too deep now.

“She seems cool.” He offers with a shrug. Damn him.

You gonna elaborate or what?

I furrow my brows at him in annoyance.

“You gonna ask her out?” he asks lowly so the other guys don't hear. I appreciate that, not because I'm ashamed, but because he knows everyone will make a huge deal out of it.

I've never asked a girl out. Never had to, I guess, with my position in this school. Being the football captain, popular, good-looking, and rich, the girls all flock to me and the others

secretly hate me for it. I usually don't bite, no matter how popular or pretty the girl is, because I can't ignore their faults like the rest of the guys can. For me to show any interest in a girl is like ringing a fight bell for all the other assholes that feel like they have something to prove.

"Yeah, eventually." I answer honestly.

"Better hurry up, bro. There's two that have been trying to close the deal all week in English already." He offers.

"Who?" I ask snapping my head up and narrowing my eyes.

"Doesn't matter man. They are two of many. You know that."

He's right, I do know that. Cat's a hot commodity right now. I hear the talk amongst the guys. They only see the outside of her, not like me, they like that she is new and she is, undoubtedly, hot as hell. Unfortunately, that's all that's needed to snag most of the guys' attention.

I need to move this along. They need to know she's mine. The bell rings and I guess that's all I'm going to get from him, but it's enough to light a fire under my ass.



Later that day, as I walk to Journalism, I spot Cat walking several feet ahead with Devin. He must have followed her out of class, and I can tell by her expression and careful distance, that she's not happy about it.

I hang back, stopping next to a bulletin board to pretend I'm not watching, and assess the situation before charging in like a caveman.

He slides in front of her to stop her from entering the class and I can tell from the look in his eyes that he is up to something.

This prick knows I like her, I told him to leave her alone, and here he fucking is again.

She rolls her eyes and shakes her head at him, obviously not interested in what he's throwing down.

He reaches up a hand like he is going to touch her cheek. I stiffen and have to force myself to stay in place as she leans back quickly with a scowl while brushing his hand away.

He laughs and she charges past him, hitting his side with her shoulder as she enters the room.

He rubs his arm with his hand, looking angry for a split second before heading off to his class.

I see where this fucker's loyalties lie.

Not with me, that's for sure, and if he thinks he can step in on my girl, he has another thing coming. All these fucking guys do. Time to step up my efforts.

Chapter 7

Cat

On Friday, as I open my locker to grab a book for my first class, I feel a tall presence hover close beside me.

I glance up to see a tall guy with wispy blonde hair and curious brown eyes staring down at me. He's dressed in some work out clothes and Nike slides. A giant duffle bag hangs from his shoulder like he just got out of practice. He's got to be 6'4" at least so...

I'm gonna go with overconfident basketball douche for the win, Alex.

I bristle at his nearness and step back, closing my locker.

"Cat right? I'm Ryder." He speaks as if I was waiting for him.

"Okay? Should I know that?" I ask confused at his familiarity.

"Yes, you should. I'd like to take you out. How about tonight?" I laugh and he smiles like he has me right where he wants me.

He obviously doesn't know me.

"Now why would I want to do that?" I ask curiously.

"Why wouldn't you?" he asks with a twinkle in his eyes, brushing a hand through his long blonde hair.

He apparently thinks this is a seller for most girls, to each their own I guess, but it just looks dirty and sloppy to me. Man-buns are the absolute worst style ever conceived. Give me a clean-cut guy any day. These tools that think looking like they just rolled out of bed is cute do nothing for me.

"Morning Cat." Noah slides between us with a side glance at Ryder.

Now this is a fine specimen.

He is dressed in a soft tee layered under a crisp button up he has rolled to his forearms, and pristine jeans with his usual expensive sneakers. His light brown hair is styled back artfully from his face and he smells like he took a shower in a goddamn mountain oasis.

“Morning.” I respond, directing my attention away from Ryder meaningfully.

“Can I walk you to class? Just wanted to run a few things for the article by you.” He says looking deep in my eyes. His are such a bright green speckled with gold near his pupils. I’ve never seen anything like it.

“Oh sure, yeah let’s go.” I reply, snapping out of my reverie.

I give a tight smile to Ryder as we walk off. He smiles with a roll of his eyes like he is unfazed by my rebuff before turning to walk away.

Noah has saved me from a few of these encounters throughout the week. I don’t know if it’s intentional, but it’s a welcome reprieve from the jackasses. I feel like I’m getting to know him better from working so closely with him in class, and I’ve decided that Noah’s alright. I’m not interested in dating him or anything, but at least he’s nice to look at if nothing else.

“So, how was your first week?” he asks with a smile.

He quickly slides a hand behind me to my opposite hip and lightly guides me closer to his side to get around a guy standing in our path before letting go.

His touch makes my belly flip flop and I feel the imprints of his fingertips on me like they are etched into my skin.

“It’s been okay. What did you want to run by me?” I ask to quickly get back on topic before I need to be in class.

“Hm? Oh nothing, that guy just seemed like he was bothering you. I came in for the save.” He explains with a wink.

So you are doing that on purpose.

“Do you need a ride home today? I could take you, there’s no practice after school today.” He offers easily.

“Um no, but thanks. Sabrina is going to take me home.”

Alone time with Noah is the last thing I should be thinking about right now.

“Okay just checking on ya. Well, I’ll see you in class then.”

He winks seemingly unaffected by my refusal. We walk up to the classroom door I need to go in and he stops to stand in front of me.

“See you later, Cat.”

He brushes a piece of hair out of my face and my belly burns. He stares at me as if his offhand goodbye means something more.

“Have a good day.” He winks with a smirk before he turns and walks off.

I walk into class confused at the exchange. He’s acting like we are close friends, not just partners in class. I don’t know if I like that, but something in the back of my brain whispers *you know you do*.



“He’s looking at you again.” Sabrina comments with a smirk she tries to hide with a sip of her drink.

We sit alone at lunch, just how I like it. I’m sad Sabrina didn’t have any friends she usually sat with before I came along because she is a really cool chick, but it works to my advantage because I enjoy eating without being bombarded with a ton of people.

“He’s being weird.” I answer, knowing exactly who she is talking about.

“He likes you.” She says seriously, her bright sky-blue eyes wide.

She adjusts her giant cardigan to cover herself as if it will lend some protection from the attention of the popular crowd.

“Maybe, but football jerks don’t do it for me, you know that.”

“I know, but Noah doesn’t seem like that.” She adds softly with a tilt of her head.

“He’s the football captain, he can have whoever he wants, and I’m just the new flavor of the month.”

“He can, but he hasn’t that I’ve ever seen.”

“What do you mean?” I ask taking a bite of pasta.

“Well, I’ve never known him to have a girlfriend and I can’t even remember anyone that has bragged about being with him. I mean, I’m not totally in the know, but surely there would be whispers?” she challenges.

“Maybe he’s just nice enough not to kiss and tell. He isn’t an asshole, I’ll give him that.” I joke, pointing my penne at her.

“He’s always been nice to me.” She whispers softly as I dig back into my food. She fidgets in her seat as she picks at her food for a couple of seconds like she is debating on whether to elaborate.

“Sophomore year some grungy guys were picking on me, saying stuff like wanting to break in the nerd, being gross...”

She looks down and grabs a fry, swirling it in ketchup as I snap my head up furiously at her story.

“He and Luca came up and told them to pick on someone their own size, or something to that effect. They ran off not wanting to mess with them being so much bigger, I guess. He picked up the books they had knocked out of my hands and walked me to class.”

“Are those guys still in school here?” I ask, wanting retribution for how they treated her. She laughs.

“Nah, they graduated last year, thank goodness.”

“Fuckers.” I snap, disappointed I can’t do anything to help.

“Maybe you should give him a chance.” She suggests softly.

“Maybe.” I answer to appease her.

Maybe not, I think to myself in an effort to steel my reserve.

But she has shown me a side of Noah I didn’t know he had, and if I’m being honest with myself, it’s making staying away much more difficult.

Dammit.



I slide into Sabrina’s little Audi to head home at the end of the day still a little conflicted about Noah.

Sabrina turns the station to the local pop station and hums along to every song perfectly as she drives into my neighborhood and chatting in between the verses.

“You like music a lot, huh?”

She seems like more than a casual hummer. Usually I would get annoyed by something like that, but her quiet voice is so damn pleasant and I know she is in choir.

“Oh yea. I love it, but it’s just something I enjoy on my off time. It’s not like I own every band tee known to man or anything.” She says with a chuckle in my direction.

“Band tees are my jam. Easy, comfortable, but they show a little personality too.”

“I get that. So you know every artist you wear?” she asks with wide eyes.

“Of course. I hate when people wear bands that they have no connection too. It should mean something, you know? I have a few people I am still looking for and it makes it that much better when you search out the perfect tee and find ‘the one’.”

“Totally. So who are you still looking for?” She asks with interest.

We chat for a while about our favorite songs and artists and just get to know each other a little better.

She's such a good person. She seems to genuinely care about people and is zero drama.

We pull into my drive way and I unbuckle and turn to her.

"Hey, thanks a lot for being so cool to me this week. I don't know what I would have done if I hadn't met you." I tell her.

"Honestly, me either. I was dreading another year with no friends before you stood up for me with Devin." She replies blushing.

"Yea fuck that shit. You're stuck with me now. Thanks again, girl."

She laughs and nods her head in agreement.

"No problem, Cat. See you next week!"

I climb out of her car happy with the way my first week panned out. I may be confused about a certain green-eyed boy, but Sabrina is a sure thing.

Chapter 8

Noah

Practice is kicking my ass today. I was thinking about Cat all night. When I realized I only had four hours before I had to be up, I finally stopped resisting and wrapped my hand around my dick with thoughts of plump pink lips replacing it, her full tits in my own, and black curls spread out across my mattress before cumming violently in my hand. After a quick clean up, I finally knocked out cold.

I have never had a reaction like this to a girl before. Usually, they approach me. At parties, at school, at the hoity-toity events I am forced to attend by my parents to impress my dad's business partners as he introduces me with a proud pat, gloating about all my stats and achievements, as if he had anything to do with my success on the field or in school.

The sad part is, they fall for it, can't wait to introduce their daughters to a boy they know is surrounded in money and dripping in potential. I'm not bragging, it's the sad truth, and it's fucking ridiculous.

Sure, I've taken a few girls up on their offers of a good time, if they were especially easy on the eyes or not completely annoying. But, much to my dad's dismay, I'm picky.

He doesn't expect me to up and marry one of these girls or anything, this isn't the dark ages, but he has definitely voiced his disappointment when a business deal fell through conveniently around the time I made it clear I wasn't interested in starting a relationship with one of his associate's little princesses.

But Cat is just so damn different. Intoxicating in her ability to seize my attention with a flick of her hair or a questioning gaze. And fucking beautiful to top it off. I don't care where she came from, she doesn't have to spill her secrets to me – and she seems to have plenty – I just know I'm glad as hell she walked into my school almost 2 weeks ago.

She's all I see. All day I'm spotting her in the halls, laughing with Sabrina in the lunchroom, gathering her books from her locker. She's like a magnet pulling me closer and winding me tighter until last period comes and I can finally get some quality time with my girl.

She doesn't know she's my girl, but she is. The guys around here are starting to understand she isn't up for grabs and fall back in line. Anytime I see some upstart motherfucker trying to swoop in and speak to her, I'm there. She doesn't want to talk to them anyway, I can tell.

Honestly, navigating all of the advances she gets daily is like performing some cock-blocking obstacle course. Even still, I'm happy to slide in when I can with a go-fuck-yourself glare as I cut off their weak attempts at pick-up lines for better conversation, with me of course.

I throw in a little touch here and there. Nothing too invasive, but a little more than friend zone. A squeeze of her shoulder, a quick graze of the back of my hand on hers, a light dusting of fingertips at the small of her back as we walk out of class. She was taken aback at first, but has never outright swiped me away like the others. The more I do it, the more she gets used to it. Soon it will seem the norm, and the goal is that when that happens, it will make her crave even more.

Little Cat, so fitting, she's like a wild kitten you have to slowly show affection to, to gain her trust. Move too fast and you get the claws. I want to make her purr. Holy hell, do I want to make her purr.

That's what I was up all-night mulling over. How do I take this from wishful thinking to the next level without scaring her away? I want to lock this girl down.

"Caldwell! Get your ass in gear! You play like this at the season opener and you can kiss State goodbye!" Coach Fuller yells stopping the play I was lining up for in a daze.

Right. State Championships, recruiters, scholarships, I need to snap the fuck out of it. I shuffle through the end of practice with my head a little clearer even though I can still feel the fog of thoughts of Cat hovering in the back recesses of my brain.

Coach blows the whistle ending our morning session and we rip off our helmets and head to the locker room.

“What the fuck dude? I can’t hold these fuckers off you all day while you’re out there daydreaming, man.” Devin starts in on me as soon as we enter.

“Fuck you man, I couldn’t sleep last night, sorry I had one fucking bad day.” I defend slamming my helmet on the bench in front of my locker.

“You’ve been off your game since that little piece of ass showed up, you better get your shit together -”

I rush him and bang my chest pads against his, looking eye to eye with him.

“Watch it dipshit. You don’t fucking talk about her like that. You are *not* my coach, and *I’m* the fucking captain so watch how you speak to me.” I growl low in his face.

“I’m just trying to help man. I thought we were friends. I don’t want you to ruin your chances because of some fucking girl that won’t mean shit by next month when you could be drowning in pussy next year with a full ride if you had just kept your head on straight.” He states with a sneer.

Friends. Real friends don’t fucking ask out their friend’s girl on the daily.

I still see him trying to get at Cat when he thinks I’m not around, and I know for a fact she despises her class with him because there are days she walks into Journalism pissed that he can’t seem take no for a fucking answer.

Luca and Terrance walk up with confused faces as they take in the tense atmosphere as we continue our stare off.

“Friends. Right. When it’s convenient for you, I guess.” I respond with a scoff.

“Hey man, come on, we need to get ready for class.” Luca says with a hand on my shoulder, lightly pulling me away from Devin.

Luca is a real friend, always looking out, he speaks the truth without being an asshole like Devin. I step back and turn away

to start stripping off my pads.

“What the fuck is that supposed to mean? We’ve played together since middle school and now you wanna say we aren’t even friends?”

Devin shouts indignantly at my back throwing his pads around like he has a right to be offended. I whip back around to face him.

“Yeah, some fucking loyalty you’ve got. You’re not fooling anyone. You’ve been trying to get at my girl since day one and it’s pissing me off.” I can’t keep this shit in anymore. He’s pushed me too far.

“Your girl?” he almost squeals with a raised eyebrow.

Terrance’s head snaps up to look at me while Luca sits to start untying his cleats and shaking his head in exasperation.

Oops. Did I say that out loud? Oh, fuck it, I’m tired of playing games.

“As far as I knew, she was still on the market.” Devin argues with a shrug like that’s a perfectly reasonable explanation as to why he’s a dick.

“Well, not for long so back the hell up. I told you to leave her the fuck alone already, don’t make me do it again.”

Terrance’s eyes widen and Devin stares at me with a disgusted scowl while shaking his head. Luca continues undressing as if it’s just another day in the neighborhood and I get a few glances from teammates who were pretending not to listen in.

Good. Let them see.

Cat. Is. Mine.

“Yeah, alright man, it’s your full ride at stake, not mine. Have at her.” He says with swipe of his hand.

As if I needed his fucking permission. I grab my towel and hygiene kit and head for the showers.

Fuck that guy.



I wait for her to arrive with my stomach twisting as I keep glancing at the door every time someone else walks in.

We have an interview scheduled in 15 minutes with some cafeteria staff today and although it's not exactly romantic, I'm looking forward to some one-on-one time with her outside the classroom.

Ms. G allows us to set up interviews during class time and knows it takes time so we won't be expected to return to class today. It's also Wednesday so I don't have practice and I really want to drive her home today.

She's been dodging my offers since last Monday saying she's riding with Sabrina or Amelia is coming to pick her up.

My chest burns when she walks in and starts heading toward me. She's wearing some ripped black skinny jeans with flip flops and a slouchy tee that says "I came, I saw, I got bored, so I left."

She's so fucking cute.

Her normally wild flowing curls are tied up on the top of her head in a giant bun and little pieces escape around her face.

I saw her at lunch but she's been keeping her distance. This class is the only place I know I can see her up close. The highlight of my day.

"Hey, I typed out the questions we discussed so it's easier to follow along for our interview." She says, getting right to business.

I've decided that, after announcing to the whole fucking locker room she was off limits, I need to step up my efforts today. She tries to keep our interactions to classwork but that's about to change.

"Oh, that's perfect, thanks. You look really pretty today Little Cat."

Here we go...

Chapter 9

Cat

My face heats up. Little Cat, there's that fucking nickname again. Assholes have been giving me suggestive nicknames since before I hit puberty and I have always hated them. So why does his make my stomach flip? Maybe because it's endearing and not disgusting.

Noah has been slowly trying to insert himself in my life and it's getting more and more difficult to turn him down. I've noticed him watching me throughout the day now, he's not even trying to hide it anymore. He has been respectful so far, but his gaze is starting to linger and he is giving little touches now that seem to set my butterflies afloat.

I usually hate when people touch me or try to get overly familiar, but I'm surprised to find I kind of like it.

Kind of more than kind of actually.

I've always trusted my instincts when it came to deciphering someone I should steer clear of, that's easy. But good-guy radar has never occurred to me and it's really confusing to try to change gears for the first time in my life.

I have never had a boyfriend, never had sex - I count my lucky stars on that one because I had to fight for it - never been kissed, or even been on a date.

I know I told myself I was here to focus on school and getting out on my own, but for the first time ever, I kind of like what it's settled into.

The Bennetts have been consistently friendly and I am feeling more comfortable around them. Amelia gave me the phone insisting I needed it for safety, they are helping me learn to drive after school, I finally let them buy me some new clothes when Amelia assured me I could pick whatever I wanted, and Matthew has been friendly and accommodating while still keeping his distance and, in my experience, that's saying a lot for foster-dads.

I don't know if this little bit of comfort is setting me more at ease or what, but I'm kind of intrigued at the idea of letting Noah in a bit.

"Um thanks." I respond.

I kind of slobbered it up today so I'm not sure what he means, but I'll accept the compliment. I don't know that I've ever had one that I didn't immediately recognize came laced with nefarious intentions.

"I like your hair like that." He adds. My stomach does a flip.

I didn't want to wash it this morning and it was super frizzy because of the humidity so I just threw it up but ok....

"You ready?" he asks staring at me intently, his sea green eyes twinkle with what seems like excitement.

"Yep, ready when you are." I reply

"Oh, I've been ready, Cat." He says still not making a move to get up.

Wait, what are we talking about?

Oh right, the interview. I pop out of my seat, nerves on end, grabbing my bag from the floor.

"Okay, let's go." I look down waiting for him to move.

"Oh yeah, let's go." He says snapping out of his statue-like trance and grabbing his things.

He places a large, full hand to the small of my back and guides me out the door in the direction of the lunchroom.



I've always stuck to the firm belief that you do not fuck with people that handle your food. I have never understood people that are rude to fast food workers or wait staff. I like my burgers sans spit, thank you very much. Plus, when you are nice, they are usually so appreciative they step up their service and sometimes even add in some little extras in my experience. Just my two cents, take it or leave it.

Not to mention, my Momo was a cafeteria lady all her life and I know she worked her ass off and was the best woman I ever knew. God, I miss my late grandmother every time I walk into a cafeteria.

Love you Momo.

I was actually really happy being tasked with this assignment, since it has a special place in my heart, so I'm excited to talk with the staff today. Maybe I can help drum up some awareness at how hard these ladies work and get people talking about fair wages to help lighten their load. My Momo, who struggled to provide for my dad as a single mom, would be proud.

"Do you want to take the lead?" Noah asks as we continue to the lunchroom seeming amused at my excitement.

"Yea sure, if you don't mind?"

"Not at all, I'll just add in here and there to keep the flow going and ad lib some questions we don't have on the list. You keep us on course if we steer too far in one direction." He suggests.

That's smart, have a game plan, I'm impressed.

He opens the door and holds it for me as I walk in and see the sweet older lady that acts as the Manager of the cafeteria sitting at a lunch table. I walk up to the table as she looks up with a tired smile.

"Lupe?" I confirm, even though I already know it's her. I saw her name on her name tag my first day, and when we called to set up the interview with the Manager, I realized who she was immediately.

"Yes, that's me." She says looking a little nervous.

She has her hair in a tight bun and rolls a hairnet around in her hands. She's still wearing an apron with a few splatters of food leftover from lunch service today. It was chili with cornbread and it was fucking delicious.

"Hi! I'm Cat, and this is Noah. We are with the school newspaper and just wanted to ask you a few questions. Thanks

for taking the time to speak with us today.” I say holding my hand out with a smile trying to set her at ease as she shakes my hand and then Noah’s.

“Yes, no problem, what did you want to talk about?” she wonders.

I doubt any of the brats at this school have said more than two words to her.

“Well, it has come to our attention that the staff here are grossly underpaid for the amazing job that you do here. I was hoping we could speak to you about the many duties you perform daily so we can make others aware of the shortcomings in the school pay structures here at Lakeview Prep.”

“Really?” she asks, intrigued and surprised by the topic.

“Yes ma’am,” I respond “We won’t ask your salary directly, but we have heard from sources that some of your staff are getting paid almost minimum wage while coaches and some admin are allotted anywhere from 60 to 150 thousand dollars a year from the school budget. Would you like to comment on that?” I urge taking out my sheet of questions and a notebook and pen.

“Wow, I didn’t know that, no...” She trails off with a disappointed look in her eyes.

“Well, we are hoping that if you could walk us through a day, a week, in your life, we could make the donors of the school see that what you do here, feeding and caring for their children every day, is equally as important as assisting in college applications or winning games.” I reply.

Noah looks at me with a proud nod with his pen at the ready and a smile in Lupe’s direction.

“Well, um, yes, I – I would be happy to do that” she responds hesitant at first and then steeling her spine as she realizes that she has, in fact, been compensated unfairly.

“Great, let’s get started then.” I say grabbing my list of questions to get down to work.

I'll do my best Momo, for you.

Chapter 10

Noah

She's fucking amazing. I haven't seen her in action yet since we have just been brainstorming and outlining our story so far, but I am seriously impressed.

This girl's got it.

She sets the interviewee at ease immediately and speaks with her as if she is personally offended this woman is being slighted.

It's true, the coaches here live like kings and being a football player, I never really questioned it, just happy to have a competent leader, but Cat is making some good points as she leads this interview.

She's got a good angle. One she didn't mention to me before. Maybe she thought I would be biased, but I am floored by the well thought out arguments she brings to this piece.

I add in some clarifications here and there but let her lead, as she seems to have it well in control.

Mostly, I can't keep my fucking eyes off her. It's making it hard for me to contribute much, as entranced as I am. She's so beautiful, passionate, and intelligent. I try to soak in her easy smiles, that are so rare, but seem to come easily as she speaks with Lupe. She snickers and reassures her as if they are best friends.

I snap out of my daze when I realize she is wrapping up. She shakes Lupe's hand as they stand, and I do the same before turning to guide her to the courtyard outside of the lunchroom. The doors shut behind us and she turns to me with her amber eyes shimmering with excitement.

"So? What do you think?" she asks

"I think you are fucking amazing." I admit. Her eyes widen and her cheeks pink.

Oops, I said that out loud.

“Seriously, I love your angle and you handled that interview like a pro.” I try to save my forward slip-up.

“Thanks, Noah.” She whispers with a little smirk.

“Did I miss anything? Should we go back to class?”

“Hell, no. You did great and this deserves a celebration. Wanna grab a bite? I can drop you off at your house after.”

Say yes, say yes, say yes...

“A celebration for an interview?” she releases a raspy giggle.

Oh my God, she fucking giggled at me. My chest tightens.

“I’m wondering what happens when we publish the piece if I get this kind of response from the prep.” She jokes.

“Can’t wait for you to find out Little Cat.” I tease. She blushes.

Are you feeling me like I am you?

I can’t stop my hand from stroking one red cheek with my knuckles. She’s soft and warm and I want more. She starts breathing faster.

You feel it.

I step closer and lean in, slowly searching her eyes. She looks up at me, molten gold scorching my reserve as I close the distance between our lips and take hers in mine.

The quiet noises of crickets and a soft breeze in the courtyard fade into the distance as I become consumed with our kiss.

It’s everything.

She’s tentative at first, slowly relaxing as I unroll my fingers against her warm cheek while wrapping her up from her hip to her lower back, pushing her against me.

I’m enveloped in her clean, cotton scent that gives off a soft undertone of fresh roses.

My cock stiffens behind my zipper when I feel her pillowy breasts press against my ribs and I try to keep my hips back as

far as I can so I don't scare her, even though I can't bear to separate from her.

Finally.

She opens her mouth a little with a shudder when I accidentally brush my chub against her, and I take the opportunity to sweep my tongue against hers. She tastes like mint and sugar and sin and I want to consume every drop of her as I lay my soul bare for this girl. Time seems to slow as I continue gently exploring her mouth.

It's fucking perfect.

And I don't want to ruin it, so with as much restraint as I can gather, my heart pounding, I slow the kiss to a satisfying close and lean my forehead against hers as we exchange fast breaths and gather ourselves.

Her eyes are still closed as I step back and take her hand in mine smiling at her when she opens them.

“Come on, let's go celebrate.”

Chapter 11

Cat

I try to slow my pounding heart with a deep breath as soon as he closes the passenger door of his car and I'm sure that he can't hear me freaking the fuck out.

He rounds the front of his car to get in and starts up the car with a quick glance and a smile in my direction.

My first kiss.

He just kissed me. I was just kissed by Noah Caldwell. And I liked it. Who am I kidding, it was fucking amazing.

I expected some weird separation, or fumbling, or excuses afterwards like in all the movies but there was none. Noah just continued on like nothing changed when I can feel in my gut that *everything* has.

It's like he expected it, was waiting for it, and he looks completely at ease while I felt like the earth was shaking beneath me.

He turns the dial of the radio to some old school country station and I smile when Patsy Cline fills the car. Crazy.

You ain't lying, sister. I'm feeling a little crazy myself.

"Is this ok?" he asks shyly

"I love Patsy Cline." I reply

"Classic."

"Classic." He agrees with a nod, leaning back in his seat and backing out of the parking spot.

"So where are we going for this unplanned celebration?" I ask trying to gain my bearings back.

"Well, I'm not really in the mood to run into everyone after school at the burger joint they normally hang at, so why don't we drive into downtown and hit up that old diner down there? I could go for a milkshake."

“Okay, yeah I’ve been there. They have awesome fries.” I agree.

Austin traffic is terrible this time of day so it takes longer than usual as we make our way over but Noah seems content to fill the time chatting it up.

“So it seems like you have gotten pretty tight with Sabrina.”

“Yea, she’s really cool. I think it’s pretty shitty the way people are to her just because she’s smart.”

“Unfortunately, that’s not a valued trait for most of the girls in this school.” He quirks a knowing brow my way.

“No shit, it’s like if you aren’t wearing designer gear and look like a Bratz doll there is no way to fit in here. It’s wild.”

“Maybe that’s why ya’ll clicked so fast. Sabrina has never tried to fit in either, even after living here her whole life.”

Huh, I never thought of it that way but he’s got a point.

“Good for her. Even more reason to respect the hell out of her.” I say with conviction.

“So what about your friends? I assume they come easy being on the football team.”

“You would think.” He says with a snort.

What’s that about?

“Real talk?” He asks glancing my way.

“Always.” I agree simply.

“Why bother talking if all that is coming out is watered down bullshit?” He smiles softly and nods.

“Honestly, I only consider Luca and Terrance as friends. Everyone else just wants to be around me to up their status or get something from me. It’s exhausting pretending all the time.”

I appreciate his honesty so I don’t chastise his actions.

“So why do you do it?”

“It just seemed easier not to rock the boat I guess. I didn’t want to cause a shift in morale on the team for one. And girl-wise, everyone just assumes I’m hooking up all the time and I don’t correct them because it’s not anyone’s business but mine.”

“So you just maintain this façade? So everyone else is happy while you have to fake it?”

Don’t you see how fucked up that is?

“I guess. But I’m sick of it. I’m almost an adult for God sakes and I can only be myself around two freaking people. Well, three now.” He corrects with smile in my direction.

“So what do you really like to do? Who are you really, Noah?”

He thinks for a second as if he isn’t quite sure before answering.

“I do really enjoy football. I want to play in college but just for the scholarship. I’m sure my dad would love for me to go pro, but I want to write. I really love working on the newspaper. I guess I’m kind of a closet nerd.”

“Hey, there is nothing wrong with closet nerds.” I reply teasingly.

“Yea, you would know, huh?”

He laughs and the warm sound reverberates through the car. It’s one of those contagious laughs and I can’t help but join him.

“So, you really hit it off with Lupe. I think we have a lot to go off of already.” He comments.

“Yea, she was great right? I hope the piece can gain some traction.” I say truthfully.

“You seem really invested in the article. I thought it might be a little boring for your first assignment, but you seem to be enjoying it.” He observes.

“Personal interest, I guess.” I say with a shrug.

“You have a personal interest in underpaid cafeteria staff?” he questions teasingly and I feel a little defensive.

“I do, actually. My grandmother worked in a cafeteria her whole life and never made enough to make ends meet.” I slip out.

Why did I say that? Now he will have questions. I’ll keep it short. I’ve had his tongue in my mouth after all, and he opened up to me first, so it’s the least I can do.

“Really? Did you live with her?” he asks gently.

“For a little bit, yea. But she helped raise me.” I explain.

“I’m sorry.” He says softly. I look at him with surprise.

“You obviously loved her, and you’re in a foster home, so I’m assuming she’s gone?”

“Yea. She’s gone.” It pains me to say the words out loud.

He reaches over and places his hand over mine with a squeeze. He’s so sweet. I find myself opening up without thinking about it.

“I went to live with her when I turned nine but she was already in her sixties by then. She had my dad later in life. She was so strong all the time, but in the end, it was breast cancer that got her.” Noah pulls into a parking spot at the diner and rubs my hand with his.

“Well, if you got any traits from her, I’m sure she was fucking incredible.” He says to lighten the mood. I chuckle.

“Yeah, she was pretty fucking incredible.” I agree.

“You know what you need?” he asks with a twinkle in his minty-green eyes.

“What?”

“Some amazing fries.” He responds quickly.

“And a kiss.” He adds before swooping down to capture my mouth in a firm, chaste kiss. For comfort, nothing more.

“Come on, let’s get to celebrating. There’s a chocolate shake with my name on it.” He says before climbing out of the car

and running around to open my door for me with a hand out.

I take it and we walk inside side by side.



We get seated in a side booth quickly, since it's not dinnertime yet, and order our food. Two shakes, chocolate and strawberry, and a large basket of fries to share with some gravy on the side for me.

This feels like a date. Is this a date?

Something has changed in the last hour and I'm not the type to beat around the bush. So, I ask him straight up.

"Noah? Is this a date?"

"Most definitely a date Little Cat." He responds without hesitation.

"The first of many if you're okay with that?" he asks more gently.

"I'm okay with that." I concede with butterflies flipping around my insides.

He smiles big, flashing his perfect white teeth and a little dimple forms on his left cheek. *Oh fuck, I'm screwed.*

I clear my throat to cover the way he affected me.

"So, tell me about Luca and Terrance. What are they like?" I ask to deflect.

"Really cool. Luca is my best friend. Super loyal, chill, no drama. The strong silent type as you girls would say."

I snort at that.

"Terrance is the life of the party. He's always up for a good time and makes things fun, but will still take your secrets to the grave."

I nod while sipping my shake.

"So do they fake it too?" I wonder aloud.

“Luca, definitely not. He’s not from here, so I guess he’s not as invested. People know he’s not a chatty guy and mostly just leave him alone, which he seems to prefer.”

“Hmm. Interesting. I guess I can see that. What about Terrance?”

“Terrance, I guess a little bit, but not in the way you think. He really is a happy-go-lucky guy but he doesn’t come from a lot of money like everyone else. You just wouldn’t know it with the way he fits in so easily.”

Noah seems to have some real inside information and the journalist in me decides to press him a little more.

“So what’s up with the cheerleader chicks? Why are they all such bitches?”

“I think it’s just Becca that’s an actual bitch. I have no idea why, I try not to speak to her if possible so I know nothing about her besides her Dad being some kind of politician. The other girls are just following her lead I guess.”

“Fake it ‘til you make it.” I conclude.

Noah nods, grabbing a fry from the basket. I’m kind of shocked at how open he is. He’s not at all what I expected from the popular guy.

“So I have a game coming up in a couple of weeks. You should come. I’d love to see you there.” He says tentatively.

“I know absolutely nothing about football. I’m sure I would be lost in the crowd anyway.”

“I can always spot you in a crowd, Cat.” He winks at me mischievously.

“Just think about it, okay?”

“Okay. I’ll think about it.” I concede.

He really seems to want me to go and I don’t want to disappoint him right away.

“So where do you want to play football in college?” I ask to change the subject.

“Oh man, I would love to go to UT. I grew up watching them and it would be amazing to be on that field. Plus, the journalism program is amazing. How about you? Where do you want to go?”

“Honestly, I will go wherever I can get a scholarship to. I’m working my ass off this year to try to secure something.”

“I’m sure you will get something great, Cat. You deserve it.”

I shrug with a small smile at his reassurance and it’s then, when we are talking happily about our future, that my terrible past comes walking through the door.

Chapter 12

Noah

Things are falling into place nicely if I do say so myself. I'm feeling on top of the world after a couple of amazing kisses and finally getting her to open up to me.

I'm smiling and chatting about college possibilities when I see her whole body lock up and her eyes bulge out before looking down until her face is practically hitting the table.

What the hell?

I turn around to see a big, rough looking dude walk through the door with a local high school football logo on his tee. Jackson High is a public school in one of the lower income areas of the city.

He was obviously a football player, defense probably, I can tell by his thick build, though he looks a little too old to still be a senior. I guess he's one of those sad sacks that wears his old high school shirts to relive his glory days.

I look back to Cat and see she is still trying to disappear into the linoleum tabletop.

Who is this guy? An ex-boyfriend?

Jealousy rears in my gut.

"Cat, are you ok?" I ask her.

"Um, I think I had too much of that shake or something. Maybe we should go, Amelia should be home soon anyways." She rambles glancing up with a quick appeasing smile at me before her eyes go wide again and her smile melts away.

"Kitty Cat." The dude says strolling up to our table.

What. The. Fuck.

"It's been a while. you're looking good as always." He says without a glance my way.

His eyes are locked on the cleavage slipping out of her slouchy tee and they blaze while perusing the rest of her slowly.

She shrinks back in her booth seeming to want some distance from him.

Nah, no fucking way, asshole.

He's not gonna stand there and make my girl uncomfortable while I'm sitting right here.

"Not long enough, Enrique. We were just leaving." She says gathering her bag and grabbing her phone off the table.

He turns, when he finally realizes she is with someone, and assesses me.

"You got some new friends, huh Kitty? Richy-rich ones by the looks of it." He says with a snarl taking in my clothes and glancing at my expensive watch, but still only speaking to her.

"You got a problem, man?" I ask, looking into his cold black eyes, tired of this shit show.

"Nah, *dude*." He says in a mocking tone.

"Just wanted to catch up with Kitty Cat over here, we go waaaay back." He answers smugly.

What the fuck does that mean?

"Well, like *Cat* was saying, we were just leaving," I say throwing a couple twenties on the table.

It's double the tab, I'm sure, but I do it to fuck with him since the prick obviously has a chip on his shoulder.

"Back the fuck up, so she can get out." I say standing to my full height.

He looks up from a few inches below me and backs up a little with an amused chuckle.

"Oh yeah, sorry about that Kitty Cat, it was good seeing you." He says looking back to her.

"Movie nights aren't the same without you." He whispers the last part with a sickening smile at her.

Her head snaps up at him and her golden eyes burn into a dark reddish caramel slits while she starts to stand and exit the booth with her spine locked tight.

“Get the *fuck* out of my way, Enrique.” She growls, angrier than I’ve ever seen her.

I’m pissed now too, and fully ready to step in if he doesn’t leave.

“Maybe I’ll see you around.” He answers in a menacing tone while he backs up fully to let her out.

I’m holding back the urge to push him across the fucking diner at this point.

“I seriously doubt it.” I tell him glancing pointedly to his t-shirt with a sneer to insinuate she doesn’t belong in that shitty world anymore as I wrap my arm around Cat’s shoulder and walk us out to my car.

It was kind of an asshole thing to say. I try not to act like a rich prick at all costs, but he doesn’t deserve to breathe her air as far as I’m concerned. He upset her, so he’s a dick in my book and I’ll have to forgive myself for that little dig at his financial status.

I open the door for her as she gets in silently, visibly shaking.

I rush over to my side to get us the fuck out of here. I climb in and start driving back quickly, breathing in her light rose scent to calm my temper.

“I’m really sorry about that.” She whispers, is she embarrassed? Or upset? She seems almost sad.

I fucking hate that guy.

I look over to grab her hand and notice her golden eyes are dull and haunted, shimmering with unshed tears and my chest feels like it cracks open wide.

Oh, fuck no, if he makes you cry right now, I will turn around and beat the shit out of that fucker.

I pull into the next parking lot in front of an office building and turn off the car. I unbuckle my seat belt, and then hers, and pull her to me, wishing this fucking console wasn't in the way. I hold her tight, hoping I can squeeze out whatever poison that guy filled her with.

I don't say anything. She will tell me if she wants, but I'll be here for her no matter what.

Chapter 13

Cat

It feels so good in his arms. Noah squeezes me gentle and strong all at the same time like he's trying to fill the cracks in my heart.

What a fucking roller coaster of a day and it's not even over yet.

I'm not a hugger, but this feels nice. Noah's fresh woodsy scent surrounds me. I try to gather myself with deep breaths of him and squeeze my eyes shut to keep my tears at bay.

I will not cry for that asshole. Never have, and never will. I won't give him the satisfaction of owning one tear of mine. I've moved on and he's not ruining this for me.

Noah was amazing backing me up at the diner, he deserves and explanation, and honestly, I'm tired of holding on to this alone.

"He was my foster-brother." I begin and Noah loosens his hold to lean back with his hands at my hips. He searches my eyes for more of an explanation.

"I got placed in his parent's house freshman year. It was a crap part of town and the house was barely serviceable but they were ok. Hard workers, just hoping to get some extra cash from the state with the exchange of a bed and a couple meals a day. Enrique was a football player, one of the best on his team from what everybody said about him. Everyone acted as if he could walk on water."

Noah rubs my hips with his thumbs as I take a breath and continue.

"He was a Junior and took me under his wing, kept the boys at bay, said I was like the little sister he never had. Called me his Kitty Cat." My voice wavers and I take a break.

"Did he hurt you, Cat?" Noah asks softly, tension in his arms, as he waits for a response.

“I didn’t see it coming.”

He’s gripping me tighter, pulling at my sides now.

“We would have a movie night every once in a while. When his parents worked night shifts, sometimes it would line up and they would both be gone and he said we could keep each other company. We were sitting there one night and I felt his hand start to creep up my leg. I pulled away a little but hesitated because I was confused at why he was doing that. He was always so protective of me, until that night, I realized it was more like possessive.”

Noah pulls away and puts his hands to the ignition and I continue.

“His little name for me suddenly made more sense and started to make me feel sick when he tried to coax me, saying he knew I was feeling him to. He placed my hand on him and I almost threw up.”

My stomach sours at the memory of his erection in my hand as his whispered *Come on, Kitty* in my ear.

“I jumped up, pissed, and started yelling at him. He got mad and pushed me up to the wall and pressed against me. He was so strong, I couldn’t move...”

Noah is breathing hard and looking out the front window. Flashes of rough hands up my shirt and down my pajama shorts race through my vision.

“He touched me and I lost it. As soon as I was able to push him far enough away, I kicked him in the nuts as hard as I could and when he went down, I started wailing on him. Grabbed an old metal lamp nearby and beat the shit out of him until he stopped moving. I ran out the door barefoot and caught the bus to a shelter. The bus driver knew me, and took pity when he saw me out that night with no shoes. He paid for my fare. When I got to the shelter, they called my caseworker and I was moved back to a group home. He told everyone I just lost it, he didn’t know why I freaked out and attacked him. There was no evidence to support my claim that he had sexually assaulted me since it was just some touches. Besides,

no one wanted to accuse the neighborhood hero. His parents agreed not to press charges on me so that was that.” I finish with a stuttered sigh.

Noah faces back to me and guides me back into his arms as he kisses the top of my head.

“I want to kill him.” He confesses quietly against my hair.

“He’s not worth the trouble.” I argue with a snort.

“I moved on. I was lucky. So many other girls in my position aren’t.”

“It’s not right, Cat.” He fumes.

“It’s life. It wasn’t the first time or the last that a foster tried to make a move on me. Just the one time I wasn’t expecting it. I guess that was the worst thing about it.” I conclude.

My phone dings in my pocket interrupting us.

Amelia: Hey Cat, are you ok? We got home a while ago and you’re not here....

I respond back quickly

Me: I’m fine. Sorry, went out for a quick bite with a friend and lost track of time.

Amelia: It’s fine Love, take your time. Just wanted to make sure you’re OK.

Tears well in my eyes. *She called me Love. I’m okay. I’ll be okay.*

Me: Be home soon.

I don’t realize I said home until it’s already been sent.

“I better get back, that’s Amelia.” I tell Noah, hoping to put an end to the tense atmosphere in the car.

“Yeah, ok.” He says biting on his cheek.

“Hey, you know I would never do that to you, right?”

I sigh, looking into his sad eyes.

“I know, Noah. I’ll admit, that’s why I was a little hesitant about you at first, but it feels like you’re different. Real.

Right?”

“Yeah, I’m real, Cat. I can promise you that.” He replies with a smile, remembering our exchange the first day we met. “Let’s get you home.” He says buckling back up, turning the key in the ignition, and getting back on the road.

We ride back in silence, listening to the soft sounds of old country hits filling the car, hand in hand.

Chapter 14

Noah

She gives me a soft kiss before getting out of the car. I caress the back of her neck softly to try to prolong it, but I know I need to let her go. She's been through a lot today.

I wait as she gets out of the car silently and walks up to the front door before turning back to me with a little wave.

I wave back and as soon as she walks through the door, I ball up my hand and slam my fist on the dash.

I want to kill that motherfucker.

It took everything in me to not turn the car back on and race back to that diner to fuck him up while I listened to Cat's heart breaking. But she needed me. I had to stay calm and get her home safely.

Now I fume, knowing that by the time I could make it back there, he would already be gone.

I drive home with warring thoughts swirling my brain. I hate that our stories were so similar. A feeling of guilt is starting to pool in my belly.

Football player, town hero, possessive as soon as I saw her, my plan to slowly get her to trust me.

But I'm not like him. Right?

Cat knew my intentions. Fuck, the whole school did. I wasn't trying to trick her and I would *never* put my hands on a woman if it wasn't wanted.

Fuck no, I'm nothing like that pervert.

I pull into the gravel drive in front of our predictably pretentious home, staring at the huge columns lining our covered porch and kill the engine.

As I walk through the door my dad walks out of his downstairs study with an annoyed look on his face.

“Where have you been? I had some business associates I wanted you to meet here earlier.”

“I went out with a friend after school.” I reply.

Literally the only time he gives a damn about where I am is when he wants something from me.

“What friend? This was a good networking opportunity for you.” He insists, as if I give a damn about anything related to his business of turning this once beautiful city into a concrete jungle.

“My friend, Cat.” I say without explanation.

“Cat? Isn’t that the little Hispanic girl the Bennetts took in? I don’t know what they were thinking with that damned idea. Why are you hanging out with her?”

The vein in his temple is starting to swell.

“Because she’s nice and I wanted to. I like her.” I try to reason with him.

“I can *see* why you like her son, just don’t get attached. She doesn’t belong in this world. I’m sure she’s just a temporary fix for the Bennetts anyway.” He responds in a patronizing tone. I narrow my eyes at him.

Not everyone sees family and kids as some kind of a play like you do.

“Don’t Dad. You don’t know anything about her.” I warn.

“I’m just saying, I was your age once. It’s normal to be tempted by girls like that, but just keep your head on straight.”

That’s the second person to say that to me today and the first was Devin. With the caliber of people doling out that advice, I’m fairly certain that keeping my head on straight is code for “become an asshole.”

“Whatever Dad, I’ve got to get some studying done.” I say, completely done with this conversation, and turn toward the staircase leading to my rooms.

Yes, rooms, I have four. My bedroom with an attached bathroom, a media room with a small kitchenette, a gym, and

an office. Like a high school kid needs a fucking office.

My parents thought it best to convert the left wing of the house to my “suite” as they like to call it. Sounds better to their friends than saying the area of the house they want me to stay out of the way in. This was especially true when I was younger. All the entertaining areas are to the right of the house so by setting me up over here, they could ensure I wouldn’t be bothering their guests.

Unfortunately, as I’ve gotten older and my achievements more impressive, Dad has been wanting me to mingle with them more. I couldn’t be any less enthusiastic about it.

I head to my bedroom and undress, and then walk into my bathroom to take a shower.

As I stand under the warm spray, my feelings solidify. I don’t give a shit what anyone says, since the day I saw her, I knew Cat would be mine. I have never felt like this before but think I might love this girl, if not yet, I definitely could.

She’s everything I never knew I wanted but as soon as I saw her, needed to have.

Her past doesn’t scare me, if anything it makes me want to protect her, take care of her, and show her what happiness could feel like. She deserves to be happy.

I decide that that’s what separates me from all the assholes she has been protecting herself from.

I care about her, I would never hurt her, and I’ll be what she deserves.

Chapter 15

Cat

I walk through the front door about 7pm and place my house key on the entry table.

Everything seems different. Instead of the usual disconnect I associate with this house, it seems more welcoming, homey. I also feel lighter after talking to Noah.

I hear footsteps approaching and halt my ascent up the stairs and turn around.

“Cat, hey, how was your day?” Amelia asks searching with her big blue eyes. They widen a bit at taking in my appearance.

“Are you ok? What happened?”

I wasn’t crying but I know my eyes must be red from holding everything in.

“Hey Amelia. It was a rough day, but I’m ok. Thanks for waiting up for me.” I reply.

“Do you want to talk about it? I left you a plate in the microwave, we can sit and talk if you’re hungry.” she questions gently, eyes shimmering with hope.

As a matter of fact, now that I know where Noah and I stand, I have a strong desire to figure out this weird foster arrangement.

“I’m not hungry.”

Her expression deflates.

“But if you have time, I’d like to talk.” I concede.

“Sure honey, let’s head out back.” She says eyes brightening and waving toward the back of the house.

I walk behind her as she leads me out the glass sliding doors onto a huge wood deck overlooking the lake.

I try to gather my thoughts, unsure what to say but knowing I need some answers.

There are a pair of Adirondack chairs facing the view and she takes one as she motions for me to sit beside her. Her eyes swivel toward me searching and uncertain.

At my silence, she starts.

“So, what happened today? Is everything alright?”

“I didn’t get into any trouble.” I start to ease her worries.

“Oh no, honey, I didn’t -” I cut her off and continue.

“I went out with Noah after school. We went to that diner downtown and I ran into an old acquaintance.” I answer. Her shoulders tighten.

“What acquaintance? You weren’t hurt, were you?” she starts firing off questions in a more serious tone.

“An old foster brother. I wasn’t happy to see him, but I wasn’t hurt. Noah was there...” I trail off.

“Was it Enrique?” she asks gently. I rear back with surprise.

“How do you know about Enrique?” I ask instantly on edge. She heaves a long sigh before answering.

“When Matthew and I decided to foster, we went through a lot of files. We thought we would foster a child closer to Posey’s age at first, but when your case worker approached us we were taken by your story.” She admits.

“My story? What do you mean?” I ask.

What do they know about me? And why did they pick me?

“Yes, we saw when you were placed in the custody of the state, and why, how many homes you had been placed in, the reasons you were moved. We also saw the police report documenting the so-called attack on this Enrique boy and read between the lines. I saw your statement and after everything you had been through, I was sickened when I saw that nothing came of it.”

She knows. They know. Everything.

And they still wanted me here with their own daughter whom they obviously love. I'm dumbfounded. The silence stretches as I absorb this new information.

"We also read through your school records and saw how bright you are. We hoped that by bringing you here, you could get a fresh start. We just want to help, Love. I promise."

My eyes start to water.

Is this true?

She seems so genuine, like she was carrying a weight that has been lifted by telling me this information.

"No one has ever called me that." I admit.

Her eyes soften and start to water as well.

"I'm sorry to hear that. Didn't you live with your family before the state took over?"

She seems confused that not all families speak as they do, with love and caring words.

"I lived with my parents and then my grandma. But they didn't speak like that." I answer.

She tilts her head still confused.

"My mom died in a car crash when I was Posey's age. My father was never a loving person, always distant from everyone but my mom, I guess. He died when I was nine. After that, my Momo took me in. She watched me for the most part anyway before my dad died. She would call me Mija. She was amazing, but showed love by working hard and providing for me. She gave the best advice and life lessons and I was happy until I found out she was sick shortly after I went to live with her." I explain. "She died a year later."

Amelia wipes a tear from her face.

"I read the quick facts, but hearing it like that, makes me so glad to have you here with us, Cat." She says sadly.

"We know you have been through a lot. We just want to help lighten your load. I know you will be 18 soon, but you

will always be welcome in this family. If you want to be.” She adds, wiping another tear.

“Why would you want that?” I ask trying to make sense of the situation.

“Matthew and I have tried to have more children. After the hard birth I had with Posey,” she pauses, sniffing, “it’s just not in the cards for us again. But we have love to give, Cat. I hope you will accept it.” She pleads.

I’m starting to understand now. My chest tightens at her grief.

“Thank you for taking a chance on me. I’ll try to do the same.” I tell her.

“That’s all we can hope for, Cat, but we won’t ask you for it. Our love comes with no conditions.” She assures me.

“And we just want you to be safe and happy. If you see this Enrique boy again, you let us know. You don’t have to accept when someone tries to hurt you anymore. You have us now, and we won’t stand for it.” The new voice surprises me and I turn around, blushing when I realize Matthew has been listening behind us. He speaks with a strength I believe in.

Can I count on these people? This family? Could I even dare to dream to be a part of it?

I stand and walk towards her as she stands and opens her arms. I hug her softly as she rubs my back and the breeze from the lake swirls around us.

So many hugs today. Half as many as I’ve probably had in my entire lifetime. My family only gave hugs in proper situations – like funerals. Even then, it was just an awkward pat. Not to celebrate, or say hello or goodbye, or even to console. It feels weird, but nice.

“Thank you for talking to me, Cat. I’m always here if you need me. We’ll leave you to your thoughts” Amelia says with a smile as she releases me.

She walks to Matthew’s side and he slides his arm around her shoulder to walk her inside the door to the house. As it

slides closed, I feel as if another has opened.

I look out to the lake and pick up a slight scent of roses in the air.

Momo always told me that the scent of roses meant the Virgin Mary was nearby protecting me but it was only after she died that I ever sensed it. Since then, I have always believed it was her and use it as an opportunity to speak to her.

Am I safe, Momo? Are you protecting me by guiding me here? Please stay with me, I need you now more than ever.

I stand at the railing, looking at the lake and breathing her scent to calm the storm in my mind made from this tumultuous day until the roses fade. Afterwards, my heart feels lifted as the hope I never allowed myself before takes hold.

Thank you, Momo, I think as I open the door to my new home and head inside.

Chapter 16

Noah

I walk into the lunchroom the next day on a mission. I need to see my girl. I want everyone to know that she's mine. I can't wait for last period and give her space anymore. I think we are past that, and I need to confirm it.

I grab the quickest thing I can find, a sandwich and chips, and look around disappointed to see she isn't here yet.

I walk over to the table I usually sit at with the guys, Luca the first one there already, as I wait.

"Hey man, what's got u all hyped up?" Luca asks as I sit down and open my chips.

"Nothing, what do u mean?" I ask scanning the lunchroom.

"You seemed a little keyed up at practice this morning. I was just checking in, man." He says with a shrug.

Thoughts of that asshole touching my girl had me a needing a way to get out some aggression this morning.

"Just had some shit go down with Cat yesterday, and now my dad is giving me the third degree about her. It's getting on my nerves." I explain.

"I just want to get shit settled before the opener so it won't affect my game."

"What won't affect the game?" Devin asks as he and Terrance walk up behind me. I roll my eyes.

I do not need his shit too.

"Just a bunch of bullshit." I answer quickly not getting into it.

"Trouble on the home front already?" he teases.

"Nah man, just shit with my dad." I counter.

"He's always a grade A asshole, what's changed?" Terrance comments.

“Fucking nothing, that’s the problem.” I respond

“Fuck ‘em.” Luca snaps with a bite to his pizza.

“Yea, fuck ‘em.” Terrance agrees with a slap on my back.

I continue to scan the lunchroom, *where is she?*

“Hey Noah!” an annoying high-pitched voice I don’t want to hear pierces my ears.

Becca walks around the table to sit on the other side of me. Her strong, citrusy-floral perfume fills my nostrils and an instant headache begins between my eyes. *Ugh, go away.*

“Hey Becca” I answer as Devin puts on a cocky smile and Terrance and Luca suddenly seem ravenous as they turn away and tear into their lunches.

“You’re coming to the party after the first game, right? I was hoping to see you there.”

She bats her dull grey eyes and runs her fingers through her overly highlighted hair. It reminds me of hay and I’m allergic to hay. I instantly feel the need to lean away from her.

“Uh, I’m not sure, I try not to make plans before the season starts. I need to focus on that first.” I answer noncommittally.

It’s a total lie, I always go to the after party for our first game and this year I was still thinking of going, if Cat wanted to. If not, I’m not really interested.

“Well, I’m sure you will do great at the game. I’m totally up for celebrating with you after.” She says as she rubs my bicep suggestively.

I only celebrate with Cat.

I look around again trying to show my disinterest at her invitation. I see Cat sitting with Sabrina, eyes locked on Becca’s hand on my arm, but showing no emotion.

Fuck this.

I swipe Becca’s hand off me and look back at her.

“No thanks Becca, but I’m sure Devin is going. Ya’ll should go together.” I offer, waving a hand at him as an open

invitation.

I grab my tray and stand as Devin puffs up to try to take over the scraps.

I walk over to Cat and Sabrina's table and sit next to my girl breathing a sigh of relief as I take in her clean, soft scent before looking up at the fire in her eyes. She's jealous, and it lights me up inside.

"Hey Babe, what took you so long?" I ask as I kiss her cheek right in the middle of the lunchroom.

Sabrina's eyes look like they are about to pop out of her head and it seems like every head is turned in our direction all of a sudden.

Like Luca said, fuck 'em.

Cat looks shocked as she blushes and looks back to her tray with a burger and fries. Good choice. I should have gotten that. I grab a fry to remind her that we share, and she swats at my hand shaking her head with a smirk.

"Got called to the counselor at the end of last period and got held up." She responds.

"Hey Sabrina." I say, not wanting to be rude to Cat's friend.

"How have you been?" I ask as I bite into my sandwich. It's bland as hell.

Definitely should have gotten the burger.

"Um hi, Noah. I've been ok." She responds in a questioning tone. She seems uncomfortable with me sitting here.

"What are you doing over here, Noah? Looks like your fans miss you." Cat says in a nonchalant tone as she looks over to a flabbergasted Becca still sitting shocked at the table with the guys.

"Well, I missed you, and that's all that I care about." I answer. I won't beat around the bush anymore. I want her to be sure of my intentions. I grab her hand and kiss the back of it before setting it back down with a pat and getting back to my food.

“I hope it’s okay if I sit here? I didn’t want to wait til last period to see you.” I ask her, looking to Sabrina for acceptance as well.

She looks at Sabrina, questioning as they have a silent conversation.

“Sure Noah, it’s fine with me.” Sabrina answers with wide blue eyes.

I’ve haven’t talked to her too much, but she’s cute in a shy, girl-next-door kind of way. Not like Cat, not my type, not that I even knew what that was before Cat, but cute.

“Thanks Sabrina.” I say looking to Cat for her response.

She stares back for a second before picking up a fry and handing it to me.

“Alright, but no douchebags, Noah. I want to eat in peace.”

“You got it, Little Cat” I say with a wink.

Everyone is still staring at us while trying to pretend they aren’t. Cat blushes a little but luckily Sabrina has her back to everyone and seems more at ease.

We settle back into our meals and eat while chit chatting about school and teachers. I really want Cat to go to my game but she seems like the type to need some persuasion so I enlist Sabrina in my mission.

“So, Sabrina, do you go to the games usually?” I ask.

“Um no, not usually, but I will have to go to the season opener.” She says quietly, blushing a bit.

“Oh yeah? For what?” I ask.

“I’m singing the national anthem.” She says quickly before popping a chip in her mouth.

“Really?!” Cat asks, shocked.

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“It’s not a big deal, I was just gonna go do that real quick and head back home after.” She says turning an alarming shade of pink.

“You should stay!” I suggest quickly.

“Keep Cat company at the game. There’s a party afterwards. If ya’ll wanna go, I can take you.” I offer with a shrug.

Cat looks to me, surprised. I smile back to ease her worried face.

“Don’t worry, I’ll protect ya’ll from the douchebags.” I say with a wink.

“Um, maybe.” Sabrina says with a questioning look to Cat who stays silent.

The bell rings signaling the end of lunch and we stand to head out. I dump my tray and then take the girl’s trays from their hands one by one and do the same for them and then turn to slide my arm over Cat’s shoulder as we walk out together. We head out to the courtyard as everyone milling about side-eyes us.

“Well, ya’ll think about it.” I remind them.

I tighten my arm around Cat’s shoulder and move her to face me. I slide my hand to her cheek and raise her face to me as I come down to press my lips softly to hers. I move my hand into the nape of her hair and thread my fingers in her soft strands as I deepen the kiss and grab her waist with my other hand. I pull back with a quick smile to a stunned Sabrina and look back to my girl.

“See you later, Babe.”

“Okay, later.” Cat says breathless stumbling backwards and turning to walk off with her friend.

I smirk at her perfect ass as she walks in the opposite direction I need to go when I feel a big slap to my back.

Terrance, who I share next period with, smiles wide with his perfect white teeth and starts walking down the hall with me.

“So, you sealed the fucking deal, huh?” he asks looking genuinely happy for me. I can’t help but smile back.

“Yeah, I hope so.” I respond simply as we continue to our next class.

Chapter 17

Cat

What. Just. Happened?

I wonder as I walk next to Sabrina in a daze.

We don't have long to get to class so she scurries off with a promised "I'll text you!"

I sit in my seat and notice the whispers and stares surrounding me. One of Becca's little minion's eyes me whispering to a girl next to her. I'm not sure what her name is, I've taken to calling them Becca two through four in my head. She's Becca Two. Noah's right, she doesn't seem as terrible without Becca by her side. Typical follower, not really a bad person unless it boosts her popularity, I assume.

"So, you and Noah are a thing now?" she inquires skeptically. I just shrug.

I'm not really sure, I should ask him. I have his number after all, but I've never used it. Just then, I feel my phone vibrate in my pocket with a text and my heart starts pounding in my chest.

Not him.

Sabrina: OMG what was that!? Are you guys dating now?

Me: I'm honestly not sure. I was just as surprised as you.

Sabrina: I told you he liked you! What do you mean you don't know? He seemed pretty sure!

Me: I mean, he took me out yesterday and kind of asked me if I wanted to go on more dates with him but I didn't think he meant like **DATING** dates....

Sabrina: Uh, looks like it was implied.

Huh. Was it?

I wasn't going to get into anything serious this year but I have to admit I like this guy.

I need to confirm. Butterflies fill my belly at the thought.

Me: Should I ask him? I'm so confused...

Sabrina: Yes!! I need to know! People are freaking staring at me and asking me what is going on. No one ever speaks to me and now they won't leave me alone!

Me: Sorry girl. I'll figure it out and let u know.

I look at my phone while Mrs. Barry, my Calculus teacher, starts her lesson. When she turns to the board to write an equation, I steel my spine and shoot a text.

Me: So is everyone staring at you too?

Noah: LOL no, but they won't shut up about lunch.

Me: Yeah, I think they are all confused. I guess I am too to be honest.

Noah: Why? It's not like everyone didn't already know I liked you.

My stomach flip flops. I mean I figured he did with all the spontaneous kissing and the new "Babe" thing he surprised me with today, but I'm shocked to see him say he likes me like it's obvious.

Me: Did they? For real, what's happening Noah?

Noah: Whatever you want to happen Little Cat. I like you. I want everyone to know that you're mine. What do you want?

Damn, put me on the spot why don't you. This is what I get for trying to be up front with him. *I want everyone to know that you're mine.* That sounds exclusive. I keep re-reading the text and decide I like the sound of that. A lot. I swallow the butterflies in my throat and respond.

Me: That sounds serious.

Noah: I'd like it to be. What do you say Cat? You wanna go steady with me? ;)

I laugh a little and the teacher turns around to scan the class before turning back to the board.

Me: Is this where I check a box? LOL

Noah: (fingers crossed emoji)

Me: (checkmark emoji)

Noah: (winky heart kiss emoji)

OMG, just like that, I have a boyfriend. A freaking sweet, super-hot boyfriend.

Not bad for my first one, I muse with a smile I try to cover with my hand so my classmates don't notice. I quickly text Sabrina.

Me: I guess he's serious.

Sabrina: !!!!!!!

She took the thought right out of my head.

Holy shit.



I walk into Journalism and head to the desk next to his smiling face. I try to hide my smirk and red-hot face by looking down as I place my bag on the floor and start getting out the notes on our interview.

“Hey beautiful, you ready to start prepping for the article?”

“Yep.” I squeak out quietly still not making eye contact.

He brings his face down in front of me to force me to look at him.

“You okay?” he asks hesitantly.

I breathe out a heavy sigh.

“Yeah, it's just weird. Everyone has been staring and trying to talk to me all of a sudden. It's so stupid. I've never had a boyfriend, and you're like, another level” I say waving my hands in his general direction.

“So this is kind of freaking me out.” I continue honestly

His green eyes twinkle with a lighter golden sparkle almost making them look luminescent as he grins so big his dimple pops out. My heart stutters.

Ugh, get it together girl.

Ms. G walks in looking exasperated, as usual, with a giant travel mug in her hand.

“Hold that thought – we need to come back to that.” He says with a finger up as Ms. G greets us and goes through the class checking on our progress. She gets to us and Noah answers for us.

“We are ready to start writing out the article, Ms. G. Cat got some great info in the interview and we have our angle.”

“Great guys! Can’t wait to read the first draft.” She responds before moving on to finish up her check ins.

“Okay, everyone get to work! We are at the halfway point so everyone needs to be on their best game to knock this out!” everyone disperses to their partners speaking amongst themselves.

“So... First boyfriend you said?” he says with a smirk as he lifts his eyebrows at me.

“You don’t have to be so smug about it.” I laugh at his playful demeanor.

How are you so chill with this?

“Not smug. And I’ll tell you a secret.” He whispers leaning toward my ear. Goosebumps run down my arm feeling his warm breath at my neck. I look at him expectantly.

“You’re my first girlfriend too.” He admits with a wink.

“I don’t think it means the same thing for you.” I argue.

If it did, he would be freaking the fuck out like me, at least a little bit.

“It means I’ve never liked anyone enough to want to spend an extended amount of time with them.” He defends.

I can read between the lines. He has spent short amounts of “time” with them.

Definitely not the same as me.

“Well, I don’t like having everyone looking at me. I usually don’t care what they think, but this is a lot, Noah. Even Sabrina is being interrogated.” I tell him.

“It will die down. By next month we will be old news. Let’s not worry about what anyone else thinks but us ok?” he reasons softly.

“OK. Let’s get to work, we have a lot to get down on paper.”

I’m tired of thinking about this. Noah is right, I have never cared what anyone thought of me. I’m not about to start now. If he’s not worried, I’m not going to be either.



Sunday comes and I find myself excited but also kind of sad at turning 18 today. I have been waiting so long for this day and now that it’s here, I can’t help but feel uneasy about my future.

I know Amelia and Matthew said I could stay and she even expressed her hope I would become a part of their family, but I feel like one wrong move could mess everything up. I can’t afford to leave here early. My college plans would go up in smoke and now that I am getting attached to them, I fear losing them would hurt even more than an uncertain future.

I didn’t even think to tell anyone about my birthday, since I’ve never had anyone to tell before.

I get up and get dressed for the day when I hear a little knock on my door. I walk over to open it and Posey is standing in a little blue sundress smiling up at me mischievously.

“Morning Posey. Whatcha up to?” I ask warily.

“Mommy and Daddy wanted me to tell you that breakfast is ready.” She says still grinning.

“Um, ok. I’ll be right down.” I respond confused.

“Okay!” she says bounding back down the stairs quickly.

Huh, must have misread her. Usually, I'm good about those things.

I grab my phone and head downstairs towards the dining room and see a text from Noah.

Noah: Happy Birthday, Babe! Miss you, and I can't wait for you to see your gift. Have a great day!

What the hell? How does he know about my birthday? I'm staring at my phone in confusion, about to send him a questioning text when I hear a loud:

“HAPPY BIRTHDAY!”

I look up, almost dropping my phone, to see Amelia, Matthew, Posey, and Sabrina standing behind the dining table.

There is a pretty cake decorated like a watercolor painting on one end of the table with a sparkly “18” candle on it and a little stack of gifts sits beside it. A spread of breakfast foods, fruit, and pastries fill the other end of the table with utensils, drinks, and plates stacked beside that.

Balloons fill the entire dining area ceiling and the strings hang down to graze my head. I look around at the scene of at least 100 balloons surrounding us in shock as they all clap and laugh at my surprise.

“Oh my God.” I say softly, my stupid eyes starting to burn. The chuckles die down and Posey comes to grab my hand and pulls me towards the cake.

“I got you, huh Cat? I was so sneaky!” she brags and I laugh out loud at her enthusiasm.

“Yea Posey, you got me alright. You did great.”

“Happy Birthday, Cat.” Amelia says warmly with a hug.

Matthew surprises me by coming up and patting my shoulder with a smile.

“I hope it's a good one, Cat.”

I look around in wonder at all they did for me.

“The best, so far.” I whisper softly and he steps back with a soft tilt of his lips.

Amelia’s eyes well up and I am grateful for the interruption when Sabrina bounds up to me.

“Happy Birthday!” she exclaims with a tight hug.

“Thanks everyone, you didn’t have to do this.” I say scanning the smiling faces in the room.

“Nonsense.” Amelia responds wiping her eye quickly.

“Let’s all dig in while Cat opens her gifts. Our girl’s day starts in two hours!”

“Girl’s day?” I ask as she hands me an envelope.

“My gift.” She explains.

I open the envelope to find four gift certificates to a fancy spa downtown with an appointment card notating that we do, in fact, need to be there in two hours. All the gift certificates notate they are for mani/pedis, a haircut, and a makeup application. This must have cost a fortune.

“Thank you, Amelia.” I say softly.

“Come, grab some food, it’s going to be a long day.” She says nudging me toward the table.

We all grab plates and serve ourselves before sitting down around the table.

“Open mine next!” Posey says squirming in her seat as she pushes a flat pink box toward me.

I open it up and inside is a small canvas she painted with four figures holding hands. I easily recognize the Bennetts and holding Posey’s hand at the end, is me, with huge black hair. We all smile in her picture and stand in front of the lake with big trees on both sides of us.

“It’s beautiful, Posey. I’ll hang it in my room, thank you.” I say with a tight feeling in my chest.

She smiles and nods like that was her plan all along and gets back to her food.

“From me.” Sabrina says pushing a bag stuffed high with tissue paper.

I reach in and pull out three distressed tees and I unfold them to reveal they are all music tees. Amy Winehouse, Stevie Ray Vaughn, and Patsy Cline.

“Great choices! I love them, thanks Sabrina.” she blushes and nods while eating. I take a couple bites as well before Matthew clears his throat.

“The black box is from me.” He says and I grab the large box and slide it over. I pull the top off and inside is another box with an Apple logo on it. I snap my head up to him in surprise.

“I thought a new laptop would help with you with school this year and I’m sure you will need a good one for college so it’s got all the bells and whistles on it for ya.”

“Oh my God, Matthew. Thank you so much.” I say shocked at the extravagant gift.

He smiles warmly before taking a sip of coffee. This guy barely speaks to me and then gifts me a freaking laptop like it’s nothing. I need to give him a chance.

“Thank you all so much...” I start to say but Sabrina interrupts me.

“Wait, you have one more!” she says pointing to the lone box I forgot about after Matthew’s gift.

“It’s from Noah.” She explains.

I grab it and pull off the paper to reveal a familiar shoebox. I flip the top and inside is a brand-new pair of high-top Converse in a textured black leather. I rub the material with my fingertips smiling. *He gets me.*

“Those are so cool!” Sabrina comments. I nod and smile in agreement closing the box gently.

“OK, let’s finish up girls, our fun awaits!” Amelia instructs and we all dig in before we enjoy the day.

Chapter 18

Noah

I pull up to my house after practice Tuesday tired as fuck. It was hot as hell today and practice is getting more intense as we get closer to our game.

I walk into the silence with dread in the pit of my stomach. I know my parents are here. They are gone a lot and, to be honest, I prefer it, even if it does suck to be here alone most of the time.

I swear, no matter how much money I make I will never make my kids grow up in a huge house like this, and definitely not alone. I want a big, loud family. Maybe a few dark, curly-haired kids running around.

Whoa, slow your roll, Noah.

I walk into the kitchen to grab some dinner when I hear heels clicking in my direction. Mom walks in wearing a designer dress and fully done up.

“Oh! Hi Noah. I was just heading out. Girl’s night tonight.” She explains smoothing down her already smooth hair.

Girl’s Night on a Tuesday. Ooookaaay...

“Good, you already have dinner worked out.” She says as I slide my pizza rolls in the oven.

As if you were going to make anything.

“Yep, I’m all set.”

“Great! Have a good night.” She replies walking out hurriedly.

God forbid I try to draw out the conversation.

As I clean up my dishes after I eat, I hear my dad walk through the door on his phone.

He hangs up with a frustrated huff as he enters the kitchen to fill a tumbler with ice. No doubt he will be in his office

drinking expensive scotch the rest of the night.

“Hello Son.” He offers with great effort.

“Hey Dad.” He bristles at my informal response. He hates that I don’t speak like a robot.

“Big plans this weekend?” he forces.

Sometimes I think he wishes I lived more up to my high school titles. I think he would prefer if I was out and about all the time, partying and hooking up with socialites.

“Nah, hopefully just finishing up an article with Cat.” I answer shortly.

“Surely there is a party or something happening that’s more exciting than that?”

My point exactly.

He has always approved more of my popularity status than my grades. I know he was always the back up quarterback and even though he came from money he probably always felt like it was never enough. He came into his own in business and landed my mom so he did alright for his standards, I guess. I think he hopes me being the captain of the team, and big catch around town makes up for his previous shortcomings.

“Not sure. I’d rather hang with her anyways.” I reiterate.

“Noah, you don’t want your infatuation with this girl to hurt your chances with more appropriate girls, do you?”

What. The. Actual. Fuck.

“Pretty sure that her being my girlfriend has already solved that problem.” I mutter pissed at his insinuation that she isn’t good enough.

“Girlfriend? Son, I urge you to rethink that.” He states incredulously.

I place the last dish in the dishrack and turn to him.

“I’m think I’m good. Night, Dad.” I say walking past him to my side of the house. *He’s such a fucking snob.*

I enter my bedroom and lay on my bed looking at the ceiling in silence.

At this point, I have memorized every groove and spot in the textured plaster. It's amazing how bored you get in a house filled with anything your heart could desire.

What's the point of any of it alone? A swim in the pool, boring. Sitting in the sauna, hot and boring. Watching a movie, after going through my whole collection a few times, boring. The pool table is useless without someone to play with. The guys come over sometimes to play video games, but they don't really like it here either. Besides the gym, there's not much to do on my own here. At least that keeps me in shape.

I get up to take a shower, wondering what Cat is up to. I'm trying not to text her so much so she doesn't get sick of me, but she's just so fun to talk to. Her sassy spirit and easy-going demeanor are addictive for someone like me.

I wash up quickly and head back out into my bedroom to find something to fill my time. I grab a book off my bookshelf and sit down in my reading chair to try to calm my antsy thoughts. I can't wait to be out of this fucking house.

Chapter 19

Cat

I walk into school this morning feeling pretty damn good.

Amelia looked into getting my license and she told me that since I'm already 18 I only have to pass an online test for my permit and then when I'm comfortable driving I just go to the DMV for the driving test and I'm set.

They have already been helping me a little after school and I am hoping it won't take long. I still have to figure out a car, but at least I will have options.

"Hoodrat alert." I hear Becca say as I walk to my locker.

Her friends chuckle and I look up with a glare in her direction. Her lips look freshly plumped and she must be keeping her insults short because it's got to be hard to talk with those things.

"Bad reaction this time, Becca? You're looking a little droopy. Might be time for a new doctor." I say with a smirk.

"Fuck you, Cat. Not everyone gets their big lips by sucking cock." She hisses through her ridiculous lips.

"Oh, I'm sure you are well versed in that too." I reply easily.

"Maybe your boyfriend wants a spin. I think I'll ask him." She says licking her lips.

Disgusting bitch.

"Well, if you think you can stretch them that far without popping, you're welcome to try." I reply unfazed.

I know Noah can't stand her, and she knows it too.

"I think I will, surely he's had his fill of slumming it with you. Everyone knows it's just a matter of time before he comes to his senses."

The minions giggle like it's a running joke.

“Face it, you’re a temporary lapse in judgment, Cat. Nothing more.”

I slam my locker and walk up to her.

“Whatever helps you sleep at night, Becca. I’m sure your little wanna-bes will be there to dry your tears when you realize you’re an idiot.” I snap back in a low tone.

They all look to the floor in shame that I called them out as well.

“Or maybe they won’t. Good luck with that.” I chuckle and walk off to my first class with a smile on my face.

Chapter 20

Noah

I'm worried. I have tried to make Cat feel more comfortable with this new situation since we made it official a week ago. I've never shown any lasting interest in a girl so people seem to be losing their fucking minds.

This is when being the quarterback in a football driven school sucks. Everyone seems to think my life is up for examination. Not to mention, my dad has already made his disapproval known.

It's not anyone's business but mine, Cat's, and whoever we want to talk about it with.

These people have nothing better to do than gossip and try to make trouble when someone seems happier than them. I know this game. I've seen other guys fall victim to it. A little pressure from the coaches, our parents, some asshole comments from jealous guys trying to make everyone as miserable as them, or temptation from the popular girls that want to test that they are still top choice by coming on to a guy that's already taken, and relationships in this school fall apart as soon as they start.

This is one reason starting something up with a girl never appealed to me – too much trouble. But Cat is worth it. She's so fucking worth it.

She looked crazy hot today with her jeans tight on her ass and a simple black tank top that molded to her perfect tits.

Most of the other girls here wear heels to school like they are going to a fucking interview but she walked up today wearing the chucks I bought her and I couldn't stop staring.

The girl drives me crazy. I'll do everything I can to make her see that and hope these vultures don't bring her down in the meantime.

I kill it in practice this afternoon and I'm pumped for the weekend. I want to spend it with my girl so I decide to ask Cat

if she has any plans because I want to make her mine. Maybe I can even try to seal the deal on her coming to the game next week and the after party.

As soon as I get home, I take out my phone and send her a text.

Me: Hey beautiful.

My Little Cat: Hey.

Me: Do you have plans this weekend?

My Little Cat: No. Just hoping to finish my online driver's test to get my permit.

Me: You want to get together? We can finish editing the article. I can come over or pick you up Saturday afternoon to come to my house...

My Little Cat: Um okay, let me make sure it's OK with Amelia and I will let you know.

Me: OK. Did you talk to Sabrina about the game?

My Little Cat: Not yet, but I can call her and let you know.

I shouldn't do this but I have to prolong this convo. I miss my girl already. I think I'm fucking obsessed, I don't know what's wrong with me but I don't even care anymore.

Me: Sounds good. So... what are you wearing Little Cat?

My Little Cat: LMAO the same thing I was wearing at school. It's not even 6 o'clock!

Me: Well, you looked fucking amazing so I'll accept that.

She sends through a selfie of her blowing me a kiss in her black tank top. Hello new wallpaper.

Her honey eyes sparkle with a sneaky smirk on her lips and her dark curls fall softly around her shoulders. I can see a little cleavage but nothing crazy. How does my cock get hard as a fucking rock at this?

This freaking girl.

I quickly save it to my screen. *Mine.*

Me: That's my new favorite picture of all time.

My Little Cat: Ur crazy.

Me: For you, yea.

My Little Cat: Ur stalling. I need to call Sabrina and talk to Amelia.

Me: Alright, alright. Call me after. I wanna hear your voice.

My Little Cat: OK. Talk to you later (lips emoji)

Damn those lips.

Now my cock is tenting my pants and there is nothing to do but wait.

Chapter 21

Cat

I pull my phone to my chest and smile. I'm like a lovesick idiot over here.

What the hell is wrong with me? Snap out of it.

Sabrina, I need to call Sabrina. I dial her up and wait for an answer.

"Hey Cat!" she answers

"Hey! I was calling because Noah is asking about the game. Speaking of, why didn't you tell me you would be singing? That's so cool!"

She sighs "Because I really don't want to do it and if I'm terrible I wanted the least number of witnesses possible." She explains sadly.

"Why are you doing it then?" I wonder.

"Because I've been trying to get into this small group for choir and my teacher said if I can't do this, then I won't be a good fit for the group, and I really want to be in it. I took her up on the challenge, but it's kind of an audition as well, and now I'm freaking out!" she rambles.

"Woah, woah, woah. I'm sure you will be great Sabrina. You should have told me. I would have been there to support you no matter what." I tell her.

"You're right. Okay, if I don't totally bomb, I'll stay for the game with you. Then we can both help each other out." She concedes.

"Deal. I want to support Noah, but I know nothing about football, and to be honest, I don't want to sit there alone." I admit.

"OK, it's a plan. Just promise we can leave if I embarrass myself." She begs.

"Promise. But you will be awesome." I assure her.

“So, what do you think about this party he invited us to?”

“Well, I’ve never been to a party but I’ve heard the one after the first game is always the biggest of the year. I guess it would be interesting to see what it’s all about...” she muses.

“So, you want to go?” I ask surprised at her answer.

“If I’m not the laughing stock of the school, it might be fun. It’s our senior year after all, we should probably try to go to one party at least.”

“OK. We stick together, and if it gets weird, I will tell Noah to take us home.”

Silence stretches over the line as she hesitates.

“Well, I have to drive over to the game anyway so you can ride with me and we can meet Noah at the party. Then we have a getaway vehicle if we need it.” She reasons.

“Good thinking. OK I guess we are going then?” I ask still unsure that I even want to go.

Parties are not my scene. It’s hard to take too many people when they’re sober, a bunch of drunk idiots sounds terrible.

“Yea, I guess so.” She answers just as hesitantly.

“Alright, talk to you tomorrow, Sabrina.”

“K. Bye Cat.” She says before hanging up the phone.

Ugh I’m already regretting this. I hope this doesn’t end terribly.

I walk downstairs to talk to Amelia next. This should be much easier. I hear her in the kitchen making dinner.

“Oh! Right on time! I made lemongrass chicken and rice tonight. Can you tell Matt and Posey dinner is ready, sweetie?” she asks, obviously busy turning off burners and plating meals.

“Um sure, I’ll be right back.”

I head to the living room and find them both putting a puzzle together, laughing, and my heart squeezes a little as I take in the scene.

My dad would never do anything like this with me.

I think he loved me in his own way, but he was too consumed with grief to ever enjoy life after my mom died.

I guess I just wasn't enough to keep him happy.

After he started using, he slowly pulled away, and then he was gone forever.

Matthew looks up at me surprised to see me standing there.

I suddenly realize my eyes are burning and I blink quickly as I snap out of my reverie.

“Uh, Amelia said dinner is ready.” I relay her message as if I wasn't just transported back to the saddest part of my memories.

“Oh great!” Matthew replies jumping up.

“Come on Posey-Pie, let's go get some chow.” He says as he takes her hand to lift her from the floor in front of the coffee table they were working at.

Posey runs past him and grabs my hand leading me to the kitchen.

“Come on Cat! Mommy made chicken wif wice!” she explains as if it's the best thing ever and as if the ‘Mommy’ applies to both of us.

It doesn't, I know that, but I just smile at her enthusiasm and follow along with Matthew trailing silently behind us.

We sit at our spots around the table as Amelia comes in placing plates in front of us.

“This smells amazing, Baby.” Matthew says with a smile, digging in.

He is so sweet to her. It makes me sad that they can't have any more babies.

“Mommy, can I have more wice?” Posey asks after looking at her plate, a little disappointed.

I snicker at her sad little face.

“Eat what is on your plate first, Love, and then we'll see.” Amelia bargains.

Posey immediately starts digging in, racing for that second helping of rice.

I take in my plate with baked chicken and a fragrant yellow rice and decide they must be on to something. *This does smell fucking delicious.* I try a bite and ho-ly hell that's good. Amelia strikes again.

"So how was your day, Cat?" Matthew asks.

He stays his distance for the most part, but always tries to include me in dinner conversation. Now that I know he knows my story I realize that he has just been trying not to make me uncomfortable.

"Um, good. Really good actually. I got invited to a party after the first game." I respond between bites, covering my mouth as I speak.

"Oh? You are going to the game?" he questions looking a little surprised at my interest.

Me too, dude.

"Well, I was invited to that as well, I guess. Sabrina is going to go with me."

"Noah invited you, I'm guessing?" he asks with a little smirk.

"Yea he um, well we are..." Matthew and Amelia both stop eating and look at me expectantly.

"We're dating." I blurt out.

Why is this embarrassing? They aren't my parents, it's not like they should care what I do or who I date, but for some reason it seems like they do, and it makes me nervous.

"Really?" Matthew asks raising his brow.

"Well, he's a nice kid but you let me know if he steps out of line, Cat." He sounds protective. It makes my cheeks heat.

This is so weird.

"You girls will be careful and call if you need anything, right?" Amelia says more seeming to try to reassure Matthew

than really ask me.

“Right.” I answer. Oh! I almost forgot about Saturday.

“And Noah was hoping to pick me up or come here Saturday so we can finish our article this weekend. I hope that’s okay?” I ask.

This seems way harder than I expected it to. I’m an adult now for God sakes, it shouldn’t matter to me what they think. But it does, and I find myself not wanting to disappoint them.

What is happening?

“Sure, Love. I don’t see a problem with that. Do you Matt?” she asks her husband with a quirk of her brow at him.

“No, but I’d like him to come in so I can speak with him. Gotta make sure he’s driving safe and all that.” He reasons.

What? Why does it feel like he is preparing for one of those shotgun intimidation scenes in the movies?

“Um okay. I’m sure that’s fine.” I concede.

Noah already knows them. It can’t be that bad right?

Chapter 22

Noah

My phone rings about 9 and I start smiling immediately as I walk over to my nightstand. My Little Cat is calling. My stomach tightens as I answer.

“Hey Babe.”

“Um hey Noah.” She replies sounding a little shy. Her soft, low voice coats my insides like a shot of whiskey to my system.

“What are you wearing now?” I ask lowering my tone to match hers. A low chuckle rumbles through the line and I can’t help but smile.

“PJs.” She answers simply.

More, I need more, Little Cat.

“What kind?” I probe half joking, half hoping she answers.

“A tee and shorts.” She says shyly.

Now we’re talking.

“What else?” I ask wishing I could see her.

The line goes silent. My cock rears up again with hope.

“Cat, what else?” I repeat with a smile.

“That’s it.” She answers in a whisper.

“Ho-ly Fuck, Woman. You are trying to kill me.” She laughs softly again.

“Well, I didn’t know you were going to ask again.” She defends.

“Can I see Cat?” I whisper.

She stays silent for a second.

“Maybe. But I was just calling to tell you that Sabrina and I are in for the game and the party with the condition that she

can change her mind if she messes up the anthem.” She laughs.

“And we will drive in her car and meet you at the party. Just in case.” She adds quickly.

“Sounds reasonable.” I agree trying to mask my excitement that she is coming to my game, even if I’m a little disappointed we won’t be riding together to the party.

“Also, Amelia was ok with us working on our paper Saturday, but Matthew says he wants to talk to you before we go anywhere.” She says before continuing nervously.

“Something about safety precautions while driving...”

I doubt that, but I have nothing to hide from Matthew and I appreciate him looking out for her.

“Not a problem.” I respond easily.

“So should we work at your house or mine?”

“Uh, it might be a little loud with Posey here, maybe yours is better?”

“Okay, sounds good.” I agree.

“Um, okay. That’s it then.” She says cautiously.

“So, can I see you now? I miss your gorgeous face, Babe.”

And I really wanna see these shorts with nothing underneath.

I need to, actually, or I feel like I’m gonna fucking die.

Just then I see a FaceTime call coming through from her.

Fuck. Yes.

I was hoping for a pic but this is so much better.

I switch over to see her gorgeous face fill my screen. She doesn’t wear a ton of make-up usually, just enough to look dressed up, but now her face is fresh like she just got out of the shower. Her curls are tied up in one of her big knots on top of her head, and her shy smile, naked of her usual bright lipstick in what seems like every color, is enough to make my dick hard as steel.

“Hey.” She says with a little wave.

So fucking adorable.

I adjust my camera to include a bit of shoulder action since I’m in just boxer briefs myself, laying against my headboard.

“Hey beautiful.” I say throwing an arm behind my head to get comfortable. I notice her eyes shoot to my bicep and I smile wide at her.

“So here I am...” she trails off softly. “Now what?” she says golden eyes searching me.

She looks so innocent but so fucking sexy all at once. It makes me wonder...

“Let me ask you something, Cat.” I plead softly.

“Ok...” she agrees.

“How many guys have you been with?” She stays silent and looks down.

“It doesn’t matter to me, I’m just curious.” I assure her quickly.

“Well, I told you I’ve never had a boyfriend, Noah.”

I’ve also never had a girlfriend, but I’ve still been with a few.

Surely, she can’t mean...

“You did, but that doesn’t necessarily mean you haven’t fooled around.” I point out.

She shuffles around on her bed uncomfortably.

“Well, I haven’t. I was never interested in anyone before.” She explains.

“Soooo, nothing? With anyone?” I mean, I know about the fucking pervert, but she knows that’s not what I mean.

“No.” she answers simply.

Fuuuuck.

I mean, it’s not unheard of at our age, but nothing? She’s so fucking gorgeous. I’m sure guys have tried.

My cock is trying to bust through the opening in my boxer briefs at this point, hoping to claim this woman for its own.

“I need to see these PJ’s, Little Cat. If you want to show me.” I clarify.

I never want anything she doesn’t want.

“Um ok, but you will have to direct me. I’ve never done this before.” She says shyly.

So fucking innocent. And perfect. *And mine.*

“Ok do you have a mirror in your room?” I ask her.

“Yeah.” She says as she gets up and walks through her room. I see a large wall of windows to her side.

I hope those are fucking tinted.

A possessiveness I have never experienced roars through my system.

She flips her camera and I see her reflection in a full-length mirror with a bed a few feet behind her.

That’s not a fucking tee, that’s a half of one. It’s torn wide at the neck and hangs off one shoulder. Her breasts – gotta be a C or a D cup - hang heavy underneath and a silhouette of hardened nipples poking through makes my mouth water.

It looks like the bottom half has been ripped haphazardly off an old Paramore band tee and I can see a sliver of her stomach peeking out between that and the top of a tiny pair of black spandex shorts that look more like panties than fucking shorts.

Her hips are wide and taper down to a pair of thick thighs I want to bite and an expanse of perfect skin all the way down her shapely legs to end at a pair of cute little feet with perfect toenails painted black.

Oh. My. Fucking. God.

I feel my jaw drop as I take her in silently.

She laughs and I look to her face and see her covering it with a hand looking embarrassed.

“Don’t hide from me Babe.” I plead, my voice sounding like I’ve been gargling glass all of a sudden.

She takes her hand away and looks at her mirror and to me through the camera. Her eyes are glittering gold as she goes silent, breathing heavily.

“Turn around.” I beg.

My cock is fucking weeping for her. Literally. My cum is dripping from the tip and I can’t do anything about it but fucking stare dumbfounded at this masterpiece that has agreed to be mine.

She turns around and I just see her bed for a second until she flips her camera again and adjusts so I can see her reflection from behind.

Her tee is ripped a little higher in the back and I can see the sway of her back and the curve of her waist leading down to her perfect peach shaped ass.

She has got way too much booty for those booty shorts and I am fucking here for it. The bottom of her cheeks peeks out of her so-called shorts, creating a little shadow underneath where her ass meets her thighs.

I squeeze the base of my cock to relieve some of the pressure building.

“Fucking perfection.” I whisper.

Chapter 23

Cat

“Fucking perfection.” He whispers with hooded green eyes burning dark.

His normally light sea green eyes look almost dark moss green now.

I am on fucking fire. My belly burns and wetness gathers at my center from his words and dark stare alone. I have never in my life felt this fucking hot.

I guess this is what they mean by being turned on.

He seems to be enjoying the show so my confidence pushes me to explore some more. His broad shoulders and huge biceps are teasing the hell out of me.

“Your turn.” I say tilting the screen back to my face as I start walking back to my bed.

His lips tilt up to one side and his eyes gleam with intensity.

“You sure wanna see me Little Cat?” he asks with a dangerous edge.

“You might get more than you bargained for if you do. You ready for that?”

Dear God, I'm ready. I don't think I have ever been so ready for anything.

“Yes. Let me see Noah.” I whisper in what I hope is a seductive tone.

He gets up from his bed and walks through a huge traditional looking bedroom and smiles wide with his dimple peeking at me before flipping the camera without warning.

Holy shit. I was not. Fucking. Ready.

He stands in front of a long mirror that is placed in a corner. He is in nothing but tight black boxer briefs. My eyes zero in

on a huge tented bulge in the front. How does he keep that thing contained in there?

I stare shocked silent at the first cock I have ever willingly witnessed in such a state. Instead of the normal disgust I've felt before, my belly flip flops happily the possibilities.

"Too much Babe?" Noah asks in his deep soft timber.

"No." I respond quickly. "Just give me a second."

He better not flip his camera before I get a good look. I tear my eyes away from his hard dick to take in his full form.

His wide, sculpted shoulders and large muscular arms taper down to broad, golden chest and defined abs framed by large bulging muscles at his pelvis that seem to point straight down to his cock still jutting proudly.

He has muscular thighs and huge calves that finish his beautiful body. He looks like a fucking sculpture.

"Now turn." I croak out.

He turns and flips his camera so I can see his v shaped back with soft muscles cording down to a cute little butt.

I have a sudden vision of him on top of me and my hands wrapping around to that amazing back and stroking all the way down to grasp that ass.

My shorts are fucking soaked. I can't fucking speak. This is my boyfriend? This is no boy, this is a man.

Holy shit.

"What are you thinking, Baby?" he asks low and steady.

"I want to touch you."

I admit the first thing that comes to mind.

His beautiful face comes back into view and he walks back to sit on his bed as that statement lingers in the air.

"God, you have no idea how much I want to touch you, Babe." He says in a pained voice.

"You want to pretend with me?"

My face heats and my brain feels like it's going to explode.

"How?" I ask looking into his blazing eyes.

His pupils are blown and he stares back at me with a pleading look.

"Touch yourself. I'll tell you what I want to do to you and you do it for me. Okay?" he implores.

"Okay but only if you do it too."

I can't do this if he isn't doing it too.

"I don't think I can help myself at this point, Cat." He admits with a soft chuckle. His face turns serious again.

"I want you to slide your hand up your shirt and squeeze your nipple."

Oh my God, oh my God, oh my God. I can't believe I'm doing this.

Butterflies fill me up from my clit to my chest and flutter uncontrollably.

"Ok." I respond to let him know I'm with him and I pull my camera back so he can see me better.

I slide my free hand up my shirt and squeeze at my already puckered and aching bud. My head falls back at the sensation and I can't contain the soft whimper that escapes my lips.

"Oh my God." he says helplessly bringing me back to our game.

I try to imagine what I would do if he was here with me.

"Wrap your hand around your cock." I say quietly, caressing my nipple with my palm.

His eyes fall shut and he lets out a low groan.

"Does it feel good?" I ask, eager for my turn.

"So fucking good, Cat. I'm not gonna last long. I need you to catch up with me. Reach into those tiny fucking shorts and tell me how wet you are." He urges me.

I slide my hand down my belly into my shorts and swipe two fingers against my entrance.

“I’m so wet.” I whisper, genuinely surprised even though I already knew I would be.

“I’ve never been this wet before.” I admit with wonder in my voice.

“Stroke your cock for me, Noah. Slow.”

He breathes heavily as he stares into my eyes. I like this game.

“This is so fucking hot, Cat” he says continuing with his pleading voice.

“Let me see how wet I made you.” He orders in a stronger tone.

My face is on fire but his lust gives me confidence.

I dip into my slit a bit and swipe up carefully curling my fingers in to protect my juices from my shorts as I take my hand out. I straighten my two fingers back up and place them in his view. His eyes widen and I splay both fingers apart as we both watch my wetness string between them. “Holy shit.” He gasps.

“I need you to take that sweetness and rub that little clit for me, Cat. Fast.” He says urgently.

I see his shoulder moving at a slow steady pace as he continues to stroke his cock.

“Can I watch you, Babe?” I ask as I slip my hand back down to start rubbing my aching clit in tight circles.

I don’t know how the endearment slips out, I have never called anyone that in my life, but it feels right.

“Oh yea, Baby, you can have whatever the fuck you want.” He states thickly as he pulls his phone out further so I can get the full glorious picture of him stroking his naked cock.

It’s fucking huge and kind of beautiful. The tip of his dick is a perfect mushroom shape I suddenly want to run my fingers around.

I rub faster as I watch him pull the skin taught as his fist meets the base of his long thick cock. Veins bulge and I see the top glisten.

As I become fixated on a small drop of cum sliding down the tip of his cock my clit starts to tingle and a feeling deep inside starts to unfurl in my belly as warmth radiates in my entire body.

“Faster Noah!” I plead knowing a feeling stronger than anything I have ever experienced is climbing up my spine.

He starts jacking his cock almost violently as his muscles strain throughout his entire body.

So fucking hot.

I squeeze my clit.

“Oh fuck!” I squeal as quietly as I can as my back locks up, my head falls back and white light clouds my vision. I feel like I’m floating.

I slow my strokes to a stop as I come back to earth gasping for breath. His whisper breaks my trance.

“So fucking beautiful.”

I snap my eyes back to my phone just in time to see Noah’s entire body stiffen, muscles clenched as he releases, gasping.

“Oh shit!” his eyes pinch shut and jaw muscles clench as a jet of thick white cum shoots out onto his belly and slowly pulses down his cock as he releases himself.

We both gasp for breath in the silence. He realigns the phone to his face as I hear tissues being ripped from a box nearby. He is looking down as he cleans himself before flopping back onto his pillow with a dimpled smile at me. He starts laughing and I smile.

“That was fucking intense Cat.” He states with conviction.

“Definitely.” I agree with a small smile. Finally feeling my face begin to cool down.

“That was nuts. Honestly, playing with you was better than sex with anyone ever.” He continues.

I grimace. I hate that someone else has had the real experience with him.

“How many anyones are we talking here?” I ask him not sure if I want the answer but I was honest with him, we should just get this over with.

“I mean I’ve messed around a little but I’ve only had sex with 5 people.” He says earnestly.

“Most girls don’t really hold my attention and I’m pretty picky” he laughs.

5 girls. 5 girls have seen him and felt him inside them.

Jealousy flares in my gut. I try to hide it by looking away but he sees right through me.

“Hey. Look at me, Baby” I do and gives me a small smile tilting his head a bit

“You are so much more than anyone or anything I’ve ever had. You’re mine now, and I’m yours. Period.”

“Okay.” I reply.

“You’re right. Our pasts don’t matter. You are nothing like any of the guys I’ve dealt with either. This is different, right? Real?” I ask with a new hopefulness.

“Damn straight, Little Cat. I’ll see you tomorrow. Goodnight, Babe.”

“Goodnight, Noah.”

We hang up and I look up at the ceiling. I said I wanted real from him, but this is getting really real, really fast.

Chapter 24

Noah

I breeze through practice the next morning, feeling on top of the world after last night.

My girlfriend is the hottest, coolest chick in existence and I'm the lucky bastard that gets to call her mine.

No one has ever seen her like I have and I revel in that feeling as I cut around the defense like they are nothing, making play after play. She makes me better. She makes life better. I have someone that actually gives a damn about me, someone coming to my game to cheer for me. I don't ever want to let her go.

Luca and Terrance give me approving nods and slaps on the helmet when I place the ball perfectly for them to score over and over again in our drills. We are going to kill it this year.

"Good work guys! Hit the showers and stay out of trouble this weekend." Coach yells with a quick whistle signaling the end of practice.

We all bound inside hyped at our stellar practice.

Luca and Terrance flank me on each side as we make our way to the locker room.

"You were on fire today, man!" Terrance says slapping my ass. I smile wide as I take off my helmet.

"Thanks, we were all clicking today." I offer.

It's a team effort and I know my boys worked their asses off today too. We walk to our lockers and start undressing.

"Seems like you got all your shit worked out." Luca says with a knowing smirk.

"Yep." I answer with a smug grin.

I notice Devin listening in so wipe it off my face and keep it short, I don't want him in my business anymore.

“Your Dad letting up on you then?” Terrance asks.

“Nah, not really but fuck ‘em, right?”

I don’t give a shit about my dad’s opinions. I’ve made it this far without his guidance, I’m not about to start now.

“Right.” Terrance smiles. “So, this has something to do with your little firecracker, then?” he probes.

Devin slams his shit down, grabs a towel, and storms to the showers still peeling off his uniform.

I appreciate Terrance’s use of “your” so I throw him a bone.

“Maybe. She’s coming to watch me at the game.” I answer not able to hide my grin.

She makes me fucking happy, I can’t help it. They know how much that means to me when my own parents have never bothered to show up for any of my games.

“By herself?” Luca asks quietly.

Is he worried about her being alone with the assholes in the stands? He’s a good fucking friend.

“Nah, her friend Sabrina says she will be there for the National Anthem so she’s gonna keep her company.”

His head snaps up for a quick second before wrapping his towel around himself.

“Good, good.” He says before snapping back up

“Are they gonna go to the party after?”

“Hopefully, yeah. Cat mentioned something about only if Sabrina is still up to it. She’s nervous or something.” I try to explain.

I don’t pretend to know the inner workings of girl relationships, so I was a bit confused myself, but it seemed conditional on her friend.

“Nice, man. Tell your girl to hook me up.” Terrance jokes wagging his brows.

“You don’t even know her.” Luca says with more edge than he usually brings to his casual conversational tone.

“Nah, but Sabrina seems cool.” Terrance says warily and I recognize a look I’m familiar with in Luca’s eyes. Jealousy.

Hmmm interesting, he doesn’t know Sabrina either so I’m confused, but I jump in to save the convo.

“Yeah, she’s really cool. I’ll introduce you guys at lunch.” I offer, making sure to include Luca as well.

“Just be nice, they said no douchebags are allowed.” I joke.

“Well, thanks for finally inviting us into your No Douchebags Club, asshole!”

Terrance and I laugh and Luca loosens up again shaking his head and smiling. We grab our shower stuff and head in to get ready for the day.



I spot Cat at her locker smiling with Sabrina and double-time it to catch her before first period starts.

I come up behind her and wrap my arms around her lifting her up and she gasps in surprise as I chuckle in her ear. God, she smells fucking delicious. Clean cotton, and soft rose.

My favorite scent.

“Good morning, ladies.” I say into her ear as I wink at Sabrina.

She blushes and I turn Cat around so I can see her too. She’s smiling and blushing as well.

“Morning, Noah.” Cat answers looking up at me while she brushes her long hair back in place from my manhandling.

“Did you have a good practice?”

I lean down to claim a kiss.

A good morning kiss, it’s my right as her boyfriend, I figure.

“Fucking amazing, yeah.” I answer with a wink.

She turns back to her locker, cheeks blazing, to finish gathering her things.

“So, I wanted to ask you guys if it’s okay if Luca and Terrance sit with us today?”

Cat and Sabrina look to each other warily, speaking their silent girl talk.

“They’re not douchebags, promise. I told them it was a rule.” I say with a hand to my heart.

“A rule?” Sabrina questions.

“Yea rule number one of our No Douchebags Club.” I say, adopting Terrance’s title.

“We can work on the rest of the rules later.” I joke. Sabrina laughs and shrugs.

“Alright, Noah, if you can vouch for them, it’s ok with me.” She answers sweetly.

She really is cool and as I look closer, prettier than I originally thought. Obviously, Luca noticed this way before me.

“Okay, but they are on probation. We don’t admit new members to our club unless we all agree.” Cat says so seriously it takes a second before I realize her sarcastic joke.

“Of course, rule number two.” I respond with a reverent nod.

“Let it be known.” I say somberly trying to hide my smirk.

They laugh and shake their heads.

“It’s a club, not a cult Noah. Bring it down a notch.” Sabrina jokes.

She’s funny too, I like her. I’m excited to introduce her to Luca – he’s so serious all the time.

The bell rings loudly through the halls.

“Right, sorry. See ya’ll later then. Have a good morning, Baby.” I direct to Cat with a quick peck on her cheek before I head to class.

Chapter 25

Cat

Sabrina and I stand in line for pizza as the guys come strutting up to us.

Please don't be assholes, I hope to myself as Sabrina straightens up nervously.

I don't want to keep Noah from his friends, and I know he's ditched them since last week to sit with us, but I also won't let them be rude to mine.

Here we go.

"Hey, beautiful." Noah says with a quick kiss to my lips.

My stomach flutters. I like that he is still sweet to me in front of them. That's a good sign.

"Guys, ya'll know Cat and this is Sabrina." He says waving a hand out to her.

"Sabrina, this is Terrance and Luca." He finishes pointing them out as if everyone in this school doesn't already know who they are.

When he talked to me about them, he described Terrance as a jokester and Luca as the strong silent type. I can see what he means as I take in Terrance's wide grin and Luca's small wave.

"Thanks for inviting us to your club, ladies." Terrance says with a flirty smile to Sabrina who is still blushing silently.

"Probationary period, you mean." I clarify with a smirk.

"Of course, President Firecracker, we were told the terms." He answers with a wink.

Noah laughs and I shake my head at his nickname and appointed status.

Noah grabs my plate and his from Lupe with a smile and heads for the register. I hang back with Sabrina to make sure

she's comfortable and notice her shocked expression as Luca jumps in to do the same for her without a word. Terrance just chuckles as he grabs his plate last.

The guys pay for our food and we follow them to an empty round table as the eyes of the entire lunchroom seem to follow our steps.

I walk beside Sabrina and bump her hip with mine to check on her and she looks up to me nervously swiping a lock of hair behind her ear with a shrug. We sit down next to each other in the chairs Noah and Luca pull out for us. They sit next to us, respectively, with Terrance completing the circle in front of us.

"So, I told the guys that ya'll are coming to the season opener and the after party." Noah offers to start the conversation.

"Um, yeah, maybe." Sabrina says warily.

"What do you mean maybe?" Terrance asks "Ya'll should definitely hit it up. It's the best party of the year!" he states enthusiastically.

"We will, if we are up for it after the game." I respond with a small smile of solidarity to Sabrina.

She lets out a breath relieved to not have to explain the details. I can tell she's really nervous about this anthem thing. This choir group must be really important to her to put herself through this. I've never heard her sing, but from her quiet hums in the car when she drives me home it seems like she has a really pretty voice.

"Noah said you have to be there for the anthem or something." Luca says gently as he takes a bite of pizza.

I can't tell if he is curious for more information or just making a statement. Sabrina clears her throat to stall.

"Yeah, just for a quick thing, but I told Cat I might stay for the game with her afterwards. Noah said practice is going well for you guys." She responds quickly trying to change the subject to something the guys will be easily distracted by. *Clever.*

“Hell yea, we were on fire today.” Terrance takes the bait but Luca looks at her with a questioning gaze.

He doesn't comment on her change of subject and I appreciate that. He seems okay. We continue chatting through lunch and it's actually a lot of fun. Terrance is funny, and although Sabrina warned he could be obnoxious, he seems to be toning it down for us.

“So are you guys going to need a ride or you are planning to meet up there?” Terrance asks conversationally.

Noah purses his lips a bit and I can tell that he isn't happy that he isn't going to be driving us.

“I'm going to ride with Sabrina. I still don't have my license. I'm working on my permit now and practicing driving after school.”

“Oh nice. Do you have a car?” he questions.

“No, not yet, just focusing on this first and then I can figure that out.” I explain.

“I can help you practice in my car too, Babe. I'd be happy to help.” Noah supplies.

“I don't think I want that kind of pressure. That looks like an expensive car.” I laugh.

“Who cares? It's big and safe and a few dings aren't gonna bother me. For real, I'll help.”

“Ok, if you really don't mind. I want to get my license as soon as possible.”

Noah nods in satisfaction and I chuckle at his willingness to help me.

I notice Luca glancing at Sabrina quite a bit as we chat throughout lunch and I look to Noah with a questioning tip of my head in Luca's direction. He just smiles and rubs my thigh with his giant hand softly until my skin is tingling everywhere and I forget all about what's going on at that side of the table.

The bell rings and we get up as the guys gather all the trash and trays and take everything to the trashcan.

Well, that was nice.

Me and Sabrina look to each other and hold in our smiles at how sweet they are all being. We all walk out to the courtyard and Noah grabs my hand pulling me toward him.

“Can I walk you?” Luca asks Sabrina and I look to her questioning.

“We have next period together.” She explains to us nervously.

“Yea sure, let’s go.” She says turning away with Luca.

“See you later, Little Cat.” Noah says cupping my face and giving me soft kiss in front of Terrance before letting me go.

“See you around, Firecracker.” Terrance winks before tipping his head and flanking Noah as they walk to class together.

I turn around to walk to class with a smile on my face. That went better than I expected.

As I’m walking to class, I ponder what’s going on with Luca and Sabrina. She’s hiding something I think, and as I continue on, I feel a bump and a splash on my side and in my hair. I whip around to see Becca standing with her minions and an unapologetic look holding an open water bottle.

“Oops, I guess you should watch where you’re going” she snickers as water drips down my hair and shirt.

“At least it makes your hair better. It was looking a little dirty before.” She adds.

This bitch.

“What the fuck?” I answer with a glare. Did she really just pour water on me like we are in middle school?

“I guess it’s hard to know where to go when you’re always where you don’t belong.” She says a little lower.

Ah, I see what’s going on now. This is a rich people version of a warning.

“You better watch it, Becca.” I retort.

“Jealousy looks ugly on you. Just like that hideous fucking skirt.” I say nodding towards her tight, sparkly baby-pink mini-skirt. It matches her lipstick that is overlined in an attempt to make her fake lips look even bigger. I’m sure the skirt is as expensive as it is ugly, but it all just makes her look like a Barbie knock off that’s trying too fucking hard.

“Fuck you, go back to the East Side with your druggy parents, whore.”

“Nah, I think I’m good right here, so get comfortable bitch.” I respond not letting her pretentious insults bother me. Her dark eyes bore into me and I wonder if I’m about to have to give this girl a peek at *my* “East Side” when a voice cuts in.

“Do we have a problem girls?” Ms. G steps toward us from the emptying hall way. The minions scatter quickly as Becca and I turn to face Ms. G.

“Of course not, Ms. G. Just a little accident. It was a misunderstanding.” Becca defends quickly knowing I’m still dripping.

The second bell rings. *Great, this bitch made me tardy.*

“Uh huh.” Ms. G answers skeptically while surveying the scene.

“You know the rules, Becca. No open containers in the hallway. Go grab some paper towels and clean this mess up.” She tells her and Becca’s eyes widen at the prospect of manual labor incredulously.

“But I’m already late, Ms. G!” She argues.

“Well, you better hurry before you miss anything important with your extended tardiness.” She responds evenly.

Becca storms toward the girl’s bathroom huffing and Ms. G stands to wait for her to return, rolling her eyes in exasperation.

She opens her tattered satchel and hands me a scarf from inside to clean up with.

“Thanks Ms. G.”

“Get to class, Cat” she says with a wink. And I do just that.

Chapter 26

Noah

I sit waiting for Cat in Journalism and the smile that comes when I see her walk in quickly fades when I see how pissed she looks.

Her hair is knotted up in a bun, not down like it was at lunch and her light grey t-shirt looks like it has a huge water stain on the side that has dried but left it loose and wrinkled.

What the fuck?

Cat walks up to Ms. G who is sitting at her desk and looks up with a smile at her. She pulls a flowery scarf out of her bag and hands it to Ms. G with a thanks before coming to sit by me.

“Get to work, guys!” Ms. G announces to the class to indicate we should continue our independent work.

“What happened, Babe?” I turn to Cat, my protective instincts on high alert.

If some jack-off thought he could enjoy a wet t-shirt contest with my girl, I will smash his goddamned face in.

“Becca.” Is all she answers seething next to me.

That bitch.

I knew some of the girls weren't going to like the idea of me being taken, but this is fucking ridiculous. I don't belong to anyone but Cat and it pisses me off that Becca thinks she has some claim over me because she is the cheer captain and I'm the quarterback. This isn't the fucking 1950's.

“Hey.” I say grabbing her hand to make her look at me.

“Fuck Becca. And fuck all these girls. I'll make their lives fucking miserable if they mess with you again.” I reassure her.

“There's nothing you can do, Noah. And I can take care of myself.” She answers grumpily.

“You underestimate me, Baby. You forget, I’m the quarterback, remember?” I say grinning.

“One word from me and any one of these chicks is banned from all parties and won’t be asked out by anyone, for anything, anymore.”

She looks at me with her eyes bugging out as it begins to click how important, however stupid it may be, my position in this school is. She laughs.

“Rich people are weird.” She comments shaking her head.

“Agreed, but it’s the way of the world around here.” I explain.

“I’ve never used my status to hurt anyone before, but I will in a heartbeat if they hurt you Little Cat.”

And I fucking mean it. I’m not playing games with these clingy bitches.

“No one fucks with my girl.” I say, finishing my thoughts aloud.

She chuckles with that deep throaty voice I fucking love.

“Well, don’t go making anyone a pariah yet, oh Mighty Quarterback. Like I said, I can handle it for now.” She responds with a smile.

“You forget, you may run this school, but I’m not from here, and I don’t play by the rules.” She says smirking.

She is so fucking hot.

I am reminded how we didn’t play by the rules last night and I can’t help but bring her in for a rough hug, kissing her neck with a growl as she laughs.



I pull up to the Bennett’s home about 12 o’ clock Saturday afternoon to get Cat.

My Mom is having lunch which always turns into dinner with her friends and my dad has some meeting across town so

I'm hoping Cat and I can fly under the radar at my house with neither of them around, as usual.

I step out of my car and ring the doorbell. Matthew Bennett opens the door quickly after, and I hold my hand out to shake.

"Good to see you again, Mr. Bennett." I say with confidence.

He shakes my hand quick and firm.

"Hello Noah, come on in. The girls are out back on the deck finishing lunch but I wanted a moment to speak with you." He says getting right to the point.

"Yes sir." I answer stepping in and following him to a study near the living area.

I look around at the blueprints scattered and pinned to the walls and notice a photo frame of his wife and daughter in his arms on his desk. He sits down behind it and gestures to the seat in front of it so I sit and wait for him to start.

"So, I understand you and Cat are seeing each other. Is that right?" he asks seeming to want to gauge my interest in her.

"Yes sir, we are." I answer without hesitation.

"Did she explain her situation with you and why she is here?" he asks.

"She did, Sir. She said you guys are fostering her." I say simply.

I'm not about to mention the other things she's told me. I don't know what they know but I'm certain she values her privacy.

"We are. And she's a good girl. I want to make sure you are aware that she's here to stay if she chooses to. Any ideas that this could be a fling that can be forgotten because she is expected to be gone soon will not do, Son." He says getting down to brass tacks.

"We have a relationship with your folks and I value that, but Cat will be around for a long time, we hope. She is a part of my family now, and that's what I value most." He finishes.

I see, he wants to make sure I know if I'm fucking around that his relationship with my family will be over. Not different from the other business associates my father deals with, but this works in my favor this time.

"I understand, Sir. And I'm happy to hear it. Cat needs a family she can rely on and I'm glad she will be around for a long time."

I was worried she might decide to bounce unexpectedly since she is 18 now, but maybe she will develop some roots in this town. Except, something in his speech doesn't sit well with me.

"But why do you keep saying, if she chooses to stay? Has she said she isn't planning to?"

I'm suddenly worried she will slip through my fingers. Matthew sighs.

"Cat has had it rough, Son. She's 18, so it's too late to propose adoption, as much as we would love to. We can't make her be a part of this family or stay if she doesn't want to." He confesses with a sadness I share.

"I see." I respond quietly.

"Well, let's hope for the best, right?" I ask him feeling a kinship with him from our shared affection towards this incredible girl.

"Yes, we'll hope for the best." He agrees

"And in case I didn't make it clear enough before, I'll accept nothing less than that when it comes to those she associates with. We clear, Son?"

"Crystal, Sir. And in case I wasn't clear, let me say that I care very much for Cat. She's amazing and I recognize that. I will do everything I can to make sure she knows both of those things." I say honestly.

"Good, good." He says nodding. "Well, let's go let the girls know you are here."

Sneaky bastard.

He must have hidden out in the house so they wouldn't know I arrived and he could speak with me as long as he wanted to without interruptions. It's a good play, I'll give him that. I chuckle as he smiles and stands for me to follow him to the deck.

"Look who I found!" he says cheerfully as he opens the glass sliding door and steps out. All seriousness he had in his office hidden with ease.

Sneaky, sneaky.

Three girls' eyes turn to me from the patio table filled with fruits and sandwiches but a pair of bright amber ones draw mine to hers instantly. I smile at her before looking to Amelia.

"Hello, Mrs. Bennett. How have you been?" I ask her to start conversation.

"Oh, I'm great Noah, good to see you again. Cat tells me you guys have an exciting article you are working on?" she questions with a friendly tone.

"Yes Ma'am," I smile.

"Cat has a great angle on it and it was a topic that was perfect for her." I add, not knowing what they know about her family.

"It's special to her, so it's special to us. We look forward to this month's issue so we can read all about it." She states warmly.

I guess she does know, that's good, Cat is opening up to them. These are such nice people.

I nod in agreement as my gaze wanders to a little pair of blue eyes locked on me.

"You must be Posey?" I ask with a smile at her.

"Yes, sir." She says and I chuckle.

"Sir? What great manners you have. But you can call me Noah." I tell her with a wink.

Her almost translucent white skin blushes profusely. Cat has been quiet the whole conversation but her eyes warm at my

exchange with Posey.

“Are you Cat’s boyfriend?” she asks shyly.

“I am.”

Hell yea I am, I think to myself proudly. Cat blushes a little at her foster parent’s smiles.

“Well, she’s my sister now, so you be nice to her.” She blurts and then quickly slaps a hand to her mouth with wide eyes like she’s surprised that came out.

“Posey!” Amelia tries to scold holding in a laugh.

“You tell him, Posey-Pie!” Matthew praises with a deep laugh.

Cat sits at the table with a shocked look and her eyes glitter a bit before she clears her throat. I didn’t miss that Posey didn’t say foster-sister and it seems Cat didn’t either.

“I would never be mean to Cat, Posey. That’s a promise. But I appreciate you looking out for her.” I say with my hand on my heart as I lock eyes with Cat who’s sitting next to her.

“Would you like something to eat, Noah?” Amelia asks after a glance to Cat, trying change the subject.

“Oh no thank you, Mrs. Bennett. Are you ready to go Cat?”

I try to go in with a save since she still looks a little shell-shocked. She looks up to me and her lips turn up a little.

I just wanna see you smile, Baby, I try to relay through my eyes.

“Sure, we just need to grab my stuff from upstairs first.” She replies looking to Matthew and Amelia who give her a nod.

She starts to rise from her chair before sitting back down and ruffling Posey’s hair a bit.

“Good looking out, Sis.” She says with a smile before standing again and walking toward me. Good, the roots I was hoping for seem to be in place.

“Good to see you both again. Nice to meet you Posey.” I say with a wave as I start to head to the doorway before Cat turns around again.

“I’ll just be a few hours.” She says to them.

“No hurry, sweetie, good work takes time.” Amelia replies looking to Matthew.

“You’ll be home for dinner?” Matthew asks Cat.

“I think so, but I will let you know if anything changes.” she answers as she pushes me toward the door. I let her pass me and follow her to her room upstairs.

Chapter 27

Cat

I walk into my room heading for the desk when I hear the door close behind me and Noah rushes me from behind, wrapping his arms around my waist.

His warmth soothes my nerves and eases the knot in my throat after the exchange with Posey outside. *I have a sister.* It's a strange but exciting prospect.

"Missed you, Baby." He says and I feel him smelling my hair. It tickles.

I turn to him with a soft smile and give him a peck on the lips. He drops back letting me go so I go back to gathering my things.

I see him peeking around out of the corner of my eye.

"Wow, so the scene of the crime, huh?" he teases.

I chuckle, knowing full well what he is referring to and continue gathering folders as my face heats. We haven't mentioned our little video chat last week, but I can't stop thinking about it.

Our relationship has moved quickly since then and Noah can't seem to keep his hands off me. I won't lie and say I don't enjoy it though. I never would have thought I could become so attached to a person in a couple of weeks, but besides the catty bitches at school, everything has just fallen into place.

"I think this is my favorite feature in here." He says walking up to my mirror.

"Noah..." I warn with a smirk.

Cheeky bastard.

"Just being honest." He shrugs.

He moves to my bookshelf and I notice he is staring at the photo of me and my Momo. In it, a younger, scrawnier version of me sits beside her and I'm resting my head on her shoulder

with a little smile. I look a little sad in the photo, but I know I was content with her so it still makes me happy.

Noah looks at the photo with a frown like it hurts him to see me so sad so young. I zip up my bag and walk up beside him with my backpack on my shoulder.

“That’s my Momo.” I say quietly.

“The only picture I have of us.”

“She looks nice.” he comments. She is looking down at me with love in the picture.

“She was. Tough, but nice. She taught me a lot.” I muse.

“Like what?” he asks hopefully.

I smile remembering her.

“Whenever I would do something bad, she used to say, ‘Carolina,’” I say my name fast like she did in Spanish, “No one lives your life but you, and only you can choose to make it a good one or a bad one. Choose wisely, Mija.”

I brush the frame with my fingertips her voice ringing in my ears.

“Your name is Catalina?” he asks, trying to repeat my name in Spanish. I laugh at his mispronunciation.

“No, Carolina, like the states, but in Spanish it’s kind of like Caht-o-leen-a” I pronounce slower.

“Cat was much easier, obviously, so I started going by that instead.” I explain.

“That’s really pretty. I like it better in Spanish.” He assures me, moving to look at my little heart necklace on another shelf.

“Thanks, me too.” I agree.

“What’s this?” he asks brushing his finger over the charm but not moving to pick it up.

It looks old and delicate and he is probably being careful not to break it.

“My dad told me he gave that to my mom for her birthday one year. He let me have it after she died. It’s not much, but I’m sure he still had to save to get it for her. I remember her wearing it for special occasions.” I answer.

“When did she die?” he asks gently looking to meet my eyes.

I stare at the necklace wistfully, trying to remember her.

“When I was 5. I don’t recall much about her, but I remember thinking she was the prettiest woman I had ever seen. My dad said I looked a lot like her. Maybe that’s why he didn’t want to be around me after she died.”

I whisper the last part hoping he didn’t hear.

“I have no doubt she was beautiful if that’s the case.” He says rubbing his thumb along my cheekbone.

“What happened to her?” he asks.

“She was killed by a drunk driver on her way home from work. My dad never recovered.”

Noah looks perplexed for a second.

“So, he just *gave* you to your grandmother?” he asks with slight anger in his tone.

Sweet, sweet, Noah.

“No, he started drifting in and out of the house. I was left alone a lot but my Momo would come check on me and take me to her house sometimes. He started using drugs pretty heavily and turned into a different person. When I saw him, he was mean and distant, and then he would leave for days at a time. One day, when I was nine, he left and never came back. My Momo showed up three days later and told me he overdosed and I was moving in with her.” I walk to my bed, trying to hold back tears, to pick up my tattered old bear.

“This was the last gift he gave me. It was for my eighth birthday. He was having a good day, a sober day. He gave it to me, and took me for ice cream. It was the best day I remember ever having with him. Afterwards, he dropped me off at my Momo’s house and was gone til the next morning. He came

back his old self, like the day before never even happened. We never had a day like that again.” I admit with a stuttered sigh.

He walks up to me and wraps me tight in his arms. I drop the bear back to the bed to bring my hands around him and breathe deeply while we hold each other.

His crisp, earthy scent calms me and I feel more grounded. Like walking in a field next to a waterfall, not that I ever have, but I imagine it would smell like him if I did.

“You’ve been through so fucking much. I wish I could make you happy again. I want to fill your life with happy days. I love you, Cat.” He says into my hair.

I look up at him shocked by his candor.

“What?” I ask surprised by his words

“I fucking love you, Cat. I don’t want you to be sad anymore. Let me make you happy.” he implores.

I look into his eyes to see if he is serious and when I sense no wavering, I bring a hand to his cheek and guide his lips down to mine in a hard kiss.

No one has ever told me they love me, and the fierce protectiveness in his gaze reassures me.

He tightens his hold on me with one arm and places his other hand on the back of my head, deepening the kiss.

I pull back a little and look him in the eyes.

“You do make me happy, Noah.”

I need you to know that.

He grabs my neck and kisses me roughly, moaning when our lips and bodies are tight against each other.

I whimper, and as my lips part he sweeps his tongue in my mouth and I can taste his desire. I swipe my hand into the silky hair that I have been longing to touch and I feel his cock jump at the sensation.

We need to stop.

I move back a few steps, panting to catch my breath.

“We better go.” I whisper placing a hand over my lips that feel swollen from our kisses.

“Your right, sorry, I got carried away.” He apologizes quickly.

I don't want him to think he did anything wrong.

It felt too damn right, that was the problem.

“Hey.” I grab his hand and look up at him stepping forward a little closer again.

“I meant it, Noah. You make me really happy. Like I've never been before.” I assure him.

“Good, Baby, that's all I want for you.” he replies with a smile.

“Come on, let's go get this article started.” He reminds me, and we walk out of the house hand in hand.

Chapter 28

Noah

We walk into my huge, empty house and she looks around with gaping eyes.

“Wow.” She comments.

“Pretentious as fuck, right?” I say looking around and trying to gauge what she must be seeing in her eyes.

She laughs deeply with a relieved smile.

“Definitely.” She agrees

“Come, let me show you my ‘suite’” I say with in a haughty tone with quotation marks as I lead her to the left-wing staircase.

“Suite?” she snorts “Is what rich people call their bedroom?”

“Oh no, Little Cat, only a true suite would do for the only Caldwell heir.” I remark sarcastically.

“Well, this I have to see.” She laughs following me up the marble staircase. I pass by the first door on the left and open it with a grand wave.

“This is my media room.” I say as she peeks in.

“Is that a fucking movie screen?” she asks incredulously. I nod rolling my eyes.

“And your own kitchen?” she chuckles.

“Do you cook in here?”

“Well, there isn’t a stove, so technically Mom says it’s a ‘kitchenette’” I quote.

“But the microwave is good for popcorn, and I keep the fridge stocked with energy drinks for the guys.” I shrug.

She shakes her head with a smile.

I turn to the opposite wall and open that door for her to inspect.

“This is my gym.” I say even though it’s pretty obvious.

“Yep, looks like a gym.” She laughs.

I walk down to the next door on that side and open it up with a flourish.

“My office. Just what every 13-year-old dreams of.” I say trying to keep from laughing at the ridiculousness of it.

My parents converted it from a kids playroom to an office for my thirteenth birthday. Apparently it was time for me to grow up.

She looks in and takes in the large desk with a computer and built-in floor to ceiling bookshelves lining the wall behind it.

“Looks like a pretty legit place to jerk off in peace. I hope there are Kleenex in that desk.” She says seriously before we look at each other and bust out laughing.

God, her fucking laugh gets me every time.

I turn back to the left-hand wall again and suddenly I’m nervous of what she will think of my bedroom. It’s the only room in the house that is really me, and I spend most of my time here. I really hope she doesn’t laugh at it too. I turn the knob and open the door slowly for her.

“This is my room.” I say simply and place my hand at her lower back to guide her in before me.

She walks in and silently takes everything in, walking in a circle from right to left.

I picked more simple, classic pieces for my furniture, not the gaudy style the rest of the house has.

In the right-hand corner I have a large, white four poster bed with simple lines, a tall headboard and heavy square posts.

The walls are a soft grey and there is a sitting area to the left with a navy-blue sofa and a traditional white coffee table I like to work at, and a grey and blue oversized wing back chair I like to read in.

Behind the sitting area, two narrow, white bookshelves filled with my favorite books and a few football trophies flank a large window that looks out at a tree line by the lake.

She turns around to glance at my dresser and the standing mirror in the corner next to it, opposite my bed there is a door leading to my bathroom and attached closet.

She finishes her circle around the room, gazing back at me standing at the door where she started.

“This feels like you.” She states with a big smile. I return it, relieved she gets me.

“Can we work in here?” she asks with a smirk.

“I don’t think I can concentrate in your masturbation den.” She says with a laugh.

I close the door, lock it, and run at her, grabbing her by the waist and tickling her sides as she tries to break free.

“Very funny, Little Cat.” I say before lowering my voice.

“But you know very well that’s where I masturbate.” I say with a wink pointing to the bed.

She blushes and pushes at my chest. I laugh loudly, grabbing her backpack to place it on the coffee table so we can get started.



We work for a couple of hours knocking out our revisions and editing. The whole time, the tension is palpable. Knowing we are here alone, and trying to keep my mind on this article is almost impossible.

She smells so fucking good and her bare legs keep rubbing against me as she reaches down to the coffee table to grab some notes make some scribbles.

Not to mention the cleavage. When she leans over it makes me want to bite into my knuckles to keep from touching.

She wore her curls down with some cut-off shorts, a distressed loose tank top, and flip flops showcasing her shiny

black nail polish.

She is fucking killing me over here. She's talking but I can't concentrate anymore.

"You need a break?" she asks when she realizes I'm not responding to whatever she asked me.

"God yes." I say releasing a heavy breath as we turn to face each other.

She laughs and places her elbow on the couch behind my head as she runs her fingers through my hair. I lean against her touch and close my eyes, relishing in the feel of her.

"Is anyone else home?" she asks shyly still stroking my scalp.

I snap my eyes open and look at her.

Why are you asking, Little Cat?

"No." I answer simply.

She leans toward me and I wait as she closes the gap between us for a soft kiss.

The kiss starts to repeat itself, over and over, gaining intensity as nerves gather in my belly.

Holy shit. She is initiating this.

I want more. I wrap my arms around her waist and gather her close to me, moving her across the sofa until she is flush against my side with a quick tug.

She whimpers at my abruptness but doesn't pull away. Her arms wrap around my shoulders and she presses her tits against my chest.

I glide my hand up her shirt slowly to see if she wants to stop. *So fucking soft.*

She just moans and presses tighter against me kicking her flip-flops off and bringing her knees under her on the couch so her face is even with mine as I continue to ravage her mouth.

I cover her side with the full warmth of my hand and caress her soft skin, moving up her back to the clasp of her bra. I let

my hand hover there as I release her mouth, pleading.

“Cat?” I feel frantic, like this is my first time making out, and she must feel it too because she attacks my lips again bringing both hands into my hair and pulling me towards her as she nods and whimpers through kisses.

Fuck. yes.

I unclasp her bra and run my hands up and down her whole bare back as we kiss deeply, my dick hardens to steel at the softness of her.

She moves higher on her knees before pressing at my chest until my back hits the sofa and I sit forward as she turns to face me and slips one leg over me to straddle my lap.

HO-LY SHIT.

I look up to her eyes and she meets my gaze with fire burning in her golden irises.

My cock twitches angrily at the clothes separating it from her hot pussy.

I slide a hand all the way up her back to clasp at her nape, the other pulling her waist forward, as I bring my lips to her neck and down her collarbone.

Cat is breathing heavily as she holds on to my hair and begins to rock into my cock slowly.

God, I fucking need her. She is torturing me and I don't want her to stop.

I slide both hands down her back to the hem of her shirt to pull it up.

She leans back to allow me to pull it over her head and looks at me nervously as she peels the straps of her bra down, letting it fall and replacing it with her arm shyly.

That's it, I'm done.

I need this girl, my fucking girl, and I will take until she tells me to stop.

I grab her by the waist, lift her off my lap, and twist her over onto her back to lay her down on the couch.

I readjust to straddle her hips and reach down to remove her arm. She lets me and her tits splay to the side slightly as they are released giving me a full view of her fucking glorious full tits and little dusky rose-colored nipples pulled taut and begging for my mouth.

My God, I'll never let this one go, I promise myself.

She's fucking perfect with her hair a halo of dark curls surrounding her and her chest heaving as I stare at her.

I dive in without a word, unable to stop myself.

Chapter 29

Cat

Noah's eyes are wide taking me in. His pupils are blown wide and the sea green of his irises are a dark glittering storm.

He straddles me and stares down, possessive and wanting in a way that makes my insides tingle. My core is on fire and my panties are soaked.

He lowers his mouth to my nipple suddenly and covers the entire thing with his mouth in a long slow pull followed by a soft lick to soothe the burn.

I gasp at the sensation.

Oh my God, oh my God, this is crazy.

I have never felt this out of control of my actions, my body running on pure instincts.

Noah trails wet kisses from one nipple, down my cleavage and back up to my neck before kissing all the way back over the mound of my opposite breast to the other nipple.

That feels so good.

How can it feel so good and he isn't even touching the part of me that aches the most for him?

His tongue curls around my areola slowly before sucking the tip in softly like a kiss.

His hands come up each of my sides and prop my breasts up for easy access. He licks and sucks and kneads them, alternating between them like he is starving and isn't sure what to eat first.

I am panting and wanton, squirming underneath him and wishing his cock was against me and not below, just out of reach.

Noah presses my tits together with his big warm hands and takes both of my nipples in his mouth at the same time. I gasp as a bolt of lightning radiates to my core.

Jesus. A moan escapes me and my back arches for more.

“You are so beautiful, Baby.” He whispers against me and the need to feel him takes over me.

I grab his shirt and tug and he sits up on his knees reaching behind his back, and pulling it up with one hand over his head.

His torso is a fucking masterpiece and I can't help myself as I place my hands on his abs that quiver under my touch and slide up over his pecs to grab his shoulders. I squeeze the muscles that bulge there and slide my hands to his huge biceps. My hand doesn't even come close to wrapping around them so I caress the sculpted bulges before wrapping around the back to squeeze the muscles that fill my hands back there.

“I need to feel you.” I pant, moving down to unbutton his jeans frantically.

He makes room for me to unzip and I reach in to stroke his cock in his boxers. The skin is soft and velvety, encasing a rock-hard cock. My fingertips barely meet when I wrap them around him.

This is my man. I revel in the thought.

I circle a finger around his cushy tip before brushing my thumb against the top to feel a small drop of wetness that glides like silk.

He takes my hand away gently kissing my palm and brings his arms down to the couch by my sides, his warm chest brushes against my hard nipples. He holds himself up as he slides his legs in between mine and I wrap my legs around his ass and pull him toward me, slamming his warmth into my burning core and grasping the back of his neck to bring him down for a deep kiss.

We moan together and I find myself rubbing against his cock through his boxers without thinking to ease the pressure.

He groans like he's in pain from the contact and I wonder if I'm hurting him. I release his neck and pull back to look at him.

“Are you ok?” I ask tentatively not wanting to break the moment.

“I’m fucking on fire, Cat. Are you ok?” he questions softly before sliding his lips to my neck again.

“I need you.” I answer with the only thing that comes to mind.

“Let me touch you, please Cat.” He pleads into my neck.

“Yes.” I respond wanting that more right now than anything I’ve ever wanted.

He pushes back to his knees and reaches for my zipper frantically undoing my shorts and grasping them around the back to pull. I lift my hips and he pulls up, my legs coming together in front of him. He pulls my shorts off fully, tossing them aside and I place my legs around him again.

He stares down at my soaked panties and I feel embarrassment color my cheeks.

He places a full hand over my mound and rubs possessively. My body tingles and I can feel nothing but that now.

I reach down wanting to feel his cock again, but it’s out of reach.

“So fucking wet for me, Babe” he muses, looking entranced.

He hooks a finger in my panties and pulls them to the side for a peek. I steel my courage and let him.

I’m ready. I want this. I need him.

Chapter 30

Noah

I look down to her tiny red cotton panties and revel in the huge wet spot at her core.

So hot, so perfect.

I can't help but cover the spot with my hand to feel her wetness. She quivers at my touch.

"So fucking wet for me, Babe" I stare in awe at what I can do to this beautiful being.

I slowly peel her soaking wet panties to the side, needing to see her for the first time. As I do, her sweet smell invades my senses and a perfect rosy pink pussy comes into view.

I let go immediately, before I can't stop myself, and look up to the ceiling as my eyes roll back in my head and I can't stop the groan that escapes my lips.

I want her so fucking bad. All of her. I don't remember ever feeling this pull to have anyone so strongly.

My hand reaches to cup her mound again and as I look into her eyes, I feel trapped, ensnared by her.

"I can't stop." I admit, my pained voice comes out pleading.

My cock is trying to escape the opening in my boxers and my balls ache for her.

"Please don't stop." She replies panting.

That's a green light if I've ever heard one and it's like my ignition sparks and I come to life.

I grasp her panties and pull them off as I did with her shorts and as her legs splay, I look at her completely.

Her pussy is bare and soft and the pretty puffy lips glisten with moisture. I slide two fingers down her slit to open her up and feel her silky pink center gently.

My other hand slides up to circle her nipple with my fingers.

She arches her back at the contact and moans.

I want to make her feel so good. This is her first time being touched like this, I need to keep it slow.

I bring the moisture from my fingers to her little hood and massage the nub underneath in soft circles.

My chest heaves as I hold back to these soft explorations. My cock is throbbing painfully.

I'm sorry but I have to touch her. I apologize to my angry dick.

I bring my stare back to her face and her brow furrows with pleasure as she writhes against my touch.

Her sweet smell envelopes me and my mouth waters. I bring my hand to her jaw and I lean over and whisper in her ear.

“I want to taste you.” I confess while still circling her clit.

She nods with her eyes closed and I kiss her neck and slide my lips down to her breasts for a soft nibble to each, I kiss below her belly button and then her pelvis before sliding down and moving my fingers out of the way for a wet kiss on her now swollen clit.

She cries out in surprise.

So fucking responsive.

It's intoxicating.

I flick my tongue out and start to circle her clit and get a hint of her tart honeyed flavor.

I want more.

My hips grind the couch, out of my control, as I slide my fingers up to spread her lips and swipe up, pressing my full tongue from bottom to top slowly to get my fill of her.

Her flavor invades my mouth and my whole body burns and tingles with one taste. She's mine.

Mine. Mine. Mine. Repeats in my head as I start to devour her.

I dip my tongue inside her and she gasps as her hands slide into my hair. I slurp at her juices and bring her silky rose petal lips into mine and suck.

“Oh my God.” She whispers as her legs begin to shake closed.

I place my hands at her thighs and spread her wide, licking up her opening to clasp her clit in my lips and suck.

I lift my hips and slide one hand down my boxers to my cock, needing to relieve the pressure before he explodes, and start pumping slowly.

She writhes and presses my face into her and I’m in Heaven as I begin to pulsate my sucks steadily and bring my hand back out from my boxers to her slit.

I push one finger inside and I feel cum traveling to my tip as my cock weeps in jealousy at the warmth and tightness surrounding my finger.

She cries out pulling my hair at the intrusion but pushing her pelvis into my hand. I slide my finger in further and pull out slowly a few pumps as wetness gathers around it.

Yes, get wet for me, Baby.

I ease up on the pressure at her clit and swirl it with my tongue as I add another finger slowly. She’s so fucking tight.

I pump my fingers softly, entranced at the wet sucking noises her pussy is giving me, and she cries out in in pleading tone.

“Oh, Babe, yes. Please.”

She’s close. I need her to cum. For my own selfish fucking pleasure.

I curl my fingers up and rub at her g-spot as I suck her clit into my mouth hard.

“Oh my fucking god!” her voice crescendos.

Her pelvis starts to rocket up from the couch and I hold her down tightly with the hand still on her thigh. I rub the upper wall of her pussy faster as her back arches and she screams out in pleasure.

“Noah!”

Her wetness gushes down my hand as she comes. It’s the hottest fucking thing I have ever seen in my entire life.

“Fucking beautiful.” I whisper reverently as she relaxes and I slide my fingers out gently to look up into her eyes.

Chapter 31

Cat

I come down from my high and look down to find him staring at me with eyes burning in need.

He just gave me the best orgasm of my life and I want so badly to do the same for him. Not because I have to, but because I want to. Need to.

To show him the things I have yet to put into words even when I know what's in my heart. Maybe it's stupid and crazy, but I love him. He makes me feel special, and beautiful, and so damn wanted.

He climbs up my body and uses one arm to hover over me as his other slides in his boxers and begins pumping.

“I need you, Cat.” He whispers in my ear.

“I know, Babe, I'm yours.” I respond pushing him back to his knees and sitting up with my legs still splayed around him. I reach for his boxers to lower them and his pants a little for easier access. His cock bursts free with his hand surrounding it still pumping.

So fucking hot.

I replace his hand with mine and feel the wetness he must have spread from me to him.

Oh my God, that's filthy – so why is it so fucking hot?

I start to pump slowly using my wetness as lubrication.

He hisses as he kisses me lightly on my neck and shoulders while bringing his hands to cup my breasts and rubbing my nipples with his thumbs.

“Yes, Cat. Just like that. You feel so good all over my cock.” He whispers.

He likes it too. My belly tingles with warmth at his encouragement.

The glide in my pumps starts to pull as the wetness dries and as I take my hand off to reach and swipe my pussy with a full hand for more. Noah looks down to see why I've stopped.

"Holy shit, Baby, yes." He whispers in an awed voice.

I grasp him with freshly coated fingers and begin to pump again.

He jolts at my touch with a shiver. I see goosebumps prick up the skin of his arm and I lean to kiss him on his bicep as I continue pumping. I travel up his arm and across his shoulder to his neck with soft kisses as he moans loudly.

He pinches my nipples softly and it makes me pick up my pace and grasp tightly while pumping.

I suck on his neck sharply before soothing it with a lick.

His back snaps straight and he grasps my breasts tightly and squeezes.

"Oh Fuuuuck!"

He growls and I feel his warm cum coat my belly between us in sporadic bursts. His body loosens and I let my hand do the same when I know he's finished.

He is still breathing fast when his hand strokes up my spine softly under my hair and his fingers glide into the hair at my nape cupping my head. He leans back from me and takes my lips in his in a bruising kiss while tugging at the roots of my hair.

He lets go after a long kiss and looks into my eyes, searching.

"That was the hottest fucking thing I have ever done." He says firmly.

I chuckle and blush looking down at the mess. He joins my stare and jumps up, tucking his cock back in and zipping up.

"Sorry Baby, I'll get a towel." He says walking quickly to his bathroom.

I stare at the cum coating my belly in wonder as I hear the sink turn on. I dip a finger through it and rub it between my

fingertips. *I've never seen cum up close before, I wonder what it tastes like*, I muse.

Noah walks back out and I put my hand back down quickly so he doesn't think I'm a weirdo as he walks up to me and hands me a damp towel.

"Thanks." I say feeling myself blush as I wipe myself down and clean my hands.

Sex is messy, but amazing.

I look for my clothes which are scattered all over his sitting area. Noah helps me gather my things and I get dressed as he finishes as well.

We both move to sit back on the couch. I snuggle into his side and he brushes his fingertips through my hair as I lay my head on his shoulder looking at the view of trees and water through the window.

"So, it was ok?" I ask feeling a bit insecure in my skills. I mean, he came, but still...

"Holy fuck, Cat. That was so much better than ok." He says with vehemence.

"Wasn't it?" he asks shyly now.

"Well, I thought so, but I've never done that before." I say softly with a shrug.

"Something like that can never be replicated, Babe. With you, it's like fucking magic..." He says his words drifting off.

I look up to him with a smile he returns.

"No, we're real, remember?" I remind him. His grin spreads and his dimple pops.

"Damn straight, Little Cat." He replies with a kiss.

Chapter 32

Noah

After stewing over it all weekend, I decide that what Cat doesn't know won't hurt her.

Becca crossed a line and I need to make it clear that her petty bullshit is not gonna fly. The cheerleading team practices in the mornings while we do, and just seeing her across the fields, bitching it up to her friends pisses me off more.

I approach her after our morning practice on Monday, making sure she is surrounded by her entire crew.

"Hi, Noah. Looking good out there! I can't wait to see you at the game." She says as I walk up.

"Cut the shit Becca. I know what you did to Cat and if you think I'm gonna let that go you really are fucking nuts."

She rears back not expecting my outburst and blushes.

"It was an accident, Noah! And come on, she's a nobody anyways. Why do you care?"

So she's denying and admitting she did it on purpose in the same sentence. What a crazy bitch.

"She's my girlfriend. Period. And if you continue to try shit with her, you will know what it's like to be a nobody. You get me?"

She fiddles with her ponytail and her friends look on with horrified gazes at our conversation.

"Noah, come on, it's not that big of a deal."

"It is to me. Back the fuck off. All of you. Cat is off limits, and Sabrina too. If I hear any of you are causing problems, you will regret it."

They all look down or to Becca who is trying to keep her composure in front of her squad.

“Got it, Noah. Just don’t come back to me when you get bored with her.” She says trying to save face.

“I *never* came to you before, and I never will. You stick to your fake bullshit life and I’ll keep on living my life without a second thought.”

I say leaning in so I don’t embarrass her by announcing that to the whole crowd. She huffs and I turn to head to class.

Problem solved.



Friday approaches quickly as life becomes a satisfying routine of school, football, the newspaper, and Cat. Honestly, I don’t know what I did with my time before her. I feel like I fill every open moment with her, or talking to her, or thinking about her. I’m fucking besotted.

We finished up our article and I approved the final draft for printing this weekend.

I’ve also been helping Cat practice driving now that she got her permit. She was really hesitant to drive the Land Rover but after I told her repeatedly I don’t give a shit about the car she relented.

I’m up early, filling the blender with ingredients for a breakfast smoothie for Cat and I. I told her I would come pick her up today since we don’t have practice the day of a game.

My dad walks in with his briefcase and sets it on the counter.

“Morning, Son.” He says in his bored tone.

“Hey.” I reply turning back to the blender.

“Your mother and I have decided to throw you a party for your birthday. It will be here, two Sundays from now. Feel free to invite some friends, but keep the list short. There will be some business associates here that will want to speak with you.”

I flip the switch on the blender in annoyance.

How generous, I can invite a few friends to my own birthday party.

So basically, he is throwing a business party that happens to be on my birthday.

“Alright.” I answer simply.

“Also, your mother and I are heading to Dallas for the weekend. I have a meeting and your mother likes the shopping there. We fly out at two and we will be back Sunday night.”

“Sounds good.” I reply.

Guess ya’ll won’t be at the game, as usual.

“Good, I’m headed out then.” He says grabbing his briefcase and walking out without another word.

Nice talk, Dad, hope I have a great game too, asshole.

He probably forgot I was even playing today.

Fuck ‘em.

I’m gonna kill it anyway because I heard there will be some scouts out tonight. I want that full ride so I don’t have to rely on my dad for school. I don’t want him holding that shit against me to try to get me to be his little puppet. I need to make it on my own so he has no say over my studies. I’m not taking over his business, no matter what he thinks, or who he makes me meet.

I pour the smoothies into a couple travel tumblers, and head out to get my girl.



I knock on the door with the drinks nestled in my arm and Amelia answers, dressed for work.

Posey runs around behind her yelling about shoes and she waves me in, with an exasperated look.

“Come on, Posey, we are running late!” she yells to her daughter. She looks back to me with a smile.

“Morning Noah, it’s a good thing you came to pick Cat up today. We are having issues this morning.” She says gesturing to Posey who hops on one foot while trying to put on her shoe.

“Usually, I drop her off early and come back for Cat since you guys start an hour later. That obviously wasn’t happening today.” She explains.

“My pleasure, Mrs. Bennett. Is she ready?” I ask, looking around for Cat.

“I’m not sure, make yourself comfortable, we need to get going.” She replies.

“I’m getting in the car Posey!” she warns walking to the open doorway. Posey grabs her backpack and runs by me with a wave.

“Bye, Noah!” she yells breezing out the door.

“Bye!” I yell with a wave.

Amelia waves back and walks out, closing the door behind her.

I look around the empty house and wonder if I should wait here for Cat in case she’s not ready. I mean, I’ve already seen her naked so...

Oh, fuck it.

I walk up the stairs and knock on her door. She doesn’t answer so I open the door and walk in as she walks out of the bathroom wrapped in a towel and her hair wet and dripping in tight waves around her shoulders.

“Ahhh!” she screams grabbing her towel tightly at her chest. I laugh and place the drinks on her dresser.

“Oh my God, you scared the shit out of me, Noah!”

“Sorry, Babe.” I chuckle walking up to her for a kiss.

“Amelia let me in, they had to go, they were running late.” I explain.

“You’re early.” She states stepping back.

“I hope you aren’t planning on wearing that to school. I can’t get into any fights before the game.” I warn smiling down at her towel. She laughs.

“That occurred to me as well, I was just thinking maybe I should change...” she teases.

I growl and grab her by the waist, kissing her damp neck.

“You look like a fucking wet dream.” I breathe into her skin.

She chuckles in her raspy voice and pushes me back with a hand on my chest.

“Behave.” She warns.

I step back smiling as I grab her drink.

“Always, Babe. I’m the picture-perfect boyfriend. I even brought you breakfast.” I say waving it at her.

She walks up to grab it and takes a sip.

“Yum, strawberry banana.” She says taking it with her to walk into her closet.

I trail like a puppy dog, hoping the towel drops like scraps.

She comes out holding some clothes and places them on the bed. I inspect the jeans and a football tee that it looks like she doctored up to make more comfortable. The neck and hemlines at the bottom and sleeves have been cut off and look frayed at the edges.

My Little Rebel.

I smile as I lift it up turning it around to inspect it further and notice that my number has been ironed on the back. My chest tightens at the meaning.

She will be there, she supports me, she’s proud of me.

“I like what you’ve done.” I say softly.

“Good, it took a while but I like how it came out.” She says easily, not knowing how this gesture affects me.

“I love it. I love you.” I respond with intensity as I drop the shirt back to the bed and rush her wrapping her up in a tight

hold.

“It’s just a shirt, Noah.” She laughs.

“It’s so much more than that, Baby.” I counter squeezing her tight. She squeals.

“Noah! I have to get ready!”

I let her go laughing with a full heart.

Chapter 33

Cat

“You’re gonna do great.” I assure a very nervous Sabrina at the side gate to enter the field.

The stands are packed and a microphone stands in the middle of the field bathed in lights in front of us as she stares at it with trepidation.

“Um hmm.” She mumbles knotting her school jersey in her hands.

She wears it with jeans and it’s a smaller women’s size that’s more fitted than what she usually wears, showing off her figure. Her thick brown hair is down, a blue ribbon tied around with a little bow on top to match our white and blue school colors. She looks great.

The band starts playing in the background.

“Hey, you look great, you practiced all week, you’re ready.” I assure her.

“I’m scared.” She whispers.

“The whole school is here and even my parents insisted on coming.”

The overhead speakers blare as they announce the players onto the field. The fans roar as they come running out.

“Then everyone that matters is here to support you. Forget about everyone else. You want that spot, Sabrina?”

“Yes.” She answers a little stronger.

“Then do it for you. Get out there and show them what you’re made of, girl. I’ll be right here waiting for you when you finish.” I say trying to pump her up

“Time to take your place, Sabrina.” Her choir teacher says as she opens the gate from the other side. Sabrina takes a deep breath and smiles at me.

“Wish me luck!” she says as she follows her teacher in.

“Good luck!” I yell at her back as she walks down the field.

A helmet snaps in my direction from the sidelines and I spot my number 12 waving at me. I wave back with a huge smile blowing him a kiss.

Good luck to you too, Babe.

Luca stands beside him, his eyes locked on Sabrina walking to the microphone.

“And now, performing the national anthem, SABRINA TREVOR!!” The announcer booms as everyone stands and covers their hearts. I cover mine reverently and silence descends before Sabrina starts softly in a beautiful haunting tone.

“Oh-oh say can you see...”

She sounds beautiful and tears prick my eyes as she continues gaining strength and confidence as she crescendos. She’s fucking killing it.

“and the rocket’s red glaaare...”

She belts out and goosebumps prick my arms. Oh my God, she is really fucking good! And her rendition embellishes all the right parts perfectly. I don’t think I have ever heard a better version in real life before.

“Oh-oh-oh say does that star spangled, banner yet waaaave...”

She holds the note without a waver in her beautiful voice. This fucking song always gets me. I wipe a tear at the words of the song and her haunting voice doing it justice.

“and the home, of the braaaave...”

The crowd fucking loses their minds cheering and I can’t help but jump up and down screaming.

“YAAAS GIRL!!!”

She beams at the crowd and then puts her head down to cover her face with her hair, walking quickly back in my

direction.

As she passes the sidelines Luca grabs her arm and she stops, looking up at him with wide eyes as he tells her something.

Terrance and Noah come up and pat her in congratulations and she laughs and runs back to the gate smiling at me.

“Holy shit, Sabrina! That was fucking amazing!”

“Thank you! Oh my God, I was so nervous!” she gushes smiling.

“You killed it. Best version I have ever heard, easy. That spot is yours girl!”

Just as I say that, her choir teacher walks to the gate with a smile.

“Great job, Sabrina. See you bright and early Monday.” She says with a wink before walking back to the teachers on the sideline.

Sabrina looks at me with wide eyes and squeals before pulling me to a huge hug and jumping us up and down. I laugh at her excitement. I’m so fucking happy for her.

“Come on. Game time!” I say and we walk in to find a seat.



The student section is packed and I’m having a hard time following the game, but I know we are winning.

Everyone boos and Sabrina does the same as I look around in confusion.

“What happened?” I ask her.

“That should have been a pass interference that would have been a touchdown!” she says angrily speaking some weird football language.

“What is that, and how do you know about this stuff?” I ask shocked.

“I thought you don’t come to the games?”

“I don’t, but my dad played for UT, so I pretty much grew up watching football. It’s really fun, actually.”

“I don’t get it. I’m so confused.” I say wishing I knew how to cheer for my man properly.

“It’s easy, I’ll teach you.” She says with a smile.

She spends rest of the half – yes, now I know there are two halves and four quarters – teaching me the game and explaining the rules and pointing out penalties.

The players go in for halftime with us up by 10 and I scream down to Noah as he walks by our section.

“GOOD JOB, BABY!” he looks up and beams at me as he walks into the tunnel.

“This is really fun now that I know what’s going on.” I say to Sabrina surprised.

“See I told you!”

People mill about while the halftime show starts. Sabrina and I chit-chat and get interrupted every now and then by students I don’t know praising Sabrina and she thanks them shyly as we continue talking.

“DOLLFACE!” a huge man booms walking up to us with a tiny woman beside him.

They are obviously Sabrina’s parents and I smile at her when she blushes. He sweeps her up into a huge hug and lifts her up while her mom laughs.

“Stop Dad! You’re embarrassing me!” she whines as he puts her feet back down.

“You killed it, Dollface. Brought a tear to my eye.” He beams at her.

“So good, sweetheart. I’m really proud of you.” Her mom says with glistening blue eyes just like Sabrina’s.

“Thanks guys, this is my friend Cat I told ya’ll about.” She says gesturing to me. I stand and shake their hands.

“Nice to meet you guys.” I say smiling. They seem really nice.

We finish talking to them and they head back to their seats as the second half begins.

I enjoy watching the rest of the game knowing when to cheer, and when to boo, but it’s pretty one sided. We are killing the other team. My man is a fucking machine and I’m so proud of him when the game ends 34-14. The crowd starts to thin and I look to Sabrina.

“You ready for this party?” I ask her nervously.

“We gotta be, I guess. Come on, let’s grab some burgers first, and then we can go be social.” She says as she stands.

Ugh, I hate being social.



We finish off our food at Danny’s and start to head to the party. I text Noah to make sure he is already there before we show up. I don’t want to walk in there if he’s not there to field off the assholes for us.

I can take care of myself, but I’m not in the mood tonight. My man just had a great game and I want to be in a good mood when I see him.

“Hey do you want to stay at my house after the party?” Sabrina offers as she drives.

“Actually, that would probably be better. It will probably be late, and I don’t want to wake Posey when I get in.” I agree.

I take my phone back out and send a quick text to Amelia letting her know the change in plans.

“She seems to have taken to you.” Sabrina comments and I smile at the thought.

“Yea, she has. She’s kinda awesome. Growing up alone was just always my norm, you know?”

Sabrina nods with a sad smile.

“It’s nice to have someone that relies on you and wants you to be around just for being you.” I admit.

“I get that. I’m embarrassingly close to my parents and I don’t know what it would be like without them. I’m glad you found your place here, Cat.”

“I’ve never had any real friends either. It’s cool.”

“The guys are nicer than I expected. It’s weird having this image of people and learning that they aren’t what you thought at all.” She comments trailing off.

“Well you were exactly who I thought you were when I met you and there is nothing wrong with that. I feel like I got two sisters moving here. No matter what happens.”

She smiles at me and her big blue eyes twinkle a little.

“I’ve always wanted a sister.” She says wholeheartedly.

“Well, we both got something we wanted then.” I say seriously before trying to lighten the mood.

“Let’s go blow these assholes minds, Sis. It’s time to fuck shit up.”

She laughs and turns up the music, and we sing along to the radio like idiots the rest of the way there.

Chapter 34

Noah

I scan the crowd at the party looking for my girl. She texted ten minutes ago saying they were on their way.

The team is pumped and are chugging back beers but I want to stay sober for Cat and Sabrina.

I spot a head of huge dark curls and a brunette with a blue ribbon through the crowd and I smile walking over.

I see Becca roll her eyes as she looks to the door and I scowl in her direction. I won't hesitate to get her ass thrown out of here.

One of guys on defense is the one that throws this party every year. His parents are fucking loaded and never around. He's cool, and I know he's got my back. Becca knows the score now, she better not act up.

I finally make it to them and wrap my girl in a huge hug.

"Congrats, Babe! You did so good!" Cat yells through the music.

"Great game, Noah. That 30-yard pass to Luca was impressive." Sabrina says.

I'm surprised until I remember who her dad is. Adam Trevor is a fucking legend in this town.

"Thanks for cheering me on guys, I appreciate it." I say realizing that not only did Cat come to support me, but Sabrina did too, and that's two more people rooting for me than I've ever had before.

"So, this is an after party, huh?" Cat asks looking around unimpressed and I laugh.

"This is it, yeah. Come on let's go out back, it's quieter."

We walk closer to the bar and I ask them if they want anything.

“Just a water.” Cat says.

“I’ll take a beer.” Sabrina says and we look at her surprised.

“What? This is my first party, and probably my last, so I need the full experience.” She explains. I chuckle at her reasoning.

“Fair enough, be right back.” I walk to the bar and grab two bottled waters and an unopened can of beer for Sabrina. I don’t trust these fuckers handing out open cups of beer from the keg.

I hand them their drinks and lead them out to the pool area outside. It’s much quieter, as promised, and we chat about the game as we sip our drinks until Terrance bounds up to us smiling with Luca trailing.

“Ya’ll having fun?” he asks them.

He obviously is, he is slurring a bit but he’s not sloppy yet.

“Yea, it’s okay.” Cat responds “Not as bad as I expected” she adds.

“The music is good.” Sabrina supplies, taking a sip of her beer.

“You did great tonight.” Luca says to her and she blushes.

“Thanks, you too.” She says softly. “All of you did amazing.” She adds quickly.

“You’re drinking?” he asks smoothly pointing to the beer in her hand as if he doesn’t care but I recognize the slight concern in his tone.

“Just the one.” She answers easily.

“I have to drive.”

He nods as he takes a sip from his water eyeing her can warily.

Luca never drinks. I’ve asked him why a few times but he just says he doesn’t like it.

“You killed that anthem, girl. I didn’t know you had that in you.” Terrance says bumping Sabrina’s shoulder.

She blushes and Cat jumps in, noticing her friend is embarrassed.

“Well, I thoroughly enjoyed the game guys. Sabrina taught me the rules. Who knew something so people-y could be so fun.”

My heart warms at her words and Terrance busts out laughing at her unashamed antisocial remark.

“You’re a trip, Little Firecracker.”

We continue to talk and laugh for a while and enjoy the fresh air out here.

“Oh, hey! Apparently the parentals are throwing a party for my 18th birthday. Ya’ll all have to come.” I cut in.

“Oooo a fancy party to celebrate the Caldwell heir.”

Cat smiles to me as the guys look at me in confusion. Maybe I haven’t been totally transparent about my lack of a relationship with my parents to Cat. She just makes it so easy to forget about that when I’m around her.

“Fancy business party, more like. But I can invite some close friends so I want ya’ll there.” I say with a shrug.

Cat looks at me with her brows furrowed and Luca steps in.

“I’ll be there, man.”

“It’s not a party without me.” Terrance supplies.

I look to the girls in question.

“You know I’ll be there.” Cat responds with a soft smile.

She gets it. She always does. She’s fucking amazing.

“I’d be happy to go, Noah. Thanks for inviting me.” Sabrina answers with a small grin.

“Cool, so the no douchebags club will be in full effect. It’s a fancy deal so let’s see who can dress best.” I wink at them and they all grumble.

“So, I’m older than you.” Cat teases.

“Only by a month, and I have bigger muscles so it doesn’t count.” I joke back. She slaps my chest and laughs.

It feels amazing to be able to relax and enjoy this win with Cat by my side. I wrap my arm around her and kiss her temple as the others talk. She looks up at me and I kiss her softly.

“Thank you for coming tonight.” I whisper in her ear.

“Of course.” She answers simply.

“I’ll go get us some more drinks.” I offer when I see everyone getting low.

“Same for everyone?”

Luca’s eyes dart to Sabrina without moving his head.

“Water for me please.” She says not noticing his interest.

“Be right back, Babe.” I say giving Cat a kiss.

I make eye contact with Luca and gesture toward the girls with an eyebrow. He nods slightly.

Good looking out, bro.

He will watch out for them. I nod back and make my way to the bar through the crowd.

Chapter 35

Cat

Noah walks to get our drinks and I notice the crowd is much thicker than it was earlier. He may be a while.

I chat with Sabrina and the guys for a couple of minutes until Terrance gets pulled away by some red head.

Just then, I'm bumped from the side by a very drunk Devin. *Ugh not this asshole.*

He looks down at me with wobbly eyes until his vision seems to clear and a grin spreads wide on his face. He looks around quickly at our group, no doubt scanning for Noah, and back to me.

"QB lost interest already?" he asks

"That's alright, you can party with me sweetness, I wanna celebrate." He says with a smarmy smile, saddling his huge body up close to me.

"Noah's getting drinks, man." Luca supplies.

"Perfect timing then." he says, taking a strand of my hair in his fingertips.

I swat his hand away.

"Get lost, Devin. You know I'm with Noah" I say narrowing my eyes at him.

He sways a bit looking at me.

"It's a shame. I told him to leave the scraps to the little guys. He didn't listen."

I'm nobody's scraps, asshole.

"Fuck. You." I respond simply.

He doesn't even deserve the attention it would take to argue with him. He's drunk as fuck and not worth it on a good day.

He narrows his eyes at me leaning closer and I can smell the beer on his angry breaths. My skin prickles with past

memories of drunken foster-dads trying to get handsy.

“Hey man, get back.” Luca says grabbing his shoulder to pull him back from my space.

“Grab some water or something, dude. Chill.”

Devin slaps his hand off him and turns drunkenly around to face him with his back to me, as if cutting me out of the conversation.

“Your right, she ain’t worth the trouble.” He says shrugging.

“This one’s looking better tonight anyways.” He says nodding to Sabrina.

Her eyes widen and she shakes her head unconsciously as she takes a step toward Luca who puffs up all of a sudden.

“Back up, dude, I’m serious.” Luca says still trying to salvage this shit show but with a new edge to his voice.

I look to Sabrina and she looks back at me with fear in her eyes. I know that look, I’ve felt it before, and now I’m pissed that Sabrina is feeling it too.

This fucker has crossed the line.

“You looking to let loose tonight, Books? Come on, let me show you around.”

He stumbles toward her reaching for her hand. She shuffles back a few steps to avoid his grasp with terrified eyes and Luca strikes his palm out fast as a fucking rattlesnake and pushes him back firmly.

Devin struggles to keep his balance.

“Don’t.” he warns lowly. His usual casual demeanor has changed to 100 percent pissed.

Well this is going to shit, fast.

People start to stare at the scene.

“What the fuck, man?” He whispers conspiratorially to Luca.

“Books wants to have a good time, and I’m in the mood for some cherry popping, if you know what I mean.”

Obviously, this guy can't read a room and I've had enough. My "East Side" is ready to rock.

Luca balls his fists but I kick the back of Devin's knee out from behind him before he can throw a punch and he drunkenly topples to the ground.

Luca stumbles back throwing an arm out to protect Sabrina from his huge falling body.

Timber, motherfucker.

Devin snaps his head up to me and gets up, faster than I expected a giant drunk guy to be able to, and gets in my face.

"You fucking bitch." He snarls at me.

Chapter 36

Noah

I push through the crowd that seems to be watching something by the pool which is the direction I'm headed.

What the hell is going on?

I elbow my way through, getting worried that something happened to Cat.

I break through the crowd in time to see Luca with an arm in front of Sabrina protectively and my pulse ratchets up as I scan for Cat.

She's a few feet back and Devin is jumping up from the ground and rushing her. I see red.

I drop all the drinks and start to run at his side as I hear him call Cat a bitch. I growl like a fucking animal as I drop my shoulder and ram into him. He falls to the floor and I hover over him.

"Get the fuck away from her." I say in a deadly tone.

He pushes at my chest with a scowl and lumbers to his feet.

"She's fucking trash, man. You're gonna fight me over this bitch?" he whines incredulously.

Luca walks to my side looking unhinged and I see Terrance make his way through the crowd with a concerned face to come up behind us.

I glance back at Cat who is staring with wide eyes and her hand on her chest.

"You ok?" I ask her and she nods.

He's fucking lucky.

I look back to Devin whose wide eyes are cautiously darting between me, Luca, and Terrance.

"Nah, I'm not gonna fight you." He drops his shoulders in relief.

“We are done. I’m tired of your bullshit. Stay the fuck away from me. And if I hear you come anywhere near my girl again, we *will* be fighting Dev, you can bet on that.”

“Your girl.” He scoffs as I begin to walk away.

“Hope she’s worth it, you’re gonna have a hard time getting that full ride without a guard, asshole.”

I whip back around and get in his face.

“Try some shit on the field, motherfucker. Everyone here heard what you said. One conversation with Coach and you’re the one that’s gonna be missing that ride when u get kicked off the team. You get me?” I warn with a low voice.

“Whatever man, I don’t need you.” He says stumbling back.

“I need a fucking beer. Fuck ya’ll.” He slurs walking off.

I keep my eyes on him and stay grounded to my spot until I can’t see him through the crowd anymore.

I’m done with these fake ass people. Being with Cat, hanging with real friends has made me realize I don’t need them. If anything, they need me and I’m not catering to their egos anymore.

Everyone around us has started milling around again as I walk back to Cat who is standing next to Sabrina with a hand on her shoulder and speaking softly to her.

“Are ya’ll ok?” Luca and Terrance walk up to flank us.

“Yea, we are gonna head out though.” Cat says with an apologetic look.

Fucking Devin, always ruins everything, It’s still early.

“Hey can I talk to you real quick?” Luca asks Sabrina and she nods walking off a bit with him.

“Crazy shit, bro. I’m gonna go grab a beer.” Terrance says and walks toward the house shaking his head.

I turn back to Cat.

“It’s okay, Baby. I get it. I’m sorry this happened.” I tell her.

“Me too.”

“What happened?” I ask her and she relays the story quickly.

I fume at what Devin said to her and Sabrina but laugh out loud when she tells me she kicked him over. She laughs too and then we hear her phone ping. She brings it out and scans a text with her brows furrowed.

“What?” I can’t deal with any more bad news.

“Sabrina says she is going for a ride with Luca?” she states more like a question looking around the crowd for them.

“I should call her, just to be sure. Devin is still lurking around and I didn’t like the way he was looking at her.” I nod in agreement as she dials the number and brings the phone to her ear.

“Hey girl, just making sure I read your text right.” She waits and I listen in on the one-sided conversation while texting Luca.

Me: Hey u with Sabrina?

Luca: Yea I’ve got her. I’ll make sure she gets home safe.

Me: OK bro, just making sure.

Luca: NP. Good looking out.

Me: Yeah, u 2. TTYL

Cat and I both drop our phones in our pockets at the same time and she narrows her eyes at me.

“Something is going on with them.” She says accusingly. I laugh.

“Maybe, but that’s their business. You’re mine. And I hear you need a ride.” I reply with a smirk.

“It appears I do.” She says with a smile.

“Let’s get the fuck out of here.” I suggest.

“Yes please.”

I grab her by the hand and walk her around the house to get to the car easier.

“Hey it’s still early. You sure you wanna go home now?” I ask hoping she wants to stay out a bit longer.

“Maybe we can practice driving in the dark a little.”

“Oh shit.” She says stopping short.

“What’s wrong?”

“I totally forgot I was supposed to stay at Sabrina’s tonight. I didn’t want to come in late and wake Posey.”

I remember then what my dad said about them leaving for the weekend.

“Um, well... My parents are out of the town for the weekend if you want to crash at my place.”

She looks up at me in surprise.

“Um, okay, that would work, I guess...” she hesitates.

“No pressure, Cat. I can take you to Sabrina’s later too if that would be better.” I say softly.

She looks down at the ground, chewing her cheek, and thinks for a second.

“No, your place is good.” She says looking up at me with resolution

“Ok.” I say coming in for a quick peck at her lips.

“Let’s go.”

Chapter 37

Cat

Butterflies are tumbling around my stomach as we walk into Noah's dark, empty house. I was not expecting to stay with him tonight and Noah looks a little nervous as well as he runs his fingers through his hair.

"Are you hungry? You want a drink or something?" he asks to stall.

"No, I'm fine."

"You want to put on a movie? I have a theater upstairs, after all." He jokes

I laugh at his attempt to break the tension.

"Sure, sounds good." I answer with a smile.

We walk up to his media room and he sets everything up while I sit on the couch and look around. The house is so quiet and I begin to wonder why his parents had to leave for the weekend. He's the quarterback, so I'm assuming they are pretty proud of him and wouldn't miss his first game if it wasn't important. On the other hand, he seemed a bit weird when he mentioned his birthday coming up like it was more business than pleasure for his parents.

Noah comes to sit beside me placing the remote down on the table in front of us and sitting back to place his arm around my shoulders. I settle in against him as some comedy movie starts up. We watch for a bit until curiosity gets the best of me.

"Is everything okay with your parents?" I ask and he looks down at me surprised.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, they are gone and had to miss your first game. I was just hoping everything was ok."

He snorts.

“Yeah, they are fine. Shopping and networking in Dallas apparently.” He says with an edge to his tone.

“So, they just left? There wasn’t an emergency or anything?” I’m confused.

“Not unless you count a sale at Nordstrom as an emergency.” He says sarcastically.

“Well, that’s kind of shitty.” I comment.

“Pretty normal really.” He answers.

I search his eyes for an explanation. His eyes soften at my stare before he continues.

“They never come to my games, Cat.”

I rear my head back in shock.

“Never? Not one?”

That’s fucking ridiculous.

“Nope, you were my first spectator.” He says quietly pushing my hair back from my neck and brushing his thumb over my jaw.

Suddenly everything snaps into focus. His persistence in me coming today and thankfulness when I did. The excitement at the shirt I made and how touched he seemed over such a little thing. His beaming smile when he heard me cheering for him. No one has ever done that for him. He rarely talks about his parents and I have yet to even see them.

What assholes.

“That’s bullshit. I’m coming to all your games, Noah. You are amazing and they are truly missing out. I’m not stupid enough to do the same.”

His eyes dart between mine, glistening and stormy. He kisses me fiercely as he grabs my hair and squeezes. Pain and pleasure radiate through my body. He lets go and looks at me with glassy green eyes.

“You mean so much to me, Cat. I don’t know how all this happened so fast, but I don’t want it to stop. I don’t want to

think about a life without you”

I don't want to stop either.

I'm not good at expressing how I'm feeling through words like he is, but I feel the intense need to make it clear that I feel the same.

“Let's go to your room.” I say with all the courage I can muster.

“I want to show you how much you mean to me.”

“Can I have you then, Baby? All of you?” he asks in a gravelly voice.

“Yes Noah, you're mine and I'm yours, remember?”

He kisses me hard as he wraps his arms around my back before sliding them down and grasping my ass. He lifts me with him as he stands as if I weigh nothing and I wrap my legs around his hips instinctively. “Uhhmm, this ass. So many things I want to do with it.” He says with a squeeze as he walks me to his room.

He lowers me on the bed and I flop back as he climbs on top of me, pulling my shirt up under my breasts and kissing my belly and ribs.

I giggle at the sensation as goosebumps cover my body.

“That fucking laugh.” He says sliding up higher to kiss my neck and sneaking a hand up my shirt to cup my breast.

“I love hearing that laugh.”

He's so fucking sweet.

He grabs my shirt and pulls it gently over my hair, forcing it up to splay above my head more comfortably.

I reach up to tug at his and he reaches behind him to rip it off quickly. His muscles are flexed in anticipation and I notice a bruise on his rib. I run my fingertips over it gently.

“You're hurt.”

“It feels better now.” He says staring at me intently with desire.

He slides his hands behind my back and unclasps my bra, pulling it off and slinging it behind him. He looks down at me and licks his lips.

“Much, much better.” He says before diving into my cleavage and spreading kisses all over me.

He leans back on his knees and splays his hands on my torso, running up my sides to cup my breasts and squeeze firmly.

“God, these fucking tits. You have no idea how hot you make me.”

“Let me see, then.” I reply.

I bring both hands to his jeans to open them up and then I lower his jeans and boxers at once. His dick bounces free and slaps his belly button, My eyes widen and my mouth waters at the sight.

So fucking big. It looks way bigger from this angle and I’m feeling a little nervous now.

He cups my chin, lifting my face to look at him in his sea green eyes that soften at my expression.

“I won’t hurt you. I love you, Cat.” He reassures me.

I stare back, warm with the knowledge, and so fucking grateful he always knows what to say to make things better.

He makes me brave enough to want to do the same.

“I love you too, Noah. So fucking much.” I tell him for the first time.

It suddenly occurs to me that I have never said that to anyone before and I feel a sharp pull at my heart. I never even said it to my grandmother besides right before she died. We just didn’t talk like that. The realization makes my eyes burn.

Noah bends down holding my face for a sweet kiss before standing back up at the edge of the bed to pull off my socks and shoes gently. He undoes my pants pulling them off with my underwear until I lay on the bed, totally naked in front of him.

“Holy hell, Cat. I can’t believe your mine.” He whispers running his hands up my thighs and squeezing my hips.

I groan in anticipation.

He straightens back up to kick off his shoes and socks and slide off his bottoms. He stands in front of me completely nude and I sit up instinctively at the edge of the bed in front of him for a closer look.

His cock bobs impatiently at eye level rock-hard with veins bulging around it. I run my hand down his length then grasp and pull his skin forward in a slow pump.

Cum drips from the tip and I want to taste him. I lean forward and flick my tongue out to capture the bead of cum in my mouth and savor his salty, tangy taste as I look up to him.

He looks down in awe breathing heavily as he laces the fingers of one hand through my hair and brings his other to stroke my jaw.

My mouth is watering and I have no idea what I’m doing but I trust my instincts and do what I feel as I open up wider to allow his beautiful mushroom tip into my mouth. I suck as I retreat slowly holding his shaft firmly for control.

His abs quiver as he cries out.

“Oh fuuuuck, Babe.”

I smile at his response going back in and doing the same a little deeper but circling the rim of his head with my wet tongue before retreating again.

His breathing picks up and he pants “I can’t, you can’t...” incoherently.

I look up to him, unsure what’s wrong and he smiles down at me softly.

“I’m going to cum, Cat. I want to be inside you when I do.” He explains.

I give him a last lingering kiss on the head before releasing his cock and he steps to the side to open his nightstand drawer and takes out a condom.

A terrible thought enters my head. *How many girls has he fucked in this bed?*

Suddenly, I'm questioning if this is as special as I thought it felt.

He opens the package and rolls on the condom.

I look down at my naked body, wondering if I should continue. It would be shitty to stop, but it's my right.

He lifts my chin to look at him.

"Are you ok? What's wrong, Baby?" he asks with a soft voice.

Maybe I'm being stupid, and I'm definitely ruining the moment but I need to know. My eyes dart to the nightstand.

"How many others have you had here?" I ask and he looks to the nightstand in confusion and back at me, realization setting in and softening his gaze.

"None, Cat. None but you." He answers deeply. I look back down from his penetrating gaze.

Is that true?

"Cat, look at me. I put those in there after our study date. For you, only you, just in case. Maybe it was presumptuous of me, but I thought maybe I should keep them there, for later. I promise you." He rambles.

I look up hoping to see truth in his eyes and he looks so sorry, like he is regretting the decision to put them there, but not like he's lying.

"I just thought..." I start unsure of what to say.

"It was feeling so special and then..." I point to the night stand.

He pushes me back to the bed and pounces on top of me, clasping my face to look deep in my eyes.

"Stop. Listen to me, Cat. I want this to be real clear before we do this." I am captivated by his hard gaze, commanding tone, and naked body on top of me and I nod silently.

“I fucking love you, Baby. That’s why you’re here and no one else ever has been or ever will be. You are mine and I am yours. This *is* special. Because once we do this, I won’t be able to let you go. Do you understand? I need you, I want you, *only you, Cat.* You with me?” he implores after his impassioned speech.

My stomach flutters and I grab the back of his head to kiss him deeply. I try to pour my thoughts into the kiss as our naked bodies press together, legs tangling, hands roaming frantically.

I’m sorry. I believe you. I’m yours. I love you.

“I’m with you.” I whisper aloud breaking the kiss.

He growls in my neck and inhales deeply as he starts rocking his dick against my pelvis. Goosebumps cover my body as he speaks to me softly between thrusts.

“God, you smell so fucking good.”

He licks my neck.

“Taste so fucking good.”

He nudges my mound with his sheathed cock.

“Feel so fucking good.”

I wrap my legs around his ass and lift my hips to grind my pussy on his dick and my body tingles.

“Yes, Noah. You feel amazing.” I say in a gasp.

He leans back and widens my legs as he runs a finger down my slit.

“I need you wet, Baby. I don’t want to hurt you.” He slides his finger into my core and twists, groaning.

“So tight.” He whispers to himself.

He begins pumping his finger, bringing his thumb to my clit to rub at the same time.

My breathing picks up as his other hand glides up my body to tweak my nipples and he leans over moving that hand to the bed to hold himself up as he sucks one nipple into his mouth

softly. He circles it with his tongue before sucking it back in forcefully as he adds another finger.

I suck in a breath at the intrusion.

He continues pumping his fingers slowly and scissoring them to stretch my entrance. Wet sounds begin to fill the room and my face heats at the vulgarity of it.

“Yes, Baby. That’s it, that’s what I want. Gimme that sweetness.” He says panting into my chest, pumping harder.

He moves to the other nipple, lavishing it in equal attention. He slides higher up my body to attack my mouth in a deep punishing kiss, his fingers slip out and he flattens his entire hand against my pussy. He rubs up and down spreading my juices as he devours my mouth with a groan.

His wet fingertips graze my ass and the heel of his palm massages my clit and I cry out against his mouth at the new sensation, breaking the kiss.

“I want you so fucking bad, Cat.”

His voice is rough and aching.

“Take me, Noah. I’m yours.” I respond my voice hoarse from my moans.

He sucks my neck sharply with a growl and sits back quickly.

I look down as he grips his cock and runs it up and down my slit to coat it with the wetness his touch has produced.

He lines himself up with my entrance and comes back to hover on top of me, brushing my hair back from my face and kissing me softly.

“I’ll go slow.” He whispers against my lips, his body quivering.

I nod and he pushes the tip in slowly as I gasp at the stretching sensation.

“It’s okay, Babe.”

He comforts me and kisses me deeper waiting for me to accommodate his girth. He pushes in another inch and stops, hissing, as I feel my pussy burning.

“So tight, so perfect.” He whispers as he moves another inch forward and stops. The burn intensifies and I need him to move, this slow entry makes me feel everything.

“Just do it. Don’t stop. Please Noah.” I implore.

He pushes in a couple more inches at a slow steady pace and I feel a sharp burn when he breaks through. My eyes water at the pain and I cry out.

He covers my mouth with his and sweeps his tongue in, kissing me frantically, as he slides in the last few inches until I feel our bodies meet.

He releases my mouth breathing fast short breaths into my hair and I grasp at his back, holding him in as I acclimate to his size.

He pulls back slowly a few inches and my walls loosen at the relief.

He pushes back in and the feel of him hitting something deep inside makes me moan uncontrollably.

He pulls back again and begins pumping slow, short thrusts steadily as he lifts his face from my neck and gasps, looking up with his eyes rolling back and closing.

“Jesus Fuck, Cat.” He pants as he continues to pump with longer strokes.

He grabs my ass, lifts me up and begins to swivel his hips up reaching a spot that sends warmth radiating through my entire body and my walls tingle and quiver with every thrust.

God, that feels so good.

“Yes, Noah, right there, shit” I hiss as he grinds into my sweet spot over and over again.

He pumps harder and faster at my reassurance and I run my fingers down his back and grab his ass just as I imagined, but

feeling the little added deepness is not anything I knew to expect.

It ignites my body and he must feel it because he begs me with a rough voice.

“Please, Cat. Please cum, Baby. I need it.”

At his plea, spots blind my vision as my pussy clamps down tight around him. My entire body locks as I arch into him with strangled cry feeling a cold jolt of electricity from my core to my fingertips and toes.

“Oh shit! Yes, Baby!” he cries out.

He pumps furiously until his muscles coil and stiffen above me and his fingertips squeeze almost painfully on my ass.

He groans into my ear and I feel warmth at my core as he empties himself into the condom.

He pulls out and falls beside me limp and sweaty, panting with an arm over his eyes.

I stare up at the ceiling that seems to be spinning slowly, gasping until it comes back into focus.

He lifts his arm and looks toward me and I look at him as his face pulls into a huge, dimple-popping smile. I can't help but smile back and we both start laughing. I don't know why I laugh, or why he does, except that I'm so happy, relieved at giving myself to this amazing man, and feeling lucky as hell that he's mine.

My eyes scan his body again, to take in another glimpse of him in all his glory but my smile slips when spot the condom on his cock. Blood coats him in a thin pink film.

Shit, I forgot about that. How embarrassing!

He looks down, just like I hoped he wouldn't, and takes in the scene. He smiles softly and looks to my eyes.

“Why are you smiling!?! That's embarrassing, Noah!” I exclaim slapping his chest.

“I don't see how. It's fucking hot actually. You're really mine now, Cat.” He responds with fervor.

I feel my cheeks heat but his words make me smirk with secret glee.

I look down at myself and notice a little smear of blood on my thighs and sigh. I'm happy it was him. I would have been mortified with anyone else. He always makes everything better.

"Hang on, I'll be right back." He says swinging his feet to the floor.

I lay still, hoping his comforter isn't ruined as he walks into his bathroom. I hear the sink running and he comes back after a couple of minutes with his cock clean and unsheathed and a small blue towel in his hands.

"Let me help you." He says softly, opening my legs.

He swipes the towel, that is warm and damp, across my thighs gently and up my core. I flinch at the sensitivity and bring my hand down to cover his.

"I've got it, thank you." I whisper.

He turns from me to walk back into his bathroom and I appreciate the privacy as I clean up more thoroughly. I hear the shower turn on and I slide off the bed, looking back with relief at the fairly clean comforter. Thank God.

He walks back into the room, straight to me, and wraps his arms around me pressing my naked body against his for a tight hug. He leans back to kiss me softly before looking into my eyes with his light green irises glittering.

"I've never felt anything like that, Cat." Noah whispers through the silence.

"I meant what I said, I don't think I can ever let you go."

"You won't have to. I'm yours, Noah. I'm not going anywhere." I reassure him.

"You're not alone anymore, Babe. You have me now." I add.

He slides his hands to squeeze my ass and sweeps his tongue into my eager mouth to seal our deal.

“Let’s take a shower.” He says softly.

I nod and follow him into his white marble bathroom. His shower is huge with double shower heads so there is plenty of room in there as we talk, sneaking touches and laughing as we get clean.

Afterwards, he wraps me in a towel and we dry ourselves off before he leads me back to his bedroom by my hand.

He lets go to pull back the covers and I find my jeans and fish through the pocket for my spare hair tie. I pull my wet hair into a messy top knot so I don’t look like Medusa in the morning before climbing into bed to sit beside him. He smiles at me.

“You’re so fucking pretty.” He says simply. I peck him on the lips and we slide down to face each other on our sides. We stare at each other in the lamplight silently.

I feel warm and sated and happy next to him. In just one night he has shown me so many sides of himself and I can’t help but be grateful for them all. He protected me, stood up for me, opened up to me, ravaged me, played with me, and cared for me. No one has ever done so much for me.

“I can’t let you go either, Noah. I love you.” I whisper to him.

“It’s you and me, Babe. I’m yours and you are mine.”

He gives me a soft kiss before turning off the lamp and pulls me into his chest in the darkness. I fall asleep happier than I can ever remember being.

Chapter 38

Noah

After a shaky Monday morning practice with Douchebag Devin, Coach calls me into his office before class starts.

“I heard there was a situation concerning the team this weekend.” Coach Fuller says, cutting to the chase.

News travels fast in this goddamned school.

“Yes coach, but I handled it. We shouldn’t have a problem.”

“Look Son, I’ve heard you have a girl now and it hasn’t affected your game negatively thus far, so I have let it go, but I want to make sure you understand that this team is priority number one during the season. If there is beef between my guys, it better be for a damned good reason, not just some lover’s spat.”

I know Coach is a good man and doesn’t mean this offensively. I glance at the picture of his wife and two girls on his desk and try to appeal to the father in him.

“I understand Coach, and that wasn’t it. Devin was being belligerent and spoke highly offensively to not just my girl, but another, with no provocation before becoming aggressive. It was not behavior befitting someone you would be proud of on this team. As Captain, I dealt with the problem As long as Devin stays in line, we shouldn’t have any issues moving forward.”

He leans back in his chair and darts his eye to the picture and back to me.

“I’m gonna trust your judgement on this one, Son. That is unacceptable and I will be having a chat with him regarding proper behavior towards females. Head to class.”

“Yes, Sir.” I reply with a nod and get the hell out of there.

Devin will fall in line.

Checkmate, fucker.



I walk into Journalism and sit beside a very excited, Cat. Her knees bob, and her eyes are sparkling.

We get to see the final copy of the paper today so I know exactly why she's so keyed up.

"Hey, Babe. You excited?" I ask laughing.

"Heck yes, I am. Aren't you, Mr. Editor in Chief?" she retorts.

"Well, I approved the final print so the surprise is ruined, but it's gonna be great Cat." I reply.

Just then, Ms. G walks in with a stack of newspapers in her arms and a big smile.

"You guys ready for the big reveal?" she asks the class.

Excited affirmations fill the room and she walks through, slamming a copy in front of each of us.

"These will be distributed tomorrow, and you guys need to spend the week gauging the buzz to see what to expand or move on from when we start our new issue next week. I'll want a full report back on Friday with your observations and suggestions. But for now, take a look, and enjoy your light week. Great job this month everyone!"

We all look to our papers and Cat's head snaps to mine with a huge grin.

"We made the front page!" she whispers.

"Did you do this?" she asks.

"No, that was Ms. G's recommendation. It was a great piece, Cat." I encourage to head off her doubts.

She reads the entire article before running her fingers over the photo of Lupe and her team with glassy eyes.

"She'd be proud, don't you think?" she asks still scanning the page.

"Who, Lupe?" I confirm.

“No, my Momo.” She whispers looking back to me hopefully.

“Hell yeah, Cat. She’d be damned proud.” I tell her confidently.

She smiles as she turns the page and we settle in to read our papers.

Chapter 39

Cat

The weeks fly by with mid-term papers and tests in all of our classes last week and arranging a gift for Noah's birthday this week so it feels like I've barely seen him. We text all the time and talk every night before bed but I still find myself missing him.

We spent some time together after his game – which he fucking rocked at – last Friday, but it seems like that's the only real time we got to spend some time together.

I think I'm addicted to him and it's freaking me out. He's picking me up this morning since it's game day again and I can't wait to see him. He must be feeling it too because I woke up to a text from him.

Noah: Can't wait to see you, Baby. I'm leaving now.

Me: Noah! I'm still in bed!

Noah: Pleeese!

Me: It's 6:30 in the morning! Why am I awake?

Noah: Fine, I'll grab us some breakfast first but I'm leaving no later than 7. Hopefully you're naked again when I get there....

Me: Fine, bring me an iced coffee and I'll get up now. I will NOT be naked.

Noah: Damn, I shouldn't have warned you. Iced coffee on the way! Love you Babe.

Me: Love you (lips emoji)

I get out of bed laughing and jump in the shower with a cap on my head to save my curls. They are still looking good from yesterday so I decide that will save me some time. I have a new game-day outfit and I want to look cute to support my man so I need to get dressed ASAP.

After the shower I pull on a ripped jean mini-skirt and some royal blue Converse. I top it off with my new school jersey.

I ordered it with his name and number on the back in a loose fit that I knot up at my stomach showing a little skin. I head to the bathroom and pull my hair into a high fluffy half-ponytail and tie a blue ribbon to finish my look. I'm finishing my makeup when I hear a knock at my door.

"Come in!" I yell from the bathroom.

"Iced coffee has arrived! The line was -" I look to him in the mirror and see him gaping at my ass.

"Holy shit, Babe." He says in awe.

The outfit is a hit, I think as I smirk at him. I put down my mascara and turn to him.

"You like my jersey?" I ask trying to hold in a smile.

"I fucking love it, but that skirt is killing me." He says staring at my legs.

"Should I change?" I suggest half-heartedly.

"Fuck no, not unless you wanna see a grown man cry." He jokes smirking at me.

He rushes me, wrapping his arms around to squeeze my ass and kiss me greedily. The kiss turns heated and I moan into his mouth when he slides his hand under my skirt to graze my pussy through my panties from the back.

"God, I missed you, Baby." He says against my lips.

He wraps his hands on my ass and lifts me so I wrap my legs around him as he places me on the counter in front of him.

My skirt rides up and he slides his hands up my thighs to push it up to my waist as he opens my legs wider. He presses his hard dick against my core and grabs my face, about to kiss me.

"Amelia..." I remind him, panting against his lips.

“She just left.” He says before sweeping his tongue in my mouth.

His hands roam up my shirt, lifting it, as he makes his way to my breasts. He pulls it up to my neck, exposing my bra and cleavage to him. He pulls the cups underneath to trap my tits in between the two pieces of clothing and starts to devour me.

Wow, this escalated quickly.

I moan as his hot mouth covers my nipple and run my fingers through his soft brown locks. He sucks and nibbles and I move to open his pants.

He leans back a little keeping his mouth on me and bites the top of my breast softly when I slide my hand inside his boxers to grasp his cock.

I give him a squeeze in response and he growls pulling my panties to the side to slide two fingers into my wet pussy.

“Ah!” I gasp.

He’s not holding back today and I am fucking here for it.

I pump his velvety cock before whispering in his ear.

“I want you, Noah.”

He pushes back, frantically pulling his wallet out of his back pocket to grab a condom. He pulls out his beautiful dick and smirks at me as he rolls the condom on.

“I can’t wait any longer. I need to feel you around me, Baby.”

He holds my panties to the side with one hand and grasps my ass with the other pulling me forward on the counter to sink his dick into my core in one stroke holding still when he is fully encased by my walls

“Oh, yes Noah.” I murmur as my whole body relaxes at the sensation of him filling me.

“Does that feel good Cat?” he whispers as he begins pumping slow and deep, holding my ass to keep me close.

He starts kissing my neck in soft open-mouthed kisses and goosebumps explode all over my body at his tender touch and deep thrusts.

“You feel so good, Babe.” I say nodding with my eyes closed and stretching my neck to him for better access.

He squeezes one hand tighter to hold me as he brings his other to my nipple and begins rolling it in his fingertips.

So many sensations at once. It's too much.

Warmth fills my body and I feel shivers climb my spine when he rubs his cock deep hitting my g-spot lightly.

“Oh my God, Noah. I'm about to cum already.” I say in awe of my body's quick reaction to him.

“Yes, Babe. Cum all over my cock. I want to see you.” He says pulling back from my neck and looking into my eyes, his green eyes burning with intensity.

He continues to hold me tight, rolling his hips to graze that perfect spot over and over again as we stare at each other and he slides his other hand down to swirl my clit with his thumb.

“I love you, Cat.” He whispers while staring deeply in my eyes.

I feel my body lock and my back arch as my head whips back and I can't control the scream that escapes my mouth from the intense orgasm his slow pace coaxed out of me.

“Yes, Baby. So fucking beautiful when you cum-”

He stops his sentence short with a grunt and squeezes me close to him with his hand at my ass and the other whipping around to my back to press me into him and he grinds into my core slowly with a long low moan. I squeeze him back still coming down from an orgasm that doesn't seem to stop.

“Oh my fucking God.” He groans in a crescendo. His body stiffens with his groan before falling limp against me, breathing heavily in my neck.

“What. Was. That?” I gasp between words catching my breath.

“That was fucking making love, Babe.” He says with surprise in his tone.

“That was crazy.” He says with a little chuckle.

His dick jerks inside me and we both remember he is still deep inside. I watch as slides all glorious 8 inches out of me slowly.

“I love you, Noah.” I whisper still shell-shocked.

“I love you so much, Cat. You have no idea.” He whispers back caressing my cheek before giving me a sweet kiss.

I fucking love this guy. More than anything. Holy shit, that is scary.

Chapter 40

Noah

I stand in the locker room with my team fucking pumped as Coach gives his after game speech.

We slaughtered the other team tonight and my girl was screaming for me the whole time. She looked hot as fuck with my name all over her and her support has been something I've come to rely on week after week. She doesn't know it, but just having her in the stands makes me play better than I ever have.

I can't wait to get the fuck out of here.

Wrap it up, Coach.

It feels like I've barely seen her lately and this morning just made my need for her worse. Being with her is fucking crazy. I feel things I never have with her and I'm convinced her pussy is magic because GOD DAMN. I have never cummed so hard in my entire life the way she makes me cum.

Me and the guys have decided to take the girls out to eat and skip the parties tonight. Our little club has grown tight the last couple weeks and I feel like we all click really well. I'm glad my friends are fitting in with hers because I've decided this girl isn't going anywhere. She's mine. Forever.

Fuck my dad, fuck the haters in this school, fuck anyone that has a problem with it. She is stuck with me and I will figure out a way to make it work next year because I need this girl with me always.

“Great game tonight guys! Enjoy the night - but not too much. See ya'll bright and early Monday!”

Coach finishes up his speech and we all bang our gear and whoop it up to celebrate before getting undressed and ready to hit the town.

We decided to meet by my car and ride together since it's the biggest, so me, Luca, and Terrance head out to the parking lot laughing about some plays.

I spot the girls waiting for us, looking cute as hell in their game gear before quickly noticing some basketball guys trying to flirt with them right in front of my easily recognizable car.

They know who the fuck they are waiting for.

They tower over the girls and it instantly raises my hackles. Their team captain and asshole extraordinaire, Ryder Simmons, seems to be leading the pack. Sabrina looks nervous and Cat looks bored.

Not this prick again.

“Uh oh.” Terrance laughs in his usual joking manner.

I turn to Luca who puffs out his chest a bit taking in the scene across the parking lot before meeting my glance with a furrow in his brow as if to ask *You with me?* I give him a resolute affirmative with a nod of my head.

We walk up with purpose behind the girls to the group, Terrance chuckling alongside us, as I hear Ryder saying something about plans to the girls.

I wrap an arm around Cat and take her mouth in mine without hesitation.

That's right fucker, don't even try it.

Luca steps up next to Sabrina and she congratulates him and Terrance on a good game.

I step back from my girl to see her smiling at me.

“Great job tonight.” She says with a smirk, knowing I’m staking my claim in front of these assholes.

“Thanks, Babe. Ya’ll ready to go?” I ask with a pointed glare at Ryder and his buddies

“Yep, now that the best plans have arrived, we’re ready. Right Sabrina?” Cat says with that little bit of sass I love her for.

“Um hmm, I’m ready.” Sabrina agrees quickly.

“Sorry Ryder, you’ll have to find some other girls to annoy tonight. Ours are busy.” I say dismissing him as I unlock my

car.

The guys all step back as Cat gets in the passenger seat and Sabrina slides to the middle of the back seat. Terrance gets in behind her and shuts the door. Luca and I stand ready to open our doors on the driver's side in front of the group.

"Maybe next time!" Ryder yells to the girls through the car.

I snap my head around to respond but Luca steps up to them and responds in a low tone the girls won't hear from in the car.

"There won't be a next time, Ryder. They're taken. Get the fuck out of here."

"Alright, alright." He concedes, laughing.

"On to the next, then."

He and the group turns away smiling as they approach another group of girls standing near them.

We get in the car and I start to drive us to Danny's, the burger hangout in town.

"What the hell did he want?" I ask Cat with a smirk to hide my lingering jealousy.

"He asked us to go to a party. We said we made plans. One of his cronies tried to get fresh with Sabrina and I told him to back off but Ryder kept insisting that any plans with them would be better." I see Luca snap a look to Sabrina in the rear-view mirror as Cat continues unknowingly with a laugh, shaking her head.

"You guys got there just in time to show him we had the best plans already." She says with a wink. I smile at her.

"You tell 'em Firecracker. Club plans trump any others." Terrance jokes and we all laugh.

In the back of my mind though, I don't forget how Luca said "*They're taken.*"



We are seated and served and as we eat, we chit chat about the game. Sabrina surprises me with her knowledge of the plays and anger at the penalties and I'm happy to see that even Cat has gained some knowledge and passion for the game in just a few weeks of watching me.

Other classmates mill about around us but I am enjoying the night with good friends.

I never realized how spending my entire high school experience with semi-friends, vapid girls, and shit parents left me so empty until Cat showed up. It's like she puts a bullshit mirror up to everyone and you can see who they really are just by seeing them next to her. She talked about being real when we first met and now I see what she means. These people are fake and predictable and I chuckle to myself as it occurs to me how true our No Douchebags Club is.

"What's so funny?" Terrance asks dipping his fry in Sabrina's ketchup. Luca shoves at his shoulder.

"Come on, man. S-Rod don't care!" he complains using the new nickname he adopted for her after she sang the National Anthem. He says she sounds like Olivia Rodrigo. It's actually a pretty good comparison.

Luca tries to glare with a smile he can't hold in because you just can't be mad at Terrance.

"I was just thinking how we will probably be the only people at my party that aren't douchebags."

"Well Amelia and Matthew are coming." Cat defends.

"And my parents too!" Sabrina chimes in.

Luca and Terrance stay quiet. Luca's mom is a little unbalanced and his step-dad is an asshole.

Terrance's parents are cool, but won't be attending since they aren't well off enough for my dad to have invited them. He's at Lakeview on scholarship which not a lot of people know.

"Well ok, that's less than ten out of the probably fifty that will be there. I don't know why they want to have

this fucking party besides hob-knobbing anyways.”

“Well, we will be there to celebrate your birthday, that’s all that matters.” Cat responds.

“Yeah, man, fuck ‘em.” Luca adds.

Me and the guys laugh at the inside joke.

“Fuck ‘em.” I agree between laughs.

Just then, two girls walk up to our table. They are on the dance team and I know the red-head named Emily has been with Terrance on occasion. I’m not sure what the other one’s name is.

“Hey guys, hey Cat, Sabrina.” Emily waves to us with a smile as we look up from our laughing. I place my arm around Cat to make sure they know I’m taken.

“Oh, hey Em, how’s it going?” Terrance asks her with a smirk.

“Good. Great game tonight you guys.”

We all give our thanks. She turns toward Terrance and speaks in a lower tone.

“Ari and I were just wondering if you and Luca want to hit up the party at the cliffs tonight with us.” She asks while pointing a thumb at the curvy brunette next to her.

She gives Terrance a pointed glance and her friend smiles at Luca who grabs his burger to take a bite.

Sabrina stares wide-eyed at the brunette as she sips her drink like she is watching a show.

“That sounds cool, maybe after we finish up here, we will head out there.” Terrance says elbowing Luca.

“No thanks, I’m tired, man. I’m gonna head home after this.” Luca says to Terrance, still not even looking at the girl trying to get his attention.

Cat studies the exchange without speaking but I see her hands fidgeting under the table as she looks to her friend with worried eyes.

“Well if you change your mind.”

The brunette slips a piece of paper with her name and number on it in front of Luca.

Sabrina and Cat stare at it as the girls say goodbye and walk away. As soon as they do, Luca grabs his drink and sets it on top of the paper, smearing the writing.

Well I guess that's that.

Terrance doesn't even try to argue with him as we finish eating and laugh and talk until closing time.

Chapter 41

Cat

Noah said that the party is apparently formal, so I convince Sabrina to go shopping with me Saturday afternoon.

She picks me up and we head to the mall to find something. Amelia suggested coming to her boutique but I didn't want to take advantage of her.

I've been saving all the cash Amelia and Matthew give me for lunches, which is way more than I need anyways, so I had enough to get Noah a gift. I actually got a great deal on it with Sabrina's dad's connections. But Amelia gave me some extra cash for shopping today, saying I should let her know if it's not enough. It was 300 dollars. I tried to give it back but she insisted, saying nice dresses are more expensive and I can use it for other events later, so here I am, not sure how anyone can spend 300 dollars on a dress and shoes.

"Here's a cute one. Sabrina says, pulling a bright red dress off the rack.

"Too bright for me, but it would look good on you." I suggest.

"Maybe..." she hangs on to it.

We continue scouring racks and I come across a couple of black dresses that catch my eye while Sabrina has a few in different colors.

We head to the dressing rooms and I tell her to go first. She comes out with a navy three quarter sleeve dress with a lace overlay first.

"Pretty, but the color is a little blah on you. Something more fun."

Her next dress baby pink with a halter top bodice and a tulle skirt.

“A little too sweet, you need something to grab Luca’s attention tomorrow.” Her eyes bug out.

“Luca would never give me attention, Cat. Not that I want it.” She defends quickly.

“That’s bullshit. That guy stares at you non-stop and hasn’t gone out with any girls since we all started hanging out. He is into you.” I argue. She blushes.

“It’s not like that, he’s just a nice guy and we are friends.”

“Uh huh, sure. Keep your secrets Sabrina, but show me something exciting.” She heads back in shaking her head.

She steps back out wearing the one she tried to offer me. It’s a bright red satin dress that instantly makes her eyes and hair pop. It has a low sweetheart neckline that shows a little cleavage and off shoulder sleeves for some sweetness. The bottom is a two tiered A-line skirt that accentuates her hips and ends a little above the knee to keep it fun.

“I don’t know about this one, it’s a little-”

“Fucking perfect. You look amazing in that.”

“You think so? It’s kinda short...”

“It’s fun and sweet, just like you. And that body you’re always hiding is banging in that dress. Look at your legs – they go on forever!” She blushes and smiles.

“Okay. I’ll take it. Your turn!” she accepts with a more excited tone.

We both head in, her to change back, and me to try on. I don’t want to waste time so I pick the one I like the most first. It’s a shimmery black taffeta sleeveless dress with a pointed sweetheart neckline. It shows some cleavage but, honestly, that can’t be helped with my figure. The bottom fluffs out with a high low hem that comes up to my mid thigh in front and hangs down to my ankles in the back. And it has pockets – jackpot. It’s a little classy, and a little rockstar and fits like a glove. I

love it immediately. I walk out smiling and Sabrina's eyes bug out.

"Oh my God, that's so pretty!" she exclaims.

"Not too much?" I ask a little worried my taste won't fit in at this party.

"No! It's super classy but with an edge. Just like you!" she laughs at her stolen comparison.

"And it has pockets!" I brag, sticking my hands in and swaying the skirt.

"Awe man! I wish mine had pockets! That's the one, Cat." She finishes with a smile that I return.

"Let's look for shoes."

"Yaaas, shoes!" she agrees. We grab our dresses and head to the shoe department.

I choose some black heels with a simple thin strap over the toes but a wide ankle strap covered in rhinestones. She goes with some metallic champagne pumps with a pointed tip.

We choose a few pieces of jewelry to match and some clutches and we are set.

Get ready douchebags, here we come.

"Okay one more store and then back to my house. I need your help with a little project." I tell Sabrina with a smirk, laughing at her questioning glance.



I ride to Noah's with Amelia and Matthew who look great all dressed up like a fancy date night. Posey stays with a sitter.

"You look great, Cat. Your hair looks so pretty and I love that dress." Amelia says looking back at me. I wore my hair down around one shoulder with the other side pinned up with interlocked rhinestone bobby pins. I

curled a few pieces with a small curling iron to make it look smoother and it came out pretty nice.

“Thanks, I hope it’s not too much.” I comment even though I know Noah will like the dress so I don’t really care.

I have his gift in a box beside me and I hope he likes it. I got him two tickets to a UT football game so we can actually watch together for once. Matthew said it’s a rivalry game so it was a good choice.

I also hid a risqué picture of me under the tissue that I wrote on the back of for him to read later, but they don’t know about that, of course. It was hard to get a good shot, with me standing in my new black lingerie in front of a nonstop giggling Sabrina, but it was actually pretty fun.

I feel like I’m really starting to embrace my sexuality. Noah just makes me feel so damn good about myself.

“It’s beautiful. You have nothing to worry about.” Amelia reassures me.

We pull up to a valet stand and I realize very quickly that this is no ordinary birthday party. Noah was right - *pretentious as fuck*.

We walk in and Noah’s normally cold, silent living area is filled with guests and tables and music no 18-year-old listens to.

I glance around the room, holding his gift protectively, stopping on green eyes that burn into my skin. Noah’s jaw literally drops and his light green eyes twinkle mischievously.

He looks amazing as he swaggers up to me in a slim cut navy suit with a crisp white shirt and skinny black tie. He wears white sneakers with it and it makes me laugh.

“I like your shoes.” I comment. Surely, he wore them to piss off his parents.

“I like your everything. You look beautiful Little Cat.” My stomach flip flops at his words and he brings me into

a soft hug before kissing me chastely.

“Hello, Mr. and Mrs. Bennett. Thanks for coming.” He says shaking their hands.

They thank him and wish him a happy birthday as a middle-aged couple walks toward us. Noah stiffens before taking my hand. I assume these are his parents by the haughty look on the man’s face and the trophy wife standing beside him.

Noah looks a lot like his dad in build, hair color, and face shape but he gets his beautiful eyes from his mom. She is blonde and plastic and exactly what I imagine someone like Becca turning into.

Here we go.

“Matthew, Amelia, welcome!” his dad says shaking their hands merrily and completely disregarding my presence.

“Thanks for the invite, Chip.”

That’s right, his name is Chip, what a stupid name.

“Ana, you look lovely, thank you for having us.” Matthew says.

“I assume you both have met Cat already?” he asks pushing me forward a bit.

“No, they have not.” Noah jumps in the conversation.

“Mom, Dad, this is my girlfriend, Cat.” Noah’s dad gives a tight smile and a small nod and his mother chimes in with a sickly-sweet voice.

“Cat, that’s unusual. Is it short for something?” she asks as if my name isn’t acceptable.

“Carolina.” I reply in perfect Spanish just to see their reactions.

They don’t disappoint. Noah’s dad clears his throat and quickly excuses himself to greet another guest and his mom gives me a constipated fake smile but doesn’t respond.

When mean girls grow up, I muse.

Neither say it's nice to meet me, so I take the high road.

"Nice to meet you both." I say to her sweetly.

A flash of red in the crowd snags my attention and I decide to pull a Chip.

"I think I see Sabrina. I'm going to go say hi. Please excuse me, Mrs. Caldwell."

"I'll join you." Noah says quickly. I smile and wave goodbye to Matthew and Amelia as we walk off.

"Sorry about that, Babe. I told you they were assholes." Noah whispers.

"At least I was prepared." I snort as we walk up to Sabrina.

She looks beautiful with her shiny brown hair in a high, loose bun with pieces framing her face. She put on a little makeup that she learned from our spa trip and her blue eyes look bright and huge in a wonderfully shocking way. She asked the makeup artist a lot of questions that day and I see it paid off.

"Hey guys! Happy Birthday Noah!" she greets us.

"Hey Sabrina you look great." He says wrapping an arm around my waist.

"Thanks, I'm no Cat, but I tried." She says smiling to me.

"Please, you are killing it, girl." I argue.

"Hell yes, you are S-Rod!" Terrance butts in walking up to us.

Luca stands beside him, gawking at Sabrina.

She's crazy, this guy wants her.

"Thanks Terrance." She answers softly not looking at Luca.

"You look really pretty." Luca comments lowly. She blushes and smiles at him.

“And look at our little Firecracker over here – damn girl.” Terrance adds.

Noah tightens his hold on my waist and kisses my temple.

“Thanks, ya’ll look amazing. You clean up nice.”

Terrance is in black trousers with a dark red button down decorated with a little triangle pattern. His sleeves are rolled up to his forearms and his shirt is untucked. Luca is in light gray trousers with a dark charcoal blazer he left open to expose a crisp white shirt left unbuttoned at the top without a tie.

“Let’s grab a table.” Noah suggests and we follow him over to a round one. We all set our gifts on the table sit in our usual formation.

“Open your gifts, Noah!” Sabrina suggests. He starts with hers. It’s a book about football.

“My dad said it helped him a lot when he was playing. Made a huge difference in his game.” She explains.

“Wow, that’s so cool, thanks Sabrina.”

He smiles and moves on to Terrance’s gift. It’s the latest shooter video game.

“Thanks man, I never get tired of kicking your ass at our gaming nights.” He laughs.

Luca slides his over. It’s a gift certificate to some ax throwing place in town.

“Oh, cool man, I’ve been wanting to hit this place up. Ya’ll gotta come with me!” the guys all plan their guy’s day excitedly.

When that’s settled, I slide my gift over to Noah. He opens the small box and his eyes glitter when he looks up to me with that dimpled smile that makes me melt.

“Babe?! UT and OU? These are impossible to get - you gotta be kidding me!” the guys all perk up to see the tickets as he takes them out waving them in their faces as Sabrina and I laugh.

“I love watching you, but I thought it would be nice to watch a game together.” I say simply. He kisses me hard on the mouth.

“Thank you, Babe. I can’t wait.” He replies.

The others are still chatting animatedly about the tickets so I lean forward to whisper in his ear.

“There is a little something for you under the tissue paper too. *For your eyes only.*” I press with a pointed glance.

His eyes burn into mine as he lays his hand over the box protectively. He places the tickets back in and shuts it, sliding the small necklace sized box into a pocket inside his blazer. He slides a hand to cup my cheek and pulls me in for a slow kiss.

“Son, can we have a word?” his dad interrupts and we pull apart. “Someone I want you to meet.” He adds. Noah faces the table, rolling his eyes as he stands.

“I’ll be right back, guys” he grumbles.

They walk away in the opposite direction of the party to a hallway leading to rooms. *Weird.*

Luca asks Sabrina to dance and they head off to the dance floor. Terrance is smiling and texting on his phone and I suddenly need to pee.

“I’m gonna head to the bathroom. Do you know where it is?” I ask Terrance.

“Uh yea, there’s one a couple doors down that hall on the left.” He points to the hall Noah followed his dad down.

“Kay, be right back.” I stand and start heading down the hall in search of the bathroom.

As I pass a door that is slightly ajar, I overhear a heated conversation.

“-aren’t even speaking to anyone.” I recognize Noah’s dad’s voice.

“I’m talking to my friends, Dad. It’s my birthday, after all. I’m not interested in networking or whatever it is you thought this was about.” Noah defends.

“I told you to keep your guests to a minimum. She shouldn’t even be here. She doesn’t belong here.” I gasp quietly at his harsh words covering my mouth.

Is this how he always speaks about me with Noah?

“She’s Cat. Her *name* is Cat. And you were fucking rude to her. She’s my girlfriend, so she will always be invited to be beside me. Get used to it, Dad.” Noah argues.

Thank you, Babe.

“Show some respect and wise up, Son. She’s a fling, a pretty little thing to have fun with, not a proper girlfriend.” His dad speaks more angrily.

I feel a hand cover my shoulder lightly and I snap my head up to see Matthew staring at me with sympathy. I stay silent, staring back at him, as the conversation continues.

“The Bennetts will ship her off to whatever back alley place she came from as soon as she isn’t of use to them anymore, Son. I told you not to get attached. She is not the one for you, find someone more suitable.”

I look to Matthew and feel my eyes burn.

Is that true? I ask him silently.

His face morphs into anger and he pushes the door open and steps in.

“Sorry to interrupt but this has gone on long enough.” Matthew says strongly as he walks into the office they are standing off in.

Noah’s pissed expression melts into sadness when he sees me standing in the hallway.

“Matthew, I didn’t see you there.” Chip says with surprise.

No, because we were obviously hiding dumbass.

“Maybe you weren’t fully aware of the situation so let me fill you in.” Matthew continues with authority, ignoring him.

“Cat is a part of my family. She won’t be going anywhere.”

My eyes water at his open claim of me and I walk through the doorway a bit as Noah comes to wrap his arm around me to face his dad on our side.

“If you have a problem with that, maybe it’s best we leave. And perhaps you should look for a new architect.” He finishes.

I know he makes a shit ton of money with the projects he takes on from Noah’s dad. To hear him give that up so willingly makes something in my chest break open.

“Matthew, now let’s not be hasty. I apologize, I didn’t realize you and Amelia had adopted Cat.”

He finally acknowledges my name, but I flinch at his reminder that I am in fact, an outsider, and not adopted.

“Cat can to join the family on paper whenever she wishes, but I can assure you, she’s been adopted by us in every way that matters, not that we need to explain that to anyone.” Matthew interjects.

“I wasn’t aware of your prejudices and I take offense to the things you said about her. She is a good girl with a bright future.”

“Again, I apologize, Matthew. I made a grave miscalculation.” Chip backtracks now at the prospect of losing the best architect in the city.

“I think Cat is the one who deserves an apology, Chip.” Matthew chastises him like a boy in grade school.

“Of course, I apologize Cat. I shouldn’t have judged your situation so quickly. I wasn’t aware-”

I cut his half-assed apology off with a hand up. I have stayed silent and courteous so far but that ends now.

“That I’m a person? Just like you? With people that actually give a damn about me? One of which, just so happens to be the son you have no time for? Apology accepted. Let’s just move on.” I snap, closing the argument with a couple of jabs of my own.

That’s right asshole, I don’t go down without a fight. Never have and never will.

“Right. Of course. Let’s get back to the party then.” Chip says in a clipped tone, trying to be polite, but obviously pissed that I had the audacity to speak to him like that.

He moves to leave but Noah stands blocking his way.

“Don’t ever speak about Cat like that again, Dad.” He warns Chip who gives him a fake smile.

“Of course, Son. Let’s get back to festivities.”

Noah moves to the side and Chip leaves us to head back to his schmoozing. I let out a long breath and Matthew turns to me.

“Are you okay, Cat? Do you want to go home?” He asks.

Home.

“I’m okay, Matthew. Thank you for what you said.” I reply wholeheartedly.

“Of course, you’re stuck with us kid. I meant what I said. Anytime.” He answers referring to the adoption. I smile as he pats my shoulder.

“Stay, have some fun. We might be leaving soon, I’ve lost my appetite. I hope you’ll forgive me, Son.” He directs to Noah.

“No problem, I’ll make sure Cat gets home safe, Sir.”

“I know you will.” He responds with a slap on his back before leaving the room.

“Well, that fucking sucked.” Noah comments. I chuckle as he wraps me in his arms in a tight hold, kissing the top of my head.

“This is what happens when you leave the No Douchebags table.” I joke. He laughs.

“You’re right, let’s get back.” He suggests.

We head back to the table after a quick stop at the bathroom I was headed to in the first place, and Sabrina and Luca are back at their seats. Sabrina is looking at me with a worried frown.

“Ah, good to be back!” I say with a sigh as I get seated and we leave it at that. The rest of the party is spent laughing, dancing and chatting without interruptions.

Chapter 42

Noah

“You want to come upstairs?” I ask Cat. Her secret gift is burning a hole in my pocket. The rest of the squad has headed home and only boring people remain.

“I want to see my other gift.”

Cat blushes with a nod and I take her hand and lead her to my wing of the house.

I close the door to my bedroom behind her and lock it. I turn back to her to take her in again. She looks fucking amazing.

Hottest girl at the party, hands down.

I pat my breast pocket and smile.

“So, what do I have in here?”

“Um, just a little something I did for you. I didn’t realize you would be opening it while I was here. It was meant for later.” She says blushing.

“I don’t want to wait, Little Cat and it’s my birthday. Can I open it now?” I ask teasing her.

“Sure, I guess.” She says turning from me to walk to my bookshelves and fidget with things.

Hmmm, why is she so nervous?

I slip the box out of my pocket and sit on my bed. I open it to the badass tickets she got me glancing at them in more detail.

These are really good seats, they must have cost a fortune.

Suddenly I kind of regret the gift of shoes I got her for her birthday, even though she *can* rock them like no one else.

I place the tickets in my nightstand and glance up to see Cat is still facing away from me. I lift the tissue paper and there is a thick piece of paper with writing on it. I pull it out to read it.

Dear Noah,

Thank you for bringing me happiness everyday. You have changed my life, and I will love you forever for it. I just want you to know that you are an amazing person and I am proud that you are mine and I am yours. I hope this brightens your day, and nights ;) Happy 18th Birthday.

Love Always,

Your Little Cat

My heart melts at her words but I wonder why she was so nervous. *And nights... what does that mean?*

I flip the card as if doing so will help me understand and when I do, my jaw drops and my cock turns to steel.

Cat is in a strapless black lace bra and matching thong panties. She lays on her stomach with her feet hooked up playfully behind her and her golden eyes sparkle with a sneaky smile. Her head is propped on her hand and her hair hangs to the side over her shoulder. The angle the picture is taken shows off her beautiful ass and her perfect breasts spill over her bra, propped up by the bed.

Wait...

“Who took this photo?” I ask suddenly jealous of anyone seeing her this way. She turns to me smiling.

“Sabrina. We had to take like 30 shots because we couldn’t stop laughing.” She giggles.

I look back to my new favorite photo, memorizing it in my mind with a smile.

Mine.

“I love it, Cat. You are so fucking gorgeous.” I say brushing the curve of her ass on the picture with my fingertip.

“And I want to see all the other shots too, so I hope you kept them. I only wish I hadn’t missed it in person.” I admit, still staring at her delectable curves and beautiful eyes in the photo.

“Well, you didn’t, really.” She teases and I snap my head up to her gaze. She stalks toward me slowly, unzipping her dress at her side.

“Holy fuck, you didn’t, Baby?” I plead getting revved up at the possibilities under that dress.

“I did.” She replies simply before dropping her dress to the floor around her.

Fuuuuck, she did.

Cat stands in all her glory rocking the shit out of that lingerie set.

“Come here, Baby. Let me get a closer look.” I plead with grasping fingers.

My cock is tenting my trousers, begging to be released.

She steps out of her dress and walks up to me, in those fuck-me heels I couldn’t keep my eyes off of all night, like a fucking goddess.

“Well?” she asks with her eyes burning dark like delicious caramel.

I slide my hands over her full hips to her bare ass and groan, leaning my head against her belly. I inhale deeply, squeezing her ass and spreading her cheeks releasing a low growl when her honeyed scent reaches me.

She’s wet for me.

I know her body so well already. I lean back staring at her tits and running my hand down the black lace to caress her clit through her panties.

“Best fucking birthday ever.” I finally respond.

She begins to breathe heavily at my touch and I pull her by her ass to straddle me on the bed. “Show me what you’ve got, Babe. I’m ready for one last gift.” I challenge her while diving in to kiss her cleavage at my face. She pushes me back to the bed her warmth making my dick crazy with need.

“Greedy man.” She teases while unbuttoning my shirt.

“You asked for it.” she reminds me with a sexy smirk.

I reach up to loosen my tie and pull it over my head and get rid of it with a frantic toss. She spreads my shirt open slowly

and leans over me to kiss my chest, licking my nipple and a surprise jolt of pleasure runs through me.

Holy hell, this girl fucking kills me.

I unbutton my sleeves quickly and she spreads the shirt with my jacket over my shoulders and I lift up so she can pull them off while carefully kissing my neck. She pushes me back down when they are discarded and runs her fingers along my torso.

“Perfect.” She whispers.

This is like the slowest fucking torture and I am here for it.

Her reverse strip tease continues as she moves down to begin unbuckling my belt and opening my pants leisurely.

I kick off my socks and shoes behind her, willing to do anything to speed this up. My heart is pounding in my chest as she unzips me.

“There is someone else I want to say happy birthday to.” She whispers sliding her hand into my boxers and squeezing my dick.

My cock weeps in relief before throbbing against my boxers when she quickly pulls her hand out again.

“Baby, please!” I plead trying my best to bring her back to it.

She smiles sneakily before leaning down for a slow deep kiss.

Just hold on, keep it together, man. I reason with my cock.

She slides down my body slowly, taking my bottoms with her before sinking to her knees on the floor.

I pop up instinctively still at the edge of the bed to see where she went. She stares at my dick and licks her lips.

Oh hell yea.

My cock rejoices when her lips envelop the tip in the wet warmth of her mouth. She slides her mouth to the middle of my shaft and pulls out sucking deeply.

Oh shit, oh shit, oh shit.

I groan at the sensation and tense my body to hold back from exploding and place a hand to her head to ground myself because it feels like I'm about to float up to fucking heaven right now.

She slides back in further this time, before pressing her tongue firmly against my vein in an upward motion and I feel a small jet of cum escape. She groans at the taste of me in her mouth and pulls back slowly, sucking and swirling her tongue as she makes sloppy noises that make my toes curl.

“Holy shit, Baby. That feels fucking amazing.” I admit unable to hold it in. She speeds up a little, going deeper and deeper as she gets comfortable. Soft slurping noises fill the room with only my heavy breaths to accompany it.

“Yes, just like that, swallow that cock, Baby.” I urge her on.

She pushes further at my reassurance and I feel my cock hit the back of her throat. She gags a little but continues on sucking me like a fucking champ.

“Jesus Christ, Cat.” I moan when I feel her lips hit my pelvis and she swallows as my cock hits her throat.

“Oh my God.” Tingles are climbing up my spine quickly.

“You have to stop or I'm going to cum, Babe.” I plead in a pained voice I hardly recognize.

She releases her suction and slides her mouth off with spit stringing from my cock to her mouth.

“So fucking sexy.” I whisper in awe of her while wiping her chin.

She stands and I slide her thong off down her soft legs and undo her bra which pops off easily with no straps to hold it in place.

She reaches in the nightstand with a soft smile of apology from our first time, and grabs a condom.

She straddles me and lays her soft curves against my body as she envelops my mouth in a deep kiss. I run my hands up and down her back and slide a finger down her crack to her slit, feeling her dripping pussy.

Sitting up, she tears the package and takes out the condom, leaning back, she rolls it on my dick with slow steady fingers.

I graze her hips with my fingertips in anticipation.

“I love you, Babe.” Slips from my lips unknowingly.

“I love you, Noah.” She whispers before hitching herself up to line her entrance to my aching cock.

“Happy Birthday.”

She slides down slowly and I feel her warm walls envelope me. A shiver runs down my body and we moan in unison.

“Yes, Babe. So good.” I urge her on as I slide my hands up her hourglass waist to her perfect teardrop tits.

She starts to rock and sets her hands on my abs for balance.

“Oh, God Noah.” She whimpers rolling her hips slowly like a fucking pro all of a sudden.

I feel her clenching around my cock every time she raises up and the feel of her pussy sucking my cock is too fucking much.

I need to speed her up.

I reach down to rub her clit, rolling her nipple with my other hand.

“I’m not gonna last, Baby. I need you to come on my cock. Let me feel those juices all over me.”

She begins grinding in earnest at my dirty talk.

Shivers rack my body again and my cock is ready to explode.

“Now Cat. I need it. Give it to me.” I pant holding on to my cum for dear life.

I pinch her nipple and clit in unison and her pussy clamps down on my cock, her body arches back, her hair grazes my thighs and I detonate.

Everything goes black for a second and I hear her screaming quietly with a sexy squeal in the background.

I swear to God, I see fucking stars as my cock pumps cum into the condom in strong spurts over and over again.

Her body goes limp and she splays herself on top of me exhausted and I wrap my arms around her to hold her steady. We lay like that for a few minutes as I relay the events in my mind silently.

“Don’t take this the wrong way Babe, but are you sure you’ve never done any of that?” I ask her genuinely wondering.

She’s too fucking good – at everything.

She laughs and my cock gets pushed out of her. I groan at the release from her tight warmth.

She slides beside me and I face her, looking into her eyes for deception. She laughs again at my disbelief and pushes at my chest playfully.

“I promise, Babe. I think I would have remembered.” She chuckles.

I lean back on the pillows and look at the ceiling.

I need her forever.

“Do you think 18 is too young to get married?” I muse aloud. *Oops.*

She pops up on her elbow to look at me.

“What the hell are you talking about Noah?!” she exclaims incredulously.

I laugh to lighten the tension.

I will marry this girl, she just doesn’t know it yet.

“What? I just found out you’re a natural sex goddess without a fucking gag reflex. I feel the sudden need to lock you down, Babe.” I retort with a huge grin I know she can’t resist.

She busts out with a full belly laugh and falls back to the bed.

“Don’t be crazy Noah! I’m not going anywhere.” She says between laughs.

Her happiness draws me closer and I flip toward her to tickle more laughs out of her.

“No, you’re fucking not. Not ever.”

I stop tickling her and we still. She looks at me in my eyes to see if I’m serious.

“Hey, I’m being real, me and you. *Forever* Cat.”

She kisses me softly and then pulls back whispering against my lips.

“*Forever.*”

Epilogue

Cat

“Cat, Noah, how’s the follow up going?” Ms. G questions.

“Great, we interviewed the school board president and some donors last week. I think by putting them in the hot seat we could be seeing some changes.” I explain proudly.

“Make sure you follow up before completing your final draft. Good work guys.” She replies with a smile. She continues her check ins and I turn to Noah.

“We’ll stay on them, Babe. It will happen.” He assures me.

I nod in agreement and we get to work writing our follow up article. We have been trying to talk to all the right people regarding our first article for this one. I really want to be able to make a difference for these ladies and Noah knows it’s important to me so he is using all of the influence he can being who he is, and being a Caldwell as well.

After the birthday blowout things calmed down between him and his Dad who now has no objections to him dating me. Not that we care. We still don’t see them much and to be honest, I am totally okay with that.

Our little club is tight as ever and I’m pretty positive that something is going on with Sabrina and Luca, although they won’t admit it. To us or themselves, I’m still not sure, but they both have a lot of shit going on right now, so I’ll give them that.

Lakeview Lions are still undefeated and Homecoming is approaching in a couple of weeks.

Life with the Bennetts is good. Really good. I’m so grateful to have been placed with them, or rather that they chose me, and I’m sure that I will have a relationship with them for a long time. Posey will make sure of that. She’s become a little attached, but I’ve never had a sibling so I have to admit it’s pretty cool.

I've been applying for colleges all over the state in hopes that Noah gets that full ride he is hoping for from UT. He's killing it right now so I think he has a good shot and I'd like to stay close to him if I can, as well as Posey.

The bell rings and we pack up our things. Noah has practice this afternoon so Amelia is picking me up. I've been getting much more comfortable driving and I have an appointment today to take my driving test.

"Hey, good luck today Baby. You're gonna do great." Noah assures me as we walk out of class.

"Thanks. Finger crossed!" I reply with a little nervous bounce.

"I love you. Text me with the results, ok?"

"Okay. Love you too. Have a good practice."

I give him a quick kiss and he grabs my wrist as I turn to leave and pulls me back in for another. He wraps me up in his arms and kisses me deeply right there in the middle of the hallway.

"For luck." He says with a wink.

I smile and turn to head out to find Amelia definitely feeling lucky.

I glance around the front parking lot and I don't see Amelia's car.

I hope we aren't late.

I bend to sit on the steps and wait for her but I hear a honk. I look up to see Amelia, Matthew and Posey all standing by Matthew's Escalade. I grab my stuff and walk over.

They are all here. Super sweet and super nerve racking. But how the hell am I going to drive Matthew's huge SUV for this test?

I've been practicing with Amelia's smaller BMW M8. I've driven Noah's big Land Rover but the Escalade is ginormous.

I walk up with a nervous smile to meet their giant ones.

“You ready kid?” Matthew asks with a laugh at my reluctance.

“I thought so, but the Escalade seems a little daunting... How will I parallel park?!”

Oh no I’m starting to freak out. He and Amelia laugh. And he gives her a nod.

“We thought it would be best if you did your test in something more you.” Amelia smirks.

I’m confused. This giant car is more me? I tilt my head in confusion and Posey giggles jumping up and down.

“What do you mean? What’s going on?” I ask growing more nervous by the second.

Amelia takes a set of keys out of her pocket and clicks the unlock button. A beautiful metallic black Lexus IS lights up next to us and my eyes go wide.

“What? No...” They didn’t.

“No way.”

“It’s yours kid.” Matthew smiles softly.

Amelia is beaming and Posey is having a fit trying to contain her excitement. My eyes start watering.

“You guys, you can’t be serious...” I trail off in shock.

“This is too much.”

“It’s not, Love. You have worked hard, you deserve it, and we are happy to be able to give it to you.”

I cry. Shit. I’m crying. Posey runs at me and embraces my waist. Matthew and Amelia walk up slowly and wrap me in my first ever family hug. I can’t stop crying.

Oh. My. God. Stop. Crying!

“Come see inside.” Matthew laughs with red eyes, taking over the reveal, since Amelia seems to be crying worse than I am.

I sniffle and rub my face to get myself together as we walk over to the car and he opens the door and motions for me to

get in. The interior is a supple red leather and there are more dials and buttons than I know what to do with.

I take a deep breath in and smell a subtle scent of roses mixed with the new leather and plastic and smile.

She's here.

My body relaxes and I am overcome with a feeling of love and gratitude. For these people, my new family, my friends, my life, Noah, my future.

Amelia hands me the keys.

“I think we have time to take her for a quick spin so you can get used to the controls before we head to your appointment. What do you say?” Amelia asks wiping her face.

I get out of the car and face them.

“Thank you both so much for this. And thank you all for everything. You have no idea what it means to me.” I say sincerely glancing down at Posey with a rub of her hair.

“Good luck on your test Cat. Wub you.” She says blushing.

“I’ll take you for a ride after, Sis.” I say leaning down to give her a hug.

“Love you too.” I whisper with closed eyes to keep more tears from escaping.

I steel my strength and stand to face Matthew and Amelia.

“I love you guys too. Not because of the car, although it’s amazing, but for taking a chance on me and welcoming me into your home.” I get out with effort.

“We love you Cat. We are so grateful to have you in our family.” Amelia replies in a shaky voice.

“Go get that license kid. It’s time for a new chapter.” Matthew declares.

“Yes. Yes, it is.” I reply with a smile.

The End

***Want more of Lakeview Prep? Check out Sabrina and
Luca's Story in Hooked on Him!***

Sabrina and Luca's story overlaps Sweet on Her and shows you a whole new side of Lakeview Prep in this Secret Crush Romance about two people with more alike than they ever knew and how they fill in all the cracks in for each other. For their story and some sneak peeks into Cat and Noah's happily ever after, be sure to follow up with this one! Check out an excerpt below!!

Hooked On Him

Prologue

Sabrina - 8th grade

There's a new boy in school today.

Luca Milano.

Even his name is dreamy.

Every girl in the school is talking about him. I can see why with his perfect light brown curls and big puppy-dog eyes. He seems reserved but confident. A little bad boy, a little shy guy.

I look at him from afar during our lunch break as I sit under a tree with my Harry Potter book. I'm on the last one and it's super intense right now, but I can't seem to get into it as I watch him talking to some of the popular boys at a picnic table near me.

I don't know why I bother. Skinny nerd girls do not get the new hot guys. A boy like that would never look twice at me with my boring brown hair and hideous braces. I told my parents that I didn't want braces but they just said I would thank them later. Not likely, my popularity was at a zero before them, I must be in the negatives by now.

I sigh and look back down to try to forget about the new boy by immersing myself in wizard wars when my book is ripped from my hands.

"Nerd alert!" Devin Hale, the resident mean boy turns my book inside out and upside-down as if he is trying to figure out how to read. "Whatcha got here, Books?"

"Give it back, Devin." I say calmly even though the bends he's making in my pages are making my stomach twist in agony.

"Harry Potter? Lame. I'll save you some time, he dies. They all die. I guess you won't be needing this anymore."

"No, no, no!"

I jump up to save my book as he rips a chunk of pages out of the end and let's them flutter to the ground.

I stare at him in utter disbelief. I can't believe he just did that. That's sacrilege to a book lover like myself. I feel my heart breaking as I watch the ending of my beloved book blow across the open field behind him. I try to stop the tears forming in my eyes.

"Hey! Not cool man!"

I direct my gaze back to Devin when I hear a new voice stepping in.

Luca Milano stands beside him with an angry look on his face as he rips my book out of Devin's hands. It's too late. It's ruined.

How utterly humiliating.

This is not how I wanted the new boy to notice me. My tears begin to fall so I grab my backpack from the ground to make my escape from this horrid interaction. They both stare at me to bear witness to my humiliation.

"She's fine, I'm sure she's got ten of 'em at home." Devin says with a little guilt in his voice.

The new boy looks at me with pity in his beautiful hazel-green eyes.

I slip my bag on and run past them to hide in the bathroom until my next class starts. I close myself in a stall for privacy while I try to calm my tears. When I feel like the humiliation is sufficiently absorbed, I walk out to the sinks to wash my face before facing the world again.

I walk into my next class and sit in the front, as usual, and try to forget about stupid Devin.

I can get a new book, but I had worn that one in already, and a new one just isn't the same. Someone like Devin could never understand that.

Right before class starts, none other than Luca Milano walks through the door.

He's in my class, crap.

I look down quickly, covering my face with my hair, so he doesn't see me.

He finds an empty seat in the back and passes me by without recognition.

Thank goodness for small mercies.

The rest of the class passes with me sitting as still as I can so I don't draw attention to myself. Something I'm pretty sure I'm quite good at.

When the bell rings, I stay seated to wait for him to leave before me.

As he passes my desk, he slips a book in front of me without a word and keeps walking.

I look down and run my fingers over a very well-worn copy of the very same book Devin destroyed.

Is this my book?

I flip to the back and find that all the pages are still intact. Confused, I flip through the pages and see some highlighted quotes. The pages fall to the inside of the front cover and there I read a scribbled inscription:

LUCA MILANO

He gave me his own book.

Why would he do that?

He never spoke to me, that day, or any of the years that followed, but it was too late. From that day forward, I was hooked on him.

Luca

I'm a stalker. I've become a stalker. Every day this week I have been searching for Sabrina.

I realized quickly that she is now buddied up with Cat, the new girl. I fear that with the combined stares of me and Noah in their direction every day at lunch, I am going to be found out. I glance up to see her laughing with Cat before quickly averting my eyes as I eat lunch with the guys goofing off around me.

I have no business trying to pursue anything with a girl like her. She's too sweet, too innocent. My problems would just wear her down and she seems fragile enough already. I wouldn't want to taint her with my bullshit, but I can watch her. And I do. I watch her all day in the halls, in lunch, in our fifth period chemistry class, and I sneak by her choir class every chance I can in hopes of hearing her sing again. She's like a fucking siren calling to me.

I don't know why she was singing that day, or why I happened to be walking by at that exact moment, but as dumb as it sounds, it seems like fate. I want to talk to her. She's never talked to me, or looked at me, and she probably doesn't even know who I am besides being some random football player, but she's all I can think about lately.

I even Googled the fucking song she sang. I had to listen to a million songs about loneliness before I found it and it was depressing as hell, but when I finally heard it and remembered how it sounded in her voice, a sense of calm washed over me. I've been listening to the damn thing at least once a day since Saturday. Anyone who could hear me would think I was in some sort of depression or something.

Noah lost his shit on Devin this morning so he isn't sitting with us today, thank God. I'm so sick of his bullshit. Also, I'm pretty sure that after what Noah said in the locker room, he's about to pull out the big guns to nab this girl he likes, which is crazy in itself, because he has never liked a girl in this school before. But if I know my best friend, one thing is for sure, if Noah wants something he's going to get it. The question is, if he does, will that mean Sabrina will be around more too?

I can't decide if that would be a good thing, or a bad thing. As I ponder quietly to myself, I feel a body slither up beside me to get my attention. I look up to see Audrey, one of the cheerleaders I have messed around with on occasion. Her curly blonde hair that she tries to hide by overstyling it daily is getting a little frizzy today and her green eyes zero in on me.

"Hey Luca." She purrs.

Her baby soft voice which before was enticing, just sounds stupid now. Sabrina's voice had a little gruffness when she sang and I fucking dug it.

"Hey Audrey, what's up?" I ask popping a chip in my mouth. She slides her slim, tiny body against me like an emaciated cat in heat. I look her up and down and even though I know exactly what's under that little dress, I have no desire to see it again.

"The girls are going to hit up the lake this weekend on my dad's boat. Maybe you and your friends want to join us?" she asks while checking out her fake nails.

Pretty sure Noah is out since Becca is definitely going to be there and he can't stand her, and Terrance has been talking to some dance chick lately so I'm going to make an executive decision here.

"Thanks, but I'm gonna have to pass. I have a project I need to finish up." Total lie, the only project on my agenda is cyber stalking Sabrina this weekend, but I want to let her down easy.

"Really? It's supposed to be great weather." She prods in her whiny voice.

I mentioned one time after we messed around that I enjoy being out in nature, and now she thinks we have some kind of connection because her dad owns a boat and we had a semi-discussion after sex.

"Yeah, I think so, enjoy." I respond trying to dismiss her politely.

"Okaaay." She replies as if she's giving me time to change my mind.

"Okay, talk to you later. Bye Audrey." I say as I turn back to my food. I glance up in Sabrina's direction out of habit, and see her flit her eyes away quickly.

Holy shit. Was she looking at me?

Dream Cast:

Cat – Madison Pettis

Noah – Tanner Buchanan

Sabrina -Joey King

Luca – Darren Barnet

Terrance – Nadji Jeter

Becca -Peyton List

Enrique – Andrew Mattarazo

Devin – Graham Rogers

Ana Caldwell – Charlize Theron

Chip Caldwell – Micheal Fassbender

Amelia Bennett – Jessica Chastain

Matthew Bennett – Tom Hardy

Ms. G – Emmy Rossum

About the Author

Victoria Stevens is a believer in true love, soul mates, love at first sight, opposites attract, possessive alpha males, the strong females that tame them, for better or worse, and happily ever afters. After becoming an avid romance reader with over a thousand books under her belt, she set out to write realistic romance stories that everyone can relate to. She lives in the South with her middle-school sweetheart, their two kids, crazy cat, two dogs, and two fish that refuse to die. She writes her heart out when she isn't working her day job, and hopes to inspire all of the everyday women out there with hopes and dreams of becoming an author, to follow their heart, find their niche, and be brave.