



The Heavier
the
Doubt...

He hadn't paid her
any attention before,
until she showed him
exactly what he'd
been missing...

M.E. Clayton

The Heavier the Doubt...





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Author's Note



Just a couple of things before I let you go and get your read on. While I am doing my best to work with better editing and proofreading software, all my books are solo, independent works. I write my books, proofread my books, edit my books, create the covers, etc. I have one beta who gives me feedback on my stories, but other than that, all my books are independent projects.

That being said, I apologize, in advance, for the typos, grammar inconsistencies, or any other mistakes I may make. Since writing is strictly a hobby for me, I haven't looked into commitments in regard to publishers, editors, etc. My hope is that my stories are enjoyable enough that a few mistakes, here and there, can be overlooked. However, if you're a stickler for grammar, my books are probably not for you.

Also, I am an avid reader-I mean an *AVID* reader. I love to read above any other hobby. However, the only downside to my reading obsession is when I fall in love with a series, but I have to wait for the additional books to come out. So, because I feel that disappointment down to my soul, when I started publishing my works, I vowed to publish all books in my series all at once. No waiting here...LOL. Now, the exception to that will be if enough readers request additional stories based off the standalone, such as in *Facing the Enemy*. At that point, if I decide to move forward with a requested series, I will make sure all additional books are available all at once. As much as this is a hobby for me, I am writing these books for all of you, as well as myself.

Thank you for everything!

Contact Me



I really appreciate you reading my book and I would love to hear from you! Now, unfortunately, because I do have a full-time job and one part-time job, plus a family that I love spending time with, I'm not very active on social media. However, for the sites I do participate in, here are my social media coordinates:

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Dedication



My books are always dedicated to my family.

Prologue

I had never known a panicked day in my life.

I'd grown up with a fairly normal upbringing. No absent parents, no abusive siblings, no anxious health disorders. No school bullying.

No anything.

Both my parents worked hard, and I'd always done well in school. I'd been popular, seemingly well-liked, and I'd even gotten along with most of my teachers during my tenure living in Lakeside. Even my cousin, Kenzlee, coming to live with us hadn't been a hardship. Sure, I'd gotten kidnapped a couple of times because of her crazy boyfriend, but I could hardly blame that on Kenzlee.

So, apart from the whole kidnapping thing, I hadn't had any real hardships in life. I'd grown up in a three-bedroom house in a nice neighborhood, and my parents had been involved parents. They'd been harsh when they'd needed to be, but also understanding when the occasion had called for it.

As for not having any siblings, that hadn't mattered much in the scheme of things. I'd grown up with lots of friends, and I'd been involved in a lot of extracurricular activities for school. So, I'd been busy when I'd wanted to be, and an introvert when I'd needed it.

There was also the fact that, while I wasn't a brainiac, I was smart enough. Though I had to study like most of the world's population, tests and final exams hadn't freaked me out. I'd been a firm believer in just doing my best, then dealing with the consequences like a rational human being.

Honestly, my life had been pretty tamed when you compared it to my cousin's. I'd had no stress, no tears, no panicking, and no drama. Hell, even my parents didn't seem to

worry about me much. Sure, they cared about me and worried like any decent parent would, but they hadn't ever hovered over my life. They had trusted me completely and still did.

After all, why wouldn't they?

I was boring.

I was safe.

I was predictable.

Now, was I complaining? Absolutely not.

Hell no, in fact.

I *liked* boring, safe, and predictable. After seeing everything that my cousin had gone through last year, I *embraced* boring, safe, and predictable.

I was a big, big, big fan of no drama, and thinking back on the whole kidnapping thing, that's probably why I'd lost my shit on those goddamn Finley brothers so badly.

Yeah, no.

I'll pass.

Looking around my room, I realized for the first time that I was on my own now. Sure, there were signs everywhere on campus with contact numbers for help or direction, but that was mostly for *academic* help or direction. They had help for getting lost on campus, but they didn't have any for being a dork.

Now, while I knew that I wasn't the only freshman on campus being consumed by nerves, that didn't really help me. The last thing that I was going to do was dump my anxiety on someone that was already doing their best to deal with their own panic attacks.

I sat down on my bed, and it was stupid to have to share a room with a stranger if you could afford different. Sure, super rich and famous kids were allowed to live off-campus during their freshman year, but I was neither rich nor

famous, so I was stuck doing my best to mesh with a complete stranger inside this little ass room, something that I prayed would work out.

Letting out a hollow laugh, I thought about Kenzlee, and I was almost ashamed of how dramatic I was acting. After everything that she'd been through last year, if anyone had a right to panic over anything, it was her. Granted, she had Talon, but still.

I let out another hollow laugh when my hands started to sweat at the sound of the doorknob rattling. My roommate was here, and when a tall blonde with blue eyes walked in, I couldn't help but feel immediately inferior because the girl was really pretty. She even had those envious curves that came with most blondes. With my luck, she was probably also smart as hell. Suddenly, I felt like a plate of leftovers, and that was just stupid. Still, it didn't change how I felt.

Like I'd said, I had never known a panicked day in my life.

Until now.

Chapter 1

The direction that we take.

Alexandria~

I was luckier than most, and I knew that. I'd been raised by parents that had invested in me since the day that I'd been born. I had also benefitted greatly by being an only child. While my parents, Allen and Sheri Grant, had good jobs, they still hadn't had to divide their income amongst three or four kids, so I'd never had the burden of trying to figure out a way to pay for college when the time came.

My dad was a marketing executive, and if his promotions and accounts were any indication, then he was a good one. Always the level-headed one of our household, I'd never had to worry about homelessness, starvation, or anything that plagued a lot of families around the world. Dad had always taken care of our family, and when Kenzlee had come to live with us last year, it'd been nothing for him to automatically take her in. Kenzlee's family had been spiraling out of control, and by the grace of God, she had managed to find her place with us; something that I was so grateful for.

As for Mom, she was a bank teller, and she was the brains behind their comfortable living. While dad wasn't stupid, Mom knew everything there was to know about smart banking, money-management accounts, and stuff like that. So, when they'd gotten pregnant with me, the first thing that they'd done was set up a college fund for me, and that was also another thing that I was grateful for.

So, even though Kenzlee had come into all that money last year, my college had already been paid for, so she had chosen to pay off my parents' house for them instead. Even though they had argued against it, Kenzlee's reasons had been hard to refute. There was just something special about a person

that wanted to share her wealth for the right reasons, and Kenzlee's heart of gold was a right reason.

Nevertheless, even though my college was taken care of, and my parents' bank accounts were a little more cushionier with their mortgage paid off, that didn't mean that I was above getting a job while I went to college. While all of my academic responsibilities were paid for, everything else should fall on me. My parents had sacrificed enough, and if I was expecting people to start treating me like an adult, then it was time to act like one.

I could also admit that I felt a bit...behind in life. When I thought of Kenzlee and even Edie, I felt like they were both lightyears ahead in the maturity department. Granted, Kenzlee's maturity had come with a slew of tragic events, but still. When most kids would have lost their minds, Kenzlee had managed to survive losing her twin, Kaden; something that still broke her heart on occasion. Then, my Aunt Gladys had dumped her on our doorstep last year because Kenzlee's father, Donovan Mitchell, had lost all their family's riches, later killing himself because of the shame. I still cringed when I remembered how my aunt had disowned Kenzlee because Kenz had refused to give her any part of the small inheritance that her father had left her. Now, by my standards, a couple of million wasn't small by any means; not at all. However, when you were used to bank accounts that had balances of thirty million or more...then, yeah, two million didn't seem like that much.

At any rate, even without all that tragedy tainting Kenzlee's life, she had Talon Draven as her boyfriend, and that'd been one hell of a courtship. Talon was an old soul, and you'd never guess that he was only nineteen. He had the kind of commanding personality that you only saw in grown folks. Even his younger sister, Edie, seemed more mature than I was, and she was a senior in high school still. However, unlike Talon's formidable presence, Edie's superpower was that brain of hers. The girl was wicked smart, and if she ever discovered the cure for cancer, I wouldn't be surprised.

Then you had those damn Finleys that were definitely way more mature than I was. Yeah, Lars was back in Lakeside with Edie, both seniors this year, but the guy used to be a part of a fighting circuit that hadn't been for the weak. Though Talon had been the only one to fight in the bouts, Lars and Hunter had always been right there, making and taking the bets, making sure that Talon had always come out on top. Hunter and Lars were also bona fide kidnappers, but that was a story for another time.

Nevertheless, when I thought of our little group, I felt...sheltered, which was stupid. There was nothing wrong with the way that I'd grown up. There was nothing wrong with having a healthy and happy childhood. I'd been blessed, and that was a *good* thing. Having lived on the poor side of town, Talon, Edie, Hunter, and Lars would have all jumped at the chance to have what I'd had growing up, so I knew how whoa-is-me I was sounding. However, while they weren't scared to be off, living their lives, I was worried if my roommate was going to like me or not.

Pathetic.

Plus, it wasn't even like I was doing this alone. While Talon had followed Kenzlee to Stanford, and while Lars was back in Lakeside with Edie, Hunter had followed me to UCLA.

Well, not *followed*.

When Kenzlee had gotten that unexpected inheritance, she had offered to pay for everyone's college, knowing that it hadn't been an affordable luxury for Talon, Hunter, or Lars. So, because men's egos were a fragile thing, Talon had agreed to let Kenz pay for Edie's college, allowing him to use all the money that he'd save from fighting for his own college education. Hunter and Lars had agreed to let her pay for their first year of college, leaving it up to them to figure out the rest. So, while I planned on looking for a job, Hunter Finley was probably going to look for two.

At any rate, when we'd all gotten back our college acceptance letters, Talon had followed Kenzlee to Stanford, I had accepted an offer from UCLA, and Hunter had done the same, though I hadn't ever asked him why he'd chosen UCLA. While we'd known each other back in high school, we never would have hung out had it not been for Talon falling in love with Kenz.

I laughed to myself as I realized that Hunter Finley was my only friend on a campus of thousands. While my parents and Kenzlee were only one phone call away, if I needed immediate help, Hunter was the closest thing that I had to family right now. The boy that'd had no problem kidnapping me was my only real friend in this place, but I wondered how long that was going to last. All it took was one look at Hunter Finley to know that he was going to make friends rather fast in college.

That was another thing that was bothering me. Before we'd all said our goodbyes this summer, I'd been a feisty thing. I hadn't been afraid of speaking up for myself or others, and I hadn't been one to let people intimidate me. I'd had a loud voice, and I hadn't been scared to use it. I could even remember threatening to murder Hunter, Lars, and Talon if they ever kidnapped me again.

I sighed.

I missed that girl, and I wished that she'd come back.

~

Hunter~

Not much intimidated me or scared me. While I'd been fortunate enough to grow up in a household with both of my parents around and involved, we had lived on the poor side of town, and we'd all seen our fair share of crime and poverty. Life hadn't been easy, though it'd still been full of love and loyalty.

My parents, Henry and Viola Finley, had done their best by me and Lars, especially since they'd gotten pregnant with Lars almost immediately after I'd been born. So close together, it'd been a struggle to feed and clothed two growing boys on top of everything else that had a price.

My father was an insurance adjustor, and though good at his job, all his years of service had hardly made him rich. Even though we had lived in the poor section of Lakeside-*which had no lake, mind you*-the bills had never been simple. When people thought of bills, they thought of rent and utilities, maybe a car payment. People forgot about health insurance, car insurance, groceries, doctor co-pays, gasoline, clothing, shoes, and everything else that most households needed.

My mother was a car dealership secretary, another job that paid enough to pay the bills, but not much else. However, the fact that Mom was happy at her job was what'd had Dad refusing to let her look for another place to work. I could remember him telling her that he'd get a second job before he'd ever let her give up something that she liked to do. Viola Finley was a people person, and she loved watching people light up when buying a new car or their first car.

Nevertheless, while things had been tight financially, I still couldn't complain about my childhood. At least, not without sounding like a jackass. I'd been lucky enough to grow up with a brother that had understood how life worked just as well as I'd had. So, instead of being an asshole or spoiled brat, Lars had stood by me through thick and thin, knowing that things could have been worse.

Whenever either of us would start feeling weighed down by our station in life, all we'd had to do was talk to Talon to shake that shit off. Talon Draven was our best friend, and he had spent his entire life taking care of his mother and sister because his father had taken off on them, leaving Talon to be the man of the house at too young of an age. While Mrs. Draven had worked her ass off, Talon had taken care of Edie, fighting almost every weekend in an underground battle circuit

to pay for Edie's college. Edie Draven was wicked smart, and Talon had refused to let that brain of hers go to waste. Even though Edie and Talon were Irish twins like me and Lars, Talon had raised her for all intents and purposes. There was nothing that Talon wouldn't do for his sister, and he had the scars to prove it.

Of course, life had gotten easier for all of us when Kenzlee Mitchell had moved to Lakeside last year. She had moved in with her cousin, Alexandria, for her senior year of high school, and with that move had come an uproar that still made me smile whenever I thought about it. Talon had taken one look at the girl and had fallen *hard* on his ass. It'd been one hell of a courtship, and we'd all been able to breathe easier when Talon and Kenzlee had finally figured their shit out. Lars and I had even had to kidnap Alexandria a couple of times to pave the way for Talon.

At any rate, just when we'd all come to terms of college being a pipe dream, Kenzlee had come into a surprise inheritance, and she'd been gracious enough to offer to pay for everyone's education. Since Alexandria hadn't needed the money for college, Kenzlee had paid off her uncle's house as a show of appreciation for all their support during her troubling times, and since Talon had saved up for Edie's college, he and Kenzlee had agreed on a compromise. They had agreed that Kenzlee could pay for Edie's college tuition if Talon used all the money that he'd save to pay for his own college education. Talon had reluctantly agreed, and now they were both at Stanford, doing their thing.

When it'd been our turn for her generosity, Lars and I had agreed to let her pay for our first year at college, leaving it up to us to pay for the remaining three years with scholarships or jobs. No matter how archaic it sounded, we'd been raised in a home where the man was the head of the household, and having Kenzlee pay for anything still felt a tad...emasculating. Still, it'd been either come up with a compromise that worked for all of us or hurt her feelings, and Talon didn't go for anyone hurting that girl's feelings. He called her White in reference to Snow White, for fuck's sakes.

Nevertheless, that was how I'd found myself at UCLA. While Talon was at Stanford with Kenzlee, and Lars was back home with Edie, I had accepted an offer from UCLA, and I'd done it mostly because Alexandria had been accepted here, too. While we hadn't really become friends until Talon and Kenzlee had gotten together, it hadn't felt right for everyone to have someone close to them with Alexandria going off all by herself. So, because I'd been raised the way that I'd been, I had followed her to UCLA, keeping that little nugget of truth to myself. Alexandria Grant wasn't the type of female that appreciated pity or unsolicited male protection. The girl was a bit of a spitfire, and I ought to know. Nonetheless, I still didn't regret kidnapping her. Talon's my boy, and I'd do anything for him, including kidnapping her again if I had to.

Now, again, while I wasn't intimidated by much, it was hard not to be intimidated by the largeness of this campus, the people, money, and expectations. Luckily for me, my roommate, Baron Memphis, seemed like a cool dude, and he was here on a football scholarship, making me feel like we were going to understand each other perfectly. If he was here on a football scholarship, then he wasn't here to fuck around. He was here for a purpose, and making something of himself seemed more important to him than partying it up or any of that other shit that was assumed about college life.

My only plan for college was to not disappoint Kenzlee. She believed in me and Lars enough to write a check for our futures, and I refused to be one more person in her life that has let her down. That girl had enough disappointment to last a lifetime, and I refused to be added to that list. While I wanted her to be proud of me, it was more than that. I wanted *us* all to make her proud; someone that selfless deserved it.

Apart from all that, my biggest concern right now was Alexandria. While I was here to look out for her, I knew that it wasn't going to take long before she had a flurry of new friends and guys going after her. Even if she wasn't 'fresh meat', Alexandria Grant was beautiful. Though she didn't resemble any Disney characters like Kenzlee, Alex had these incredible ice-blue eyes that were almost hypnotizing. They

were going to be the perfect icebreaker for anyone that wanted to get to know her, and I had to find a way to make sure that she didn't forget about me. No matter what, I refuse to let Alexandria become a college statistic. I wanted her college experience to be all positive, and I was going to do whatever I had to in order to make that possible. Hell, I wanted *all* of our college experiences to be positive ones. I wanted to hear how Talon and Kenzlee were doing great, and when the time came, I wanted to hear Lars and Edie talk about how they were also doing great in college.

Now, did I sound stingy to wish that for all of us? Maybe. Still, there was nothing wrong with wanting happiness for all my friends. Kenzlee had given us all a chance to do something more with our lives, and that's what I wanted for all of us.

Plus, there was also my temper to consider. While Talon had been the fighter, and still had no problem throwing a punch, he'd done it for money; he'd done it for Edie's future. So, he'd been the pragmatic one, Lars had been the easygoing one, and I'd been the one that had struggled with his temper. When it flared, I loved nothing more than a good fight to follow.

So, yeah, nothing had better happen to Alexandria, or else I was screwed.

Chapter 2

The reality that grounds us.

Hunter~

One week down, and things were feeling a bit more manageable. Classes started on Monday, and I wasn't feeling as intimidated as I'd been when I'd first gotten here. I had spent the past week checking out the campus, plus driving around town to get a familiar feel for the place.

That was another thing that Kenzlee had insisted upon when we had all agreed to go to college. Alexandria had already had a car, so she hadn't been an issue. However, Kenzlee had purchased a car for Edie, then buying a car for me and Lars to get around. After graduation, Edie had agreed that she and Lars could share her car, allowing me to have my own transportation while away.

So, with my shit all set up in my dorm, feeling more confident with getting around campus and town, the only thing left was for me to find a job. Mom had suggested that I wait until a few weeks, so that I could be realistic with my workload versus my free time, but I knew that if I waited, most of the jobs would be gone. I wasn't the only student here on hopes and dreams. Besides, I wasn't afraid of hard work or sacrifices. Again, the example my father had set for us had been a good one; one that worked in my favor now.

When college had become a reality, I had chosen to get my degree in computer engineering. No matter how people felt about technology, it was here to stay. Like money, it made the world go around, and I had no desire to become internet famous for putting my business out there as a way to make money. That shit was crazy to me. While I had nothing against social media, making my living from exposing myself to strangers was not anything that I cared to do. Not only was it

dangerous as hell, but I already knew that the world was shit without having to invite negative and toxic people into my life.

At any rate, having a regular job was my goal in life, but I wanted one that paid well. Again, it was important for me to make Kenzlee happy and not squander the opportunity that she'd given us all. So, computer engineering had felt like the right choice for me. Plus, with my temper being what it was, a job where I could just do my own thing seemed ideal to me. Yeah, I might be sitting in front of a computer all day, but at least I wouldn't be surrounded by idiots.

“Still plan on job hunting this week?”

I looked up from my laptop to see Baron walking into our room, fresh from the showers. Now, while I wasn't into guys, it was hard not to notice just how big this dude was. I was six-foot-one and had my own set of hard-earned muscles, but I still felt small next to this Viking. Baron Memphis was six-foot-four, had blond hair, blue eyes, and could barely fit through the door. Whenever he sat on his bed, the entire frame screamed for help, and it made perfect sense why he was here on a football scholarship. He played the linebacker position, and why wouldn't he? He also wasn't a bad-looking dude if you liked that blonde hair/blue eyed combo, which most girls did.

What surprised me the most about him was that he had no tattoos. Sure, I was stereo typing a bit, but he just seemed like the type that would have tattoos. I had several of my own, so maybe I was projecting. Still, you didn't see many athletes without tattoos these days.

“That's the plan,” I answered.

“Man, I wish I could get a job,” he stated conversationally. “I mean, I know there's no way in hell that I'll have time, but...it feels weird not working.”

Baron's childhood had been similar to mine. While he'd had both his parents in his life growing up, they'd been one paycheck above poverty themselves. Like my family, they'd been too rich for assistance, yet too poor to make

anything happen. Families like ours spent their entire existence praying that the car didn't break down, that no one got sick, or that the refrigerator didn't die. Unexpected expenses like those would keep my parents up at night, calculating how to make things work, and Baron's family had been the same. Though depressing, I was glad that I'd been paired up with someone that I could identify with. It was going to make my first year way more easier now.

"Football is work," I pointed out. "Hell, if things go according to plan, it'll be your *actual* job when you graduate from here."

Grinning, he looked over at me. "Thanks for that, but I'm used to cashing paychecks. I've been working since I got my work permit at fifteen."

"Well, that's what the off-season and summer are for," I said, shrugging. "And if you need anything, I can always help if I've got the money."

Baron started pulling some clothes from his side of the closet. "While I appreciate that, you're not looking for a job just so that you can give your money away, Hunter."

"True," I agreed. "But where I come from, you help your people when you can."

Baron turned back around to look at me. "Isn't that ironic? Poor people will give their last dollar to other poor people because they know what it feels like to be without. Meanwhile, you've got rich shits that won't give you a nickel if they can't write it off on their taxes." He shook his head. "It's a damn shame."

I immediately thought of Kenzlee. "Not all rich people are greedy or stingy."

"If you know one, then you've met a real-life unicorn," he snorted. "In my experience, they're not very nice or giving."

Instead of getting into a debate about generosity, I said, “Well, the offer still stands. If I got it and don’t need it, then all you have to do is ask.”

“I appreciate that, man. Really.”

“No problem,” I assured him before going back to my laptop. I’d been searching Want Ads before he’d walked into the room, hoping to find something that I could land right away. Not only did I need money for future tuition and to live comfortably, but what if Alexandria needed something? Yeah, she had her parents and cousin, but if she needed money in case of an emergency, I wanted to be able to have it for her, instead of forcing her to have to wait for her parents or Kenzlee to transfer it to her.

“Well, I’m off,” Baron announced. “Good luck finding a job.”

I looked up from my laptop. “Thanks, man. I’ll let you know if I find one, and what my schedule will be like, so that you can be aware of my comings and goings.”

“Nah, don’t worry about it,” he said, heading towards the door. “Since I’m probably going to be all over the place with classes and practice, as long as we each remember to lock the door on our way out, then I’m good.”

He was out the door before I could respond to that, but locking the door I could do. His easy comments were also just another reminder that I’d lucked out this year. Baron Memphis wasn’t a douchebag, and I really couldn’t have asked for more.

~

Alexandria~

Like a fool, I felt relieved. With the first week of college under my belt, I was starting to feel way better about the whole situation, and I could even admit to being a little embarrassed by my personal dramatics earlier. Now that I knew what it was like to get a taste of classes and the people,

life didn't feel so daunting anymore. In fact, I even felt comfortable enough to start looking for a job. While I had plans to party and have a good time just like any college student, I needed something to ground me, and that would be a job.

So, with my laptop open, the Want Ads up on my screen, I looked for something that would fit my schedule. In a perfect world, everything would balance out perfectly, but we didn't live in a perfect world. Even though my life was good, it was time to brace the pitfalls of adulthood, something that I hoped that I could do without having to run to my parents for help.

"I still can't believe that you're looking for a job." I looked up to see Jessica cracking her neck, waking from her nap. Unlike me, she was hitting the partying scene with all cylinders firing. "I mean, you said that your tuition was all paid for, so what's the point?"

"I'd like money to do things," I answered. "My parents sacrificed a lot to make sure that I could afford college, so the least I could do is get a job, so that I don't have to mooch off them anymore."

"It's not mooching," she huffed. "They're your parents. They're *supposed* to take care of you."

Jessica Branch and I were from two different worlds. Even though her parents weren't wealthy, they still had money, and Jessica expected them to finance *all* her expenses while in college. While I wouldn't say that she'd been born with a silver spoon in her mouth, she was an only child, and it was clear that her parents had doted on her. She was spoiled, and it showed with everything that came out of her mouth. Jessica was five-foot-five, had blonde hair, blue eyes, a killer figure, and she was catering to every stereo type that people had of blondes. However, she was here for a degree in computer science, so I was under the assumption that she wasn't an airhead, though she did say some crazy stuff at times.

Like now.

“They’re only obligated to take care of me until the age of eighteen, Jessica,” I corrected. “Anything after that is a favor. Parents are not required to take care of their *adult* children.”

“If a person is still going to school, then they still qualify as being a child,” she argued. “Honestly, they should raise the legal care age to twenty-one.”

“Because you’d *want* your parents in your business at the age of twenty-one?”

Not answering, she said, “I’m just saying that if your parents want you going to college, then they should take care of you until you graduate.”

Thankfully, my phone chimed, and when I looked down at it, I couldn’t help but smile.

Kenz: *I miss u*

Me: *I miss u 2*

Kenz: *I have sum time later between classes. I’m going 2 call u around 3*

Me: *That works 4 me. I really miss u, Kenz*

Kenz: *Same here. Plus, Talon is driving me crazy*

That had me letting out a soft laugh. Yes, Talon Draven was a lot to take, but there was no denying that he was insanely in love with Kenzlee. Lots of teenage relationships never got the chance to see forever, but that wasn’t going to be the case with Kenzlee and Talon. Talon was going to love Kenzlee all the days of his life, and if it weren’t for her wanting to wait, they’d be married already.

Me: *Probably 4 the rest of ur life...LOL*

Kenz: *Definitely...LOL. Ok...talk 2 u later*

Me: *Ok*

“So, I take it that you’re not going to the kickoff party this weekend?” Jessica asked, not caring that I was on the phone.

I set my phone down on my bed, then looked over at her. “I thought all the parties last weekend were the kickoff parties?”

“Those were the back-to-school parties,” she answered primly.

“What’s the difference?”

“There’s a bigger turnout. Now that everyone’s no longer jittery, there’s more socializing.”

“How do you know this?” I asked curiously. “You’re a freshman like me.”

Jessica shrugged. “I guess I’m just making friends with the right people.”

“So, there’s only one party this weekend?”

“Oh, no,” she rushed out. “There’s going to be a bunch of parties.”

I could feel a headache forming behind my eyes because this girl was just too much. “Then which party are you talking about?”

“They say that the Cherry House has the best parties,” she answered slyly. “So, that’s the one that I’m going to.”

“What the hell is a cherry house?”

“Really, you’re just too much, Alexandria,” she huffed. “It’s called that because of the rumors.”

Don’t ask, don’t ask, don’t ask.

“What rumors?” I asked like an idiot.

With that sly grin still on her face, she said, “Well, if you’re looking to get rid of your virginity, that’s the place to do it.” *I shouldn’t have asked.* “It’s rumored that the guys of

the house know exactly what they're doing and do the most to make it as perfect as possible for their virgins."

"Sounds more like a ritual sacrifice than a party," I snorted.

"Well, if I'm going to lose my virginity, then I'd rather do it with someone that knows what they're doing, rather than get roofied and raped," she scoffed, and that took a dark turn rather quickly.

"Not drinking is also an option," I pointed out like a ninety-year-old grandmother.

"If you want to kill all your college fun, have at it," she replied, getting out of bed. "I plan on making the most of my college years."

I almost laughed when I thought about how I'd gone from a girl that used to go to underground fights to one afraid to have a drink. I really was turning into someone's grandmother.

Chapter 3

The thoughts that surprise us.

Alexandria~

Three days later, I still hadn't found a job. Nevertheless, I wasn't letting that get me down. I had applied to several ads, and I was still holding out hope that one of them would call me back. I was also getting into a routine with Jessica, which I considered a win. Yeah, we were nothing alike, but she was turning out to be quite the social butterfly, so I was left alone in the dorm a lot. It was actually kind of nice.

With my last class for the day over, I was rushing back to my room to go through all my job applications and get a little more organized. The last thing that I needed was to get a callback or online response and not remember what the hell I had applied for.

Rushing around the corner of the statistics building, I ran smack dab into a hard chest, the impact sending me flying back. Luckily, a pair of strong hands grabbed me before I could fall on my ass.

"Shit," came a voice that I knew well.

Looking up, Hunter Finley was staring down at me, obvious concern for me in those incredible hazel eyes of his. "It's okay."

"Fuck, Alex," he rushed out. "I'm sorry."

I straightened, forcing his hands from my arms. "I'm good. No harm done."

He looked like he wasn't sure whether to believe me or not, but he let it go anyway. "How are you doing?" he asked,

instead. “I saw you across campus the other day, but I was running late and couldn’t catch you.”

Looking up at Hunter Finley, it was hard not to appreciate how gorgeous the guy was. He was six-foot-one or so, had dark brown hair, bright hazel eyes, the body of an athlete, and he had tattoos that peeked out from his shirt. Yeah, he had a temper and was lowkey violent when provoked, but there was no doubt that Hunter Finley was hot. He had that whole mysterious bad boy vibe going for him, but maybe that was because I knew that he was a fighter. While unpopular these days, I found testosterone-fueled men attractive, and Hunter Finley had plenty of testosterone in that ripped body of his.

I could remember when Kenzlee had first seen Talon without a shirt on, and she hadn’t been able to get past the fact that he’d been sporting an eight-pack, not a six-pack that most guys had. She’d been a drooling mess, and I hadn’t blamed her one bit. As far as I knew, Talon still had that eight-pack, but I wouldn’t kick Hunter Finley out of my bed for only having six of them, that’s for sure.

“It’s okay,” I told him. “I’m actually surprised to see you. After all, it’s a big campus.”

“Still, considering that you’re my only friend in this place, I shouldn’t go so long without checking in,” he replied, and did I mention that he also had a sexy voice? It was low, rough, and full of that testosterone that I was a sucker for.

“Well, with you here for computer engineering, and me here for business management, we might not get the chance to see each other often,” I replied, trying to let him off the hook. Hunter didn’t need to spend his freshman year at college babysitting me. He probably wanted to experience college the same way that Jessica and most of the other students did, and babysitting me was not the way to accomplish that.

His brows shot upward. “Trying to get rid of me already?”

I shot him a look. “Of course, I’m not,” I sighed. “I just don’t expect you to babysit me, Hunter.” I gestured around us. “This is...it’s a big deal and a lot to get acclimated to. You’re not the only one being neglectful.”

Just then, a couple of girls came around the corner, and as soon as they saw Hunter, I noticed how their faces lit up. While I had no right to feel anything when it came to Hunter Finley, a small part of me wanted to stake a claim on him. He really was the only person here that I could trust if I found myself in any kind of jam, and I was finding myself selfishly wanting to protect that tie.

“Oh, hey, Hunter,” one of the girls greeted before her eyes flew my way.

“Hey, Jaime,” he greeted back.

He turned to look back at me, but then she added, “Hope to see you at some of the parties this weekend.”

Hunter’s hazel gaze slid back her way. “We’ll see.”

With her eyes still on me, she said, “I’m Jamie Newman. This is Freida Vance.”

Before I could introduce myself, Hunter said, “It’s nice to meet you, Frieda. I’m Hunter Finley, and this is Alexandria Grant.”

Frieda just kind of waved, her blue eyes still drinking Hunter in with no shame.

Looking back over at Hunter, Jamie said, “Well, I really hope to see you this weekend.”

“We’ll see,” Hunter repeated. “I’ve got a lot on my plate right now.”

Not taking the hint, she said, “Well, I’m pretty sure that you can make a little bit of time to hang out with some new friends.”

Hunter licked his bottom lip, and while most women would find that sexy as hell-*because it was*-I knew it for the

tell that it was.

Hunter was about to lose his temper.

“Hunter, don’t forget that you’re supposed to help me move...that thing,” I said, finally speaking up, if only to help this poor girl out. An irritated Hunter Finley was a rude Hunter Finley, and no one needed that right now.

Hunter turned to look at me. “What?”

I rolled my eyes dramatically, looking over at Jamie and Frieda. “See? He’s already forgotten,” I huffed like an airhead. “Men, am I right?”

“Alex-”

I shot Hunter a look. “I mean, if you’d rather go to a party than help me move that...thing, then I totally understand-”

“Oh...uh, no,” he stammered, finally catching on. “A promise is a promise.”

Jamie looked between the two of us, and if she bought our shitty acting, then she was dumber than I was judging her to be. “Uhm-”

“Yeah, so...sorry, Jamie,” Hunter said, cutting her off. “I’ll be busy all weekend.”

She didn’t look like she believed us, but she chose not to make a scene about it. “Well, maybe next time,” she replied snidely.

“Yeah, maybe next time,” Hunter lied.

I didn’t start laughing until they were far enough away from us to hear me.

~

Hunter~

I didn't understand it. Yeah, back in high school it was understandable because the pickings were slim, but on a campus this size, there were plenty of guys to choose from. So, I didn't understand why girls kept hitting me up like there wasn't plenty of fish in this big ass college ocean.

Now, it wasn't that I wasn't interested in anything fun, but that just wasn't my priority right now. I was still waiting to hear back from any of the many job applications that I had filled out this week, and I could admit that the lack of responses was beginning to make me antsy. I *needed* a job. I needed a job more than I needed to get laid. My hand wrapped around my dick could easily take care of that kind of tension. Jacking off wasn't going to pay my next year's tuition, no matter my stamina or skill at getting it done.

So, while most guys would have taken Jamie Newman up on her obvious offer in a heartbeat, I was still trying to get situated, women the last thing on my mind right now. Or at least, all women with the exception of the one standing in front of me.

Alexandria was five-foot-two of curves that I couldn't lie and say that I'd never thought about before. Even if I didn't have a thing for brunettes, Alexandria Grant was beautiful with her dark hair, those incredible icy eyes, a heart-shaped face, and a body that could take a pounding with no issues whatsoever. Alex had a woman's body, and I liked that about her. Yeah, some people might call her 'thick', but those people were stupid. I liked my ears warm when I was eating a girl's pussy, and Alex's thighs were thick enough to keep me warm all fucking night long.

Shaking my head of thoughts that I had no business thinking, I shot Alex a look. "It's not funny."

"Yeah, it is," she countered, still chuckling. "I don't think I've ever seen you so embarrassed." Alex cocked her head to the side. "Back in high school, girls never got you flustered."

“That’s because I wasn’t deciding the rest of my life back in high school,” I replied. “While Jamie’s nice to look at, I need to focus my attentions on finding a damn job.”

Alexandria’s face softened. “Same here,” she sighed. “I think I’ve applied everywhere but the strip clubs, and if no one calls me back soon, then I’m going to have to find a way to start stripping for a living while keeping my parents from finding out.”

Yeah, the last thing that I needed to imagine was Alexandria Grant swinging on a fucking stripper pole. I mean, I wouldn’t turn down a private show if she ever offered, but I didn’t like the feeling that was crawling down my spine at the thought of her taking her clothes off for a bunch of horny men.

“Well, I might have to become a cam girl and see where that takes me,” I teased, grinning.

Alex arched a brow. “Well, I mean...you’ve got the body for it.”

“For being a cam girl?” I quipped.

She grinned. “For masturbating in front of a camera,” she corrected, and it was on the tip of my tongue to tell her that I wouldn’t mind masturbating in front of *her*.

I shook my head. While I’d always found Alexandria stunning, these new thoughts about her were starting to come out of left field and hitting me hard. Maybe it was because she was the only person that I knew here, or because she reminded me of home whenever I looked at her, I wasn’t sure. Nevertheless, whatever it was, my dick kept getting hard whenever I started thinking of her, and not like the mini-chub that I used to get around her in high school. This was beginning to feel different.

“Well, how about we hold off on getting naked for other people until we’ve exhausted all our options?” I joked. “I can’t say that I’m okay with you taking off your clothes for a bunch of strange men.”

“Ah, always the big brother,” she teased, and I was pretty sure that she just friend-zoned me.

Fucking great.

Getting serious, I said, “Alexandria, if you need anything, I expect you to come to me for help. You do realize that, right?”

“Hunter-”

“I don’t care what it is,” I went on, cutting off what I was sure was a lecture on female independence. “If you need anything, I expect you to come to me.”

Alex eyed me for a bit before finally saying, “Same here. I expect this friendship to work both ways, Hunter. If you need anything, then all you have to do is ask.”

“Deal,” I agreed.

“But...”

I could feel my heart sink. “What, Alex?”

“I just...I don’t want you to feel like you have to babysit me, Hunter,” she said, and that made me scowl. “College is our chance to grow and experience new things, so...I mean, I just don’t want you to feel *obligated* when it comes to me. If I need you, but you’re busy doing something else, then I expect you to let me know that. We’re both nineteen, and it’s time to toss away the crutches, don’t you think?”

There was no fucking way that I’d ever choose something over whatever she needed, and it wasn’t because I was beginning to have conflicted feelings about her. I’d been taught loyalty at an early age, so I wasn’t the type of guy that left his friends hanging. Even if I made new friends, I’d grown up in the same town and school system as Alexandria Grant, and her cousin was marrying my best friend; we were bonded by our friends, families, and history.

“Alex, let’s get something straight here,” I told her. “I could become friends with every person on this damn campus, and not one of them would become more important to me than you.” Those ice-colored eyes of hers widened. “New friends don’t cancel out my old friends, Alex. I’m not made that way. I don’t leave the people that I care about behind while I make my way forward. I bring them with me, and that includes you.” I couldn’t stop my hand from reaching up and cupping the left side of her face. “It doesn’t matter what I’m doing or who I’m with, Alex; if you need something, I’ll be there.”

I watched as her shoulders sagged. “I really appreciate that, Hunter. I promise that I won’t try to take advantage.”

Please, take advantage.

Dropping my hand and shaking those thoughts loose again, I said. “Okay, glad we agree.” Alex grinned again. “Look, I need to get going.”

“Yeah, so do I,” she sighed. “I need to go check my applications.”

That had me laughing. “What a coincidence.”

“I’ll see you later, Hunter,” she said, stepping back from me. “I promise not to be a stranger.”

“Same here,” I returned, then I stayed rooted as I watched Alexandria make her way down the walkway to wherever she was going, which had me thinking...

Me: *Which dorm do u live n?*

Kidnappee: *Trinity Hall*

Now that I knew where she lived, the next step was figuring out how I felt about the damn girl.

Chapter 4

The decisions that change everything.

Hunter~

“We’re going to the Cherry House tonight,” Baron announced, making me look up over at him as he walked into our room. “I don’t want to hear any arguments.”

Even though it was still only the second week into the semester, there weren’t too many people that hadn’t already heard about the infamous Cherry House. While it was a regular sorority house like a dozen others, it was said that the Cherry House was where you went to lose your virginity, girl or guy. Apparently, there were a lot of oppressed females just waiting to rebel against their parents, and they did it at the Cherry House. It was also rumored that the experienced guys did their best to make it pleasurable for the girl, and the experienced girls did their best to turn the virginal guys stupid with what they could do with five inches of dick. Granted, I was going by the statistical measures of the average penis size, though I was proud to say that I beat that statistic by a few inches.

Thank God for small favors.

“And why are we going to the Cherry House?” I asked. “I mean, I’m not judging or anything, but I don’t need my cherry popped, nor do I have any interest in being some girl’s first.”

Baron smirked my way. “Dude, I can’t remember the first time that I ever got my dick wet,” he bragged. “However, when girls think that a guy might have the makings of a professional athlete, they throw that pussy at you without even needing to ask for it.”

Sadly, he wasn’t wrong.

“So, why the need to party at the Cherry House if you’re not virginal?” I asked, having no desire to go. Again, I wasn’t opposed to getting laid, but I was too worried about finding a job to even think about pussy right now.

“I heard that it’s the place to be for the first month of classes,” he answered. “It’s where you’ll find everyone.” He tossed his backpack on his bed, then sat down. “Even the seniors hang out there to get first dibs on the newest coeds on campus. If you’re trying to make a name for yourself, that’s where you need to be.”

“But I’m not trying to make a name for myself,” I pointed out. “I couldn’t care less about that shit.”

“C’mon, Hunter,” he groaned. “I get wanting to be responsible and all that, but one night of partying isn’t going to put you on the path of destruction, my man. It might get you laid, but that’s about it.”

“And if I get an interview in the morning?” I posed. “I’m supposed to show up hungover?”

“All these businesses are probably used to it,” he argued. “Besides, it shows commitment if you show up looking like shit.”

That got a laugh out of me. “You might have a point there,” I conceded.

“Look, I’m not asking you to go through a box of condoms, or even stay out until the sun comes up,” he said. “Let’s just go check it out. I can even introduce you to a few of the guys on the football team.”

“Everyone’s going?” I asked, thinking about the chances of Alexandria being there. While I wasn’t her father, I knew for a fact that Alexandria Grant was a virgin, and the thought of her going to the Cherry house bothered me *a lot*.

“Almost everyone shows up there at one point or another during the first month of classes,” he answered. “Even

if you're not looking to get laid, it's the place to be, man. If nothing else, it should be fun."

I eyed him. "Do you know a Jamie Newman?" I asked. "Short, red hair, blue eyes."

Baron gave me a sly grin. "I've got her in one of my math classes," he answered. "*Super* friendly?"

I chuckled. "Yeah, super friendly."

His brows rose. "Thinking of hitting that?"

I scowled. "Yeah, no," I huffed. "She seems like a bit... much."

Baron grabbed all his blonde hair into a ponytail, then did that man-bun thing that guys had started doing a while back. My hair was cut close on the sides, a little longer on the top, so I didn't have anything to gather. My hair was long enough to give a girl something to hold onto while my face was in between her thighs, but that was it.

"Then why ask about her?" he asked after gathering his hair out of his face.

"I ran into her yesterday, and she mentioned hoping to see me at some of the parties this weekend," I told him. "Not to sound like a pussy, I'm not up to fending off some girl all night long."

"Dude, girls like that will move on easily if you make it clear that you're not interested," he said. "You gotta remember, this isn't high school anymore. These college girls aren't looking for marriage."

I grinned. "Unless you're an athlete that's on his way to the NFL, MLB, NBA, NHL, or whatever other letters are out there."

Baron chuckled. "Touché."

Thinking about it, maybe a good party was just what I needed. While I wasn't looking to lose my virginity or devirginize anyone, a few beers couldn't hurt. It might even

help relieve some of this fucking stress. I mean, I knew that I could always get my degree through a community college, but I didn't want to go that route unless I absolutely had to. Plus, whatever money that I might have left over could go to helping Lars when he got to college. If I could make life easier on my brother-*even a little bit*-then I would. Hell, if I got a decent-paying job right out of college, I could just go back to living poor like I used to, then use all my extra money to pay for Lars' three other years of college. It'd be a struggle, but I was used to struggling or going without for Lars, something that I'd *never* regretted or resented.

“You know what? I'll go,” I said, making up my mind.

Baron's smile stretched across his face. “Cool. We can meet up with some of my boys, have a few beers, then do whatever it is that college kids are supposed to do.”

Making a last-minute decision, I asked, “Is it cool if I bring someone?”

He shrugged. “Yeah, that's cool. Who'd you have in mind?”

“My friend, Alex.” It was beginning to feel weird to just call her my friend, but as of right now, that's all that she was.

“Oh, okay. Cool. Where do you know him from?”

“Actually, it's *Alexandria*,” I corrected. “We grew up in the same town, then ended up here together.”

He waggled his brows. “Is she hot?”

I licked my bottom lip, doing my best not to take the bait. “She's off-limits, is what she is.”

Baron grinned. “It's like that?”

Since I saw no point in lying to him, I said, “Yeah, it's like that.”

Alexandria~

I looked down at my phone, and I was kind of surprised and disappointed, though I didn't want to look too much into why I was feeling disappointed. After all, I was the one that had told Hunter to go out and make new friends. I was the one that'd told him not to worry about babysitting me, right?

Kidnapper #1: *Going 2 a party 2nite. Wanna go?*

For reasons that I just wasn't ready to examine, my first thought when I saw Hunter's text was that he'd decided to meet up with Jamie after all and taking me with him was his way of trying to avoid the lie about how he was supposed to help me move that fake thing.

Before I could respond to Hunter's text, the door to my room opened, Jessica barging inside, fresh from the showers. "I can't believe that you're really staying in for the second weekend in a row," she huffed. "You are absolutely no fun, Alexandria Grant."

"That's not true," I semi-lied. "Back in high school, I used to hit up the parties and underground fights all the time."

That had her pausing her steps. "What? What underground fights?"

I shrugged like I was Mrs. Cool or something. "There used to be a traveling underground fighting circuit, and we'd go a lot."

"Well, well, well..." she drawled out.

"Don't, Jessica," I chuckled.

Resuming her steps towards the closet, she asked, "So, you're perfectly fine with watching two guys beat the crap out of each other, but a college party freaks you out?"

"Have you ever watched two shirtless guys fighting each other?" I challenged. "It's hot as hell."

“Oh, God,” she rushed out dramatically. “You’re one of *those*.”

That had my head rearing back a bit. “One of *what*?”

“One of those girls that live in those smutty romance novels and like all that alpha-male nonsense,” she answered, and while I wasn’t one to judge anyone’s taste in their partners, Jessica was obviously judging what I liked in a guy.

“And you have a problem with strong men?” I asked.

If her hair wasn’t wrapped up in a towel, she would have tossed it over her shoulder with all the attitude that she was showing. “No man will ever tell me what to do,” she vowed. “Their job is to please me, not the other way around.” I had to bite my lip to keep myself from saying something condescending. “I can’t imagine a woman ever letting a man tell her what to do.”

I couldn’t keep my mouth shut, even though I knew that I ought to. “But you don’t find anything wrong with a woman telling a man what to do?”

“Men don’t have to prove their strength or superiority,” she retorted haughtily. “If women aren’t careful, they’ll let masculinity set us back fifty years.”

I just stared at her.

This chick was off her nut.

Now, while I was all for female empowerment, my self-esteem wasn’t fragile enough to be threatened by a man’s masculinity. Letting a man be a man didn’t prevent me from being a woman, strong or otherwise. So, yeah, I thought underground fighting was sexy, and I thought guys like Hunter Finley and Talon Draven were hot as hell. I also wasn’t going to let this girl get away with judging my taste in men.

“Well, while I can appreciate your stance on the opposite sex, I like that alpha-male stuff, and I make no apologies for it,” I told her.

“Unless he becomes too much for you to handle,” she replied coolly.

“I think this is one of those times when we’ll have to agree to disagree,” I said diplomatically. “If nothing else, we’ll never fight over the same guy.”

That seemed to be enough to get Jessica off her high horse. “True,” she said, the attitude gone for the moment. “So, are you really going to stay home?”

I looked back at the text from Hunter, then said, “I don’t know. I just got invited to a party.”

“You should go,” she encouraged. “Even if you’re not going to the Cherry House, a party will do you some good. It’ll help loosen you up.”

Screw it.

Me: *Sure.*

Kidnapper #1: *Great. I’ll pick u up @ 9*

Me: *R u going 2 babysit me all nite?*

Kidnapper #1: *It’s a surprise*

That got a laugh out of me. While it wasn’t necessary to babysit me, I knew that Hunter wouldn’t invite me to a party just to ditch me later. I also knew that I was safe with Hunter. There was no way that I was going to get roofied on his watch.

Looking back up at Jessica, I said, “I just texted Hunter that I’ll go to the party with him.”

Jessica scowled. “What’s the point of going to a party with a guy? It’s like taking sand to the beach.”

“I’m not looking to hook up with anyone, Jessica,” I answered. “I just really want to go and hang out. You know, have a few beers and a good time.”

She shook her head at me again. “That sounds so boring.”

“I’m okay with boring,” I drawled out.

“Well, I’m going to get my bell rung by whatever hot guy catches my eye.” She said it like the thought of a guy turning her down was inconceivable, and maybe it was. I mean, Jessica was very pretty and outgoing, so maybe she did have the power to grab any guy that she wanted. “Besides, who is this Hunter person?”

“Just a friend that I grew up with,” I told her, hedging around the truth a bit. “We were lucky enough to end up here together.”

“Is he hot?” she asked slyly, and the thought of Jessica hooking up with Hunter bothered me a lot.

“Yes, he is,” I answered truthfully, no matter how I felt about the subject.

“How hot?”

“Scorching.”

“Hmm...” she murmured, and I could feel things getting more and more complicated by the minute. Whatever was happening, it was clear that Hunter Finley was no longer just a guy that I’d grown up with.

Chapter 5

The little things that open our eyes.

Alexandria~

Even though nine o'clock was considered early for college life, the party at the Cherry House had been in full swing when we had arrived an hour ago, and while I wasn't necessarily uncomfortable, this was my first college party ever, and I could admit to feeling a bit intimidated by the lack of decency swarming the place. Even though there'd been drugs and sex at the underground fights, everyone had been there mostly for the fighting and bets. Here, people were upstairs offering up their virginities like Oprah used to give away audience prizes.

"Are you sure that you're okay?"

I looked up at Hunter for the millionth time tonight. "Are you going to keep asking me that all night?"

He smirked down at me. "You just look nervous," he replied honestly. "If you don't want to be here, we can go, Alex."

"I'm not nervous," I denied. "I just...well, you do know why they call this place the Cherry House, right?"

Hunter's smirk turned into a full-blown grin. "You're uncomfortable about all the sacrificial virgins in the place?"

"You're a dick, Hunter Finley," I replied before taking a drink of my beer.

"Oh, c'mon," he chuckled. "You can't tell me that sex makes you uncomfortable, Alexandria. There's no way that you would have made it through our senior year if it did."

He wasn't wrong about that. Talon could *not* keep his hands off Kenzlee to save his life. While he'd done his best to

act right whenever Edie had been around, it'd been a rare thing for Talon and Kenzlee to go a day without being underneath each other.

“Sex doesn't make me nervous,” I said, eyeing the bastard. “I just...it's weird.”

After taking a drink of his own alcoholic concoction, he asked, “What's weird?”

“I don't know,” I muttered, feeling like a naïve child all of a sudden. “I mean, I know that candlelight and rose petals only happen in romance books, but I can't imagine *wanting* to lose my virginity at a college party in a bed that probably doesn't even have clean sheets.”

Hunter eyed me for a second before bursting out laughing. “Clean sheets, Alex? Really?”

“Screw you, Hunter Finley,” I huffed before stepping away to leave him and his condescending ways to enjoy the night without me.

“Whoa,” he said before I felt his hand wrap around my arm, yanking me back. “Relax, Alexandria.”

I looked up at him. “I'll relax as soon as you stop talking to me like I'm an idiot.”

His brows jumped as he shot me a look. “I am *not* talking to you like you're an idiot,” he lied. “I was just teasing you.” His hazel eyes glanced around the room before settling back on my face. “If it's any consolation, I don't understand why a girl would want to lose her virginity here, either.”

“Oh, but you understand why a guy would?”

“Get real, Alex,” he sighed. “For men, it doesn't take much. For men, it doesn't have to mean anything. I can't think of many guys that need something like that to be special for them.”

“Well, if there are girls upstairs just passing out their virginities like clipped coupons, then it looks like not many

girls care if it's special or not, either."

His lips quirked. "You got me there."

Cocking my head as I peered up at him, I said, "You know, Hailey Carlson told everyone about how you guys lost your virginities to each other." Hunter's face said it all, and I couldn't help but smile. "My, my, my...is the great Hunter Finley blushing?"

"Stop it," he ordered, his voice clipped. "Men don't blush."

"It looks like you're blushing to me," I teased before taking another drink of my beer.

"I'm not," he insisted. "Plus, it was a long time ago."

"Oh, don't worry, Hunter," I chuckled. "Hailey gave you rave reviews. Five stars, even."

"She was a virgin," Hunter drawled out. "She didn't have anyone to compare me to."

That had me leaning back to get a better look at him. "Are you telling me that you're not as good as your Lakeside reputation claims?"

Hunter stepped to me, his large frame towering over me, and those hazel eyes looked like a prism of fire when he said, "Oh, I'm more than better than what my reputation suggests, Alex." *Oh, hell.* "So, don't get confused about that. However, I could have been better for her that first time."

"There you are!"

Before I could make a fool of myself and throw myself at Hunter Finley, a huge Viking of a guy came barreling towards us. I knew from the little bit that we'd talked about before that this was Hunter's roommate, Baron Memphis. Hunter had mentioned how Baron played football, and I could believe it. The guy was freakin' huge, and I knew enough about football to know that he was the perfect size for a lineman.

“Hey, Baron,” Hunter greeted, doing that whole fist bump thing.

Baron’s eyes danced back and forth between me and Hunter. “You two having fun?”

I lifted my beer. “We’re getting there.”

Without asking, Baron grabbed my free hand, then brought it up to his lips, kissing the back of it. “I’m Baron Memphis, mi’lady.”

Hunter reached out, knocking my hand from his, “Knock it off,” he grumbled.

Baron just laughed. “Can’t blame me for trying.”

“Yes, I can,” Hunter growled.

I chuckled as Baron threw me a wink. “The guy is no fun.”

As Baron teased Hunter, I realized something sobering. Back in Lakeside, Hunter and I used to be super fun. We’d been all about the partying atmosphere and those damn fights. As one of Talon’s best friends, Hunter had watched out for Talon’s best interests, and Talon had never been to any of the fights without both Hunter and Lars at his side. We’d both been part of the popular crowd, but now? We were both like timid wallflowers at our first college party.

It was time to quit letting life intimidate us.

“Well, he’ll be fun tonight,” I stated convincingly. “I promise.”

Grabbing my hand, Baron said, “Then let’s go, folks.”

Hunter quickly grabbed my hand from Baron’s, causing Baron to laugh again, but we still ended up following him. However, not before I downed the rest of my beer.

~

Hunter~

If Baron kept flirting with Alexandria, then we were going to have problems. Even though I knew that he was just playing around, it was bothering me to the point that I couldn't ignore how I felt about Alex anymore. I wasn't sure when I'd gone from being comfortable as just being friends to wanting to smash my roommate's face in for touching her, but here we were.

Nevertheless, with Alexandria's hand in mine, I let Baron lead us out into the backyard, and it was just as wild as the inside. I didn't say anything as we approached a group of three guys and four girls, and they all seemed to feel comfortable around each other. However, it didn't take long to figure out why.

"Hunter, Alexandria, I'd like you to meet some of my teammates and a few members of the cheerleading squad," Baron announced. "That's Corbin, Rico, and Darrell, all on the best side of the ball." The guys all hooted and cheered for themselves before Baron went on to introduce the cheerleaders. "This is Sage, Gina, Carrie, and Melanie." Gesturing back towards me and Alex, he said, "This is my roommate, Hunter, and his friend, Alexandria."

"Hey," I greeted, Alexandria saying the same.

"So, do you play football, Hunter?" Gina asked.

"Yeah, no," I chuckled. "All my free time is going to be spent working."

"I hear you," she replied kindly. "There are only twenty-four hours in a day, so something's got to give, right?"

"What about you, Alex?" Rico asked. "What do you like to do for fun?"

"Same as Hunter," she replied. "I'm looking for a job or jobs to get me through the year."

“So, you’ll have no free time at all?” he asked her, and my tongue peeked out to lick my lower lip. I knew that I had no right to feel possessive or jealous over Alex, but what I knew didn’t change how I felt.

“Not if I’m lucky,” she chuckled.

“You look empty,” Corbin said. “Need another beer?”

“Oh, uhm...sure. Thanks.”

Though my drink was full of the hard stuff, it was still safer than whatever Corbin might be handing Alex. There were no drugs lined in my drink, and despite these people being Baron’s friends, I didn’t know any of them well enough to trust them with one of the most important people in my life. So, when Corbin handed over a beer, I took it, passing Alex the drink that I’d been drinking.

No one said anything at the blatant move, but unless someone was being shady, then no one should object to what I’d just done. Luckily for me, Alexandria didn’t seem to care. She took the drink and helped herself while I cracked open the fresh beer.

“So, are you two dating?” Sage asked, looking at me while she asked that personal question.

“Oh, no,” Alexandria answered, and I had to grit my teeth from correcting her. “We grew up together and were lucky enough to end up her together.”

“Oh, that’s nice,” Gina remarked. “It’s always so refreshing to see a familiar face when you’re surrounded by nothing but strangers.”

“If you guys aren’t dating, then why are you holding her hand?” Corbin asked me, and I could feel my back immediately straighten at the challenge that I thought I heard in his voice.

“Because she’s my responsibility,” I answered, my voice making it clear that our relationship status was irrelevant as far as I was concerned.

“We didn’t just grow up together,” Alexandria explained as my fingers tightened in hers. “We’re actually friends. His best friend is engaged to my cousin.”

“Do they go here, too?” Carrie asked, trying to diffuse the tension.

“No, Talon and Kenzlee go to Stanford.” Alex’s thumb was running back and forth across the back of my hand, and I knew that she was trying to calm me down.

“Talon?” I glanced over at Darrell. “Not Talon Draven?”

Already feeling protective, I asked, “How do you know Talon?”

“Dude, anyone that follows the fighting scene has heard of Talon Draven,” he said, talking like Talon was a celebrity.

“Holy shit,” Rico hooted. “That makes you Hunter Finley.”

Baron looked back at me. “You’re famous?”

“No, I’m not famous,” I drawled out annoyed. “Neither is Talon.”

“The fuck he’s not,” Darrell argued. “Talon Draven’s got a vicious knuckle game, and I’ve seen him fight a few times.” Eyeing me, he added, “I thought you looked familiar.”

“Do you fight, too?” Gina asked.

Staring right at Corbin, I said, “Only when I have to, though I’m not scared to.”

Lying through her teeth, Alex grabbed my arm as she said, “That sounds like a nineties jam.” She looked over at the group. “I’ve got a thing for nineties music.”

“It’s the best,” Darrell huffed in agreement. “Nothing can compete with those vibes.”

“Let’s go dance, Hunter,” Alex said, tugging on my arm.

While I had no objections to nineties hits, I knew for a fact that Alexandria listened to all kinds of music. I also knew that she didn’t need a guy to dance with her if she wanted to dance. There’d been many parties back in Lakeside when Alexandria had given no thought to whether she could dance or not; she danced whenever she was in the mood.

However, like everyone else in the group, I knew that she was acting like a sorority twit to get us away from a possible situation with Corbin. Though meaningless, I also didn’t appreciate Darrell and Rico mentioning me and Talon like they knew us just because they knew *of* us.

Letting Alexandria make everything easier for everyone, I said, “Yeah, sure. Let’s go dance.”

Tugging on my arm, she said, “Hurry before the song ends.”

I gave everyone a blanket head nod, shaking only Baron’s hand as Alexandria said her goodbyes. By the time we reached the house, the song was over, but neither of us cared about that. Alex had read the situation and had done what she could to diffuse the tension.

“Are you okay?” she asked as soon as we made our way back towards the kitchen.

“Yeah, I’m fine,” I answered, letting out a deep breath. “I just didn’t like how that fucker was questioning our relationship.”

Alexandria’s lips formed a thin line before saying, “Well, it was a valid question. Normally, friends don’t go around holding hands.”

I looked down at her. “I see chicks walking around and holding hands all the time.”

“Don’t be a dick, Hunter,” she chided. “You know damn well what I mean.”

“You want to know what I know?” She nodded. “I know that I need another damn drink, and something a little stronger than a fucking beer.”

“Okay,” she replied. “Let’s see what we can find to get you out of your mood.”

Her pussy wrapped around my dick would do it, but I decided to keep that to myself.

Chapter 6

The hesitancy that causes doubt.

Hunter~

A couple of alcoholic concoctions later, I was feeling better and so was Alexandria. Though we weren't really out there mingling, the kitchen was the hubbub of the party since all the alcohol was in here, so we were steadily meeting all kinds of new people. Yeah, the conversations were superficial and barely coherent, but we were both having a good time.

I was just handing Alex another drink when I heard someone call my name. When I turned around, I saw Jamie Newman, her friend, Freida, and some other girl making their way over. All three girls were dressed to kill, and if any of them were virgins, I doubted that they'd still be by the time this party was over. Granted, I was probably giving them too much credit for being virgins, but still.

"Hey, Jamie," I greeted when all three girls stopped in front of me. "Freida."

"This is Becky Yuga," Jamie replied, introducing the third girl.

I looked over at the new girl, making sure to aim a smile her way. After all, it wasn't her fault that Jamie was pushy. "Hunter Finley," I said, introducing myself before placing my hand behind Alex's back. "This is Alexandria Grant."

"Hey," she replied, greeting us both.

"So, what happened to being too busy to party?" Jamie asked, getting right to the point.

“We were able to finish earlier than we’d expected,” I lied.

“Well, that’s great for us,” she exclaimed animatedly, and her prissy-girl impression automatically had my back straightening.

“It is?”

“Yeah,” she replied coyly. “A girl could always use a good dance partner.”

I pulled Alexandria closer to me. “Yeah, I don’t dance.”

Jamie leaned closer into my space. “Not even for me?”

While Jamie was a pretty girl, and she was practically pushing her tits in my face, she couldn’t compete with the quiet brunette standing next to me. I was quickly discovering that no one could. I had managed to do a very rare thing, and that was fall for someone that I actually liked *outside* the bedroom. Being friends first, I didn’t have to ‘date’ Alexandria to figure out if I liked her or not; I already liked her. Becoming friends first took all the guess work out of the unknown. I knew Alexandria Grant as well as I knew Edie, Talon, and Kenzlee. So, yeah, it wasn’t hard to name all of the reasons why Alex was turning into something more for me.

As for Jamie? I didn’t even know the girl.

“I don’t dance,” I repeated. “I mean, if Alex wants to dance, then I will. But that’s only because she’s known me for so long that she could easily blackmail me if she wanted to.”

Jamie stepped back, and it was clear as day on her face that she didn’t like or had expected my answer. She was pretty enough to probably get her way most times, so I could see her getting upset about my subtle rejection. Especially, since she was being rejected in front of her friends.

Trying a different tactic, she lifted her hand, then began running a finger down my chest. “Well, we could do other things besides dance.”

I grabbed her hand, then gently removed it from my person, dropping it back down at her side. "I'm good where I am, Jamie. Thanks for offering."

"I think my cup is empty," Alex lied. "I'm going to go get me another refill while you...uh, talk with your friends."

Though my hand was still on the small of her back, I fisted the fabric of her shirt tightly, preventing her from going anywhere. "If you need a drink, I'll go get it," I told her.

Refusing to take a hint, Jamie asked, "How is she going to get a chance to meet new guys if you're playing guard dog with her, Hunter?" Jamie laughed at the end of her question, but the jealousy in her voice still made its way through. Honestly, I had no idea why she was trying to land me so hard, but she was.

"Yeah, Hunter?" Alexandria asked, and when I looked down at her, the wench was batting her eyelashes at me.

Finally putting an end to this nonsense, I said, "If I'm not going to ditch you for pussy, then you're not ditching me for dick." While the girls around me gasped, Alexandria just grinned. "We agreed that we'd come out here to have a good time and hang out, and that's what we're going to do."

Those icy eyes of hers were laughing at me. "Well, we did pinky swear and all."

However, my words backfired when Jamie said, "Oh, I get it now."

I looked back at her. "Get what?"

"She has no friends, so you don't want to abandon her," she answered, and I licked my lips, my irritation making an appearance again. "That's actually rather sweet of you."

"That's not-"

"C'mon, girls," she said, addressing her posse. "We can catch Hunter some other time." Looking back our way, Jamie

shot Alex a condescending look. “See you around, Alexandria.”

As soon as they were gone, Alex said, “*They’ll* catch you later?”

“Group sex is a thing in college,” I remarked drolly. “You know, in case you weren’t aware.”

Alex’s clear eyes widened. “Did you just turn down a *foursome* to hang out with me?”

Letting go of her shirt, I cocked my head at her. “I’m not into group sex, Alex.”

“*Every* guy is into group sex if the group is all women, Hunter,” she snorted. “I know you think that I’m some naïve virgin, but I’m not.”

Good thing that I wasn’t drinking anything or else I would have spit it out. “Are you telling me that you’re *not* a virgin?” I hissed, wondering how I could have missed Alexandria giving it up to someone back home.

Her face scrunched up. “Well, no. I mean...yeah, I’m still a virgin, but I’m not a *naïve* one.” My lungs got back to working correctly again, and I was pretty sure that I knew what it felt like to have a heart attack now. “I also know enough to know that no sane guy passes up group sex with three pretty college girls.”

Fuck it.

I crowded her until she had to crane her neck to keep looking up at me. “You want to know what turns me on, Alexandria?” I didn’t give her a chance to answer. “I have no desire to see women pleasuring each other. If a woman’s going to cum, then I want her cumming because of *me*, not anyone else.”

“Oh...uhm, yeah. Okay,” she stammered, and all that did was make me want her more.

~

Alexandria~

I hadn't been lying when I'd said that I wasn't a naïve virgin. While, technically, I was still a certified virgin, it wasn't like I hadn't dated back in high school. My experience wasn't limited to some chaste kisses behind the football bleachers. I knew how to kiss, jack a guy off, and I knew what it felt like to have a guy's lips and hands on my breasts. I also wasn't a stranger to third base. I knew the feeling of having a guy fill you up, though I knew that getting fingered felt nothing like actually having sex, but still.

There was also the fact that I hadn't been raised to shun sex or my sexuality. I'd known what an orgasm felt like way before the first time that I'd ever let a guy slide his hand down the front of my pants. Nothing felt better than an orgasm, and I dared anyone to argue that fact with me. So, yeah, there'd been plenty of times when I'd taken matters into my own hands, enjoying every single second of it.

However, while I considered myself knowledgeable enough, I couldn't remember ever feeling so heated as I'd had when Hunter had talked about making a girl cum. Hunter got turned on by turning on his partner, and what was sexier than that? With those hazel eyes glowing and that voice of his rumbling, he'd had me wondering if he was the type of guy that actually *liked* going down on a woman. I'd heard that most guys didn't enjoy it and only did it to score points, but I didn't get that vibe from Hunter. Thanks to a lot of girl talk, Kenzlee swore that Talon never let a night go by without sticking his face in between her thighs, and if Hunter was the same way, then talk about finding a certified unicorn in the world.

So, that's why I was drunk off my ass, dancing and making new friends like I'd never had a beer before. Even though I knew that Hunter was just trying to be a good friend, I found myself wishing that it wasn't just his protective instincts keeping me safe at this party. So, to avoid any

awkwardness on my part, I started drinking more, pretending that girls like Jamie Newman weren't bothering me.

Letting my body flow with the beat, I wondered how a simple party could have gotten so complicated. When Hunter had picked me up for the party, things had felt normal. Yeah, I'd already been suspecting that I was beginning to see Hunter differently, but that still wasn't anything that could take away from our friendship. So, arriving at this party, I'd been prepared to have a good time and nothing more.

However, all that changed when Baron had taken us to meet his friends. As soon as that Corbin guy had overstepped, things had quickly gone south. I'd had to act like a ditz just to smooth things over, something that I wasn't exactly proud of. No girl wanted to be viewed as a nitwit, and I had gushed about nineties music just to play nice.

That whole nonsense with Jamie and her friends hadn't help the night any, either. While girls like Jamie Newman were a dime a dozen, a small part of me still wondered if I was keeping Hunter from having a good time. I didn't know many guys that said no to sex, so would Hunter have turned her down had I not been here?

Knowing that the answers weren't going to magically appear, I figured I could call Kenzlee this weekend and tell her what was going on inside my brain. She might have some insight that I didn't, and maybe she could tell me if what I was feeling was real or just plain loneliness.

When I felt a pair of hands land on my hips, I knew immediately who they belonged to. Though Hunter hadn't been lying to Jamie when he'd said that he wasn't a dancer, he'd been a good sport about keeping me company when I'd informed him that I was going to dance with or without him. However, up until this moment, he'd been the perfect gentleman, keeping his hands to himself.

Even through my jeans, I could feel the heat from Hunter's hands, but that could also be the alcohol coursing through my veins, or all the hot bodies dancing in the living

room. Whatever it was, it felt good, and there was nothing quite like having a guy's hands warming your body. I had no idea why it was such a turn on for a guy to place his hands on your thigh, hip, back, or wherever, but it was.

Not quite brave enough to turn around, my lack of courage didn't stop me from pushing my hips back against Hunter's groin, our slow grind matching all the other couples that were dancing. I'd like to say that it was the alcohol that had me practically dry humping Hunter Finley in public, but it wasn't. Yeah, it was helping me throw caution to the wind, but I'd thought about Hunter's hands on my body way before I'd even had one drop of alcohol tonight.

When I felt one of Hunter's hands slide up beneath my shirt, my arms reached up, wrapped around his neck, and I leaned back against him, letting the beat of the music guide our bodies. A shiver ran down my spine when I felt Hunter's breath on the side of my neck, and if he kissed me there, then I was going to be like all the other idiots at this party, losing my virginity at the Cherry House.

Much to my disappointment, Hunter didn't kiss my neck. In fact, he didn't kiss me at all. Instead, he whispered in my ear, "Ready to get out of here?"

If he'd been any other guy, then I would have taken that as an invitation back to his dorm, but this was Hunter Finley. We were both drunk enough not to be able to drive, so he was probably still doing the honorable thing and looking out for me. While appreciated, why did he have to view me as some kid sister or something? Right now, with one hand on my hip, the other under my shirt, and his warm breath fanning my neck, I felt anything *but* sisterly for this guy.

Stepping away from him, I turned around, doing my best to maintain eye contact, then nodded my head. "Yeah, okay."

Hunter grabbed my hand, then started leading me from the throng of dancers in the living room. As we weaved our way through the party crowd, I realized that a glass of water

might not be a bad idea. While I didn't feel trashed, I also wasn't looking forward to a hangover in the morning.

"Hey! Where are you guys going?"

Hunter and I both stopped to see Baron calling out to us, and the dude looked worse than me and Hunter put together. Baron's eyes were so red that I wondered if he was both high and drunk, which would take a lot since he was a huge mountain of a man.

"We're heading out," Hunter answered once Baron was weaving in front of us.

"Yeah, okay." Baron reached out to shake Hunter's hand, and I grinned at the professionalism that Baron was trying to display. "I'm trashed, so I'm going to crash here or leave with Holly."

"Holly?" I asked because it was absolutely none of my business, but I couldn't help myself. While the jury was still out on his friend, Baron seemed cool enough.

"Yeah," he smirked. "We just became friends."

"Don't drive," Hunter said, sounding like he was forty.

"Never," Baron chuckled drunkenly. Then looking back and forth between us, he added, "You guys be safe. No driving for you, either."

"We promise," I replied, saluting him like a dork.

Baron's blue eyes twinkled. "I like you, Alexandria Grant."

"That's because I'm likable, Baron Memphis," I quipped, causing Hunter to yank me closer against him.

"It's time to go," he grumbled, saying his final goodbyes to his roommate.

As soon as the fresh air hit me, that's when I knew that I was a lot drunker than I'd originally thought.

Chapter 7

The choices that seem fated.

Alexandria~

“I can’t drive,” I announced, taking in a deep breath, so that I didn’t blow chunks everywhere.

“You didn’t drive us here,” Hunter reminded me.

“We’re drunk, Hunter,” I informed him, you know, just in case he wasn’t aware.

“We’re not drunk,” he lied. “We’re...we’re happily buzzed.”

“Nope,” I argued. “I’m pretty sure that we’re drunk.”

“I don’t want to leave my car here,” he remarked absently, and I didn’t blame him.

I turned towards him, nearly knocking him back. “I have an idea,” I exclaimed as I brought my finger up in the air like a tool.

“What’s your idea?” he asked, and though he wasn’t slurring, we’d both had way more than enough tonight.

“We’ll Uber a buddy system.”

His brows furrowed over those sexy hazel eyes of his. “What in the fuck is an Uber buddy system?”

“So, we ask them if they can have two sober people in the car to come get us,” I explained excitedly. “One will drive us home, the other will drive your car, so that you don’t have to come back and get it, or risk it being broken into or anything like that.”

Hunter's skeptical scowl remained. "They have that here?"

That drew me up short. "I mean...I don't know," I grumbled thoughtfully. "But...but it doesn't hurt to ask if they can do that, right?"

"Alex, no one is supposed to be driving your car if they're not listed as an insured driver," he said, sounding like he was trying to sober me up with logic.

"You're pissing on my sunshine, Hunter," I harrumphed. "It's a wonderful idea."

"I'm not saying that it's not, baby," he laughed, his scowl gone, the word baby doing dirty things to me. "Still, I don't think that kind of thing exists yet."

I let out a heavy sigh. "Well, we can't leave your car behind."

"Getting you home is more important than my car, Alexandria," he said kindly, and it really was going to suck if Hunter didn't like me back.

"I'll call the campus rideshare program," I sighed, not sure why I was so worried about his damn car. "But I still stand by my claims that an Uber buddy system is a great idea."

"I'm not disagreeing, you weird girl," he smirked, smiling down at me, that bottom lip of his just begging to be licked.

"I think you're closer, so I'll-"

"Yeah, no," he said as he slid one of his fingers through my belt loop, yanking me towards him. "You're staying at my place."

I could feel my heart thumping hard enough in my chest to start sobering me up. "I...I am?"

Hunter nodded. "I mean, I could always walk you to your door to make sure that you get home safe, but I'd feel better if you stayed with me until you sobered up."

His words felt like the biggest disappointment ever. Hunter was still in big-brother mode, and asking me to go home with him had nothing to do with attraction or sex. He just didn't feel comfortable leaving me drunk anywhere, even if it was in my own dorm room.

"Yeah, okay," I mumbled as I pulled my phone from my pocket. Hunter had convinced me to leave my purse back at the dorm, pointing out that I wouldn't be needing it since I wasn't going to be driving or paying for anything while I was with him.

After ordering the car service, I looked back up at Hunter. "Are you sure Baron won't mind me crashing at your place?" Then that got me to thinking. "Can I even stay there? Does your dorm allow female visitors?"

"I'll ask for forgiveness later if you're not allowed to be there," he replied easily. "As a freshman, I'll play dumb."

"What if you get kicked out?" I asked, my buzz quickly dying.

"I won't get kicked out," he assured me, sounding a lot more confident than I felt.

Though I didn't necessarily believe him because I knew that my own dorm had rules, I also knew that those rules were broken all the time. Only two weeks into this life, and I'd already seen plenty of guys sneaking out of our dorm in the early morning hours.

"Well, we might as well head towards the sidewalk to wait," I remarked unexcitedly. Going back to Hunter's room for some hot and heavy sex had sounded way better than going back to his place just so that he could finish his babysitting gig.

"Did you have a good time?"

I looked up at him, and it wasn't lost on me how his finger was still entangled through my belt loop. In fact, all I could think about was how he'd held my hand most of the

night, how he had prevented Corbin from getting ideas about me, how he had turned Jamie down, and how he had danced with me. I knew that we were friends, but...how could that be all this was? He'd never been this protective back in Lakeside. Yeah, Talon had been the main one to look out for me, Kenzlee, and Edie, but still. Hunter hadn't ever slipped his hand up underneath my shirt before.

"I did," I finally answered. "Did you?"

"For my first college party ever, it wasn't so bad," he replied, grinning down at me.

"How drunk are you?"

"Drunk enough," he snorted. "That's why I'm not driving, remember?"

I was two seconds away from kissing Hunter Finley, but when a car pulled up alongside the curb, honking, that had me jumping back a bit, the spell broken. At least, the spell that I kept finding myself under. Hunter wasn't under any kind of spell that didn't have alcohol as its main casting ingredient.

Always the gentleman, Hunter opened the door for me. However, before I could get inside, he stopped me. "You're not going to throw up in the car, are you?" He looked really worried about that possibility. "We can always walk."

Yeah, taking a moonlit stroll through the streets of California with Hunter Finley was not a good idea. Not if I wanted to keep from making an absolute fool of myself. Yeah, I'd rather throw up in this stranger's car than let my imagination get carried away.

"Yep, no, I'm good," I lied, getting into the car.

~

Hunter~

While I wasn't drunk anymore, I was still buzzed enough to ignore all the red flags waving in my face. Taking Alexandria back to my place was a bad idea, but I didn't like the idea of her going home drunk more. Even though I knew that she'd probably be safe, a lot could happen between walking her to her door to her getting into her room safely. Regardless of the 'rules', guys and girls were being snuck into dorm rooms left and right during the weekends, and I wanted Alex with me.

However, I was second guessing myself the quieter that she was on the ride back to my place. So, nudging her leg with mine, I said, "I like your buddy driver idea."

Those light eyes slid my way. "Then why were you trying to kill my dreams?"

I laughed at that. "I was hardly killing your dreams, Alex."

"Yeah, man, no," the driver chimed in. "Don't be killing people's dreams. This world is horrible enough without being a dream killer."

"See?" Alexandria said, her smile beaming up at me. "Don't be a dream killer, Hunter."

"I wasn't killing your dreams," I repeated, laughing at how they were both ganging up on me. "In fact, I just mentioned how I liked the idea."

"You know, they say that dreams are signs of flightiness and instability, but that's not true," our driver went on. "Dreamers are the strongest people out there. Instead of being confined to convention and playing it safe, they're the ones that are brave enough to create whole new worlds for us."

"Jesus Christ," I groaned. "I wasn't trying to kill her dreams. I swear it."

Ignoring me, our driver just prattled on. "If your girl has a dream, then it's your job to support it to the fullest. If you don't think so, then just imagine her up on the stage, accepting her award for changing the world but not thanking

you during her speech because you were a dream killer? Talk about a kick in the nuts.” Alexandria chuckled next to me. “You’ve got to be supportive,” he insisted. “If not, then what good are you to anyone?”

Even though Alexandria wasn’t my girl, and even though I wasn’t killing her dreams, I still felt the weight of the driver’s words. It would be a kick in the nuts to hear your girl thanking everyone but you for all her hard-earned success. It would suck to hear her name off everyone that had encouraged her to chase her dreams, leaving you off that list because you were an asshole.

“I support Alexandria’s dreams,” I told him. “I swear it.”

Our driver eyed me through the rearview mirror. “Just remember, whatever you don’t do for your girl, there’s another man that will.”

The conversation was completely ridiculous and irrelevant since Alex wasn’t my girlfriend, but that still didn’t stop me from feeling some type of way at the mention of other guys taking care of Alexandria’s needs and wants.

I licked my bottom lip, and that’s when I felt Alex grab my hand. “Hey, he’s just talking.”

Catching myself, I threaded my fingers through hers. “Yeah, I know.”

The rest of the ride was made in silence, but with the way that my mind was spiraling with thoughts about Alexandria, I wasn’t sure it that was a good or bad thing. Alexandria wasn’t some girl to just have fun with. We were friends, and I wanted to remain friends with her. I didn’t want to ruin what we had between us because it would affect more than just me and her. We were all family at this point, and that was important to me. I could see it being important to Alex, too.

When we finally pulled up to my dorm building, I tipped the driver extra, even though Alex had probably already

tipped him, which got me to thinking. “Hey, the next time we share a ride, I pay,” I told her.

The woman rolled her eyes as she took my hand, letting me help her out of the car. “You’re such a guy, Hunter.”

“I’ll take that as a compliment,” I replied dryly.

Threading my fingers through hers once more, I escorted her to the front of the building, and neither of us said anything as we made our way to my room. Sure, there were people everywhere, but students didn’t get ratted out for this kind of shit unless guests were being disruptive, or so I’d been told.

When we finally made it to my room, I unlocked the door, though it had taken a couple of tries. Honestly, I had no idea if I really was still drunk-ish or if it was nerves. Now that we were here, I wasn’t sure if having Alexandria in my room was such a great idea after all. Yeah, I could convince myself that I’d brought her here for safety reasons, but her perfume kept doing things to me.

Alex gave the room a curious glance, but that was it. She didn’t spend any time looking around or asking to go through my stuff. Instead, she turned to look at me, then said, “I don’t have anything to sleep in.”

I almost groaned.

I had to clear my throat before speaking. “I...uh, I have some stuff you can wear.”

Alexandria started to kick off her shoes, and who would have thought that a girl kicking off her shoes would be so fucking sexy? “What do you have for me, Hunter?”

Holy shit.

Scolding my dick, I forced him and me to acknowledge that she was asking about sleepwear and nothing more. Alexandria was not standing in the middle of my room doing anything more than getting ready for bed. Knowing that Baron wasn’t going to come back to the room, I wondered if I should

just sleep on his bed. Though that was extremely invasive, I didn't think that he'd mind all that much. I could even wash the sheets afterwards if he wanted me to.

Turning away from the girl that was driving me crazy, I went to grab something out of the closet, but her next words stopped me. "I'll just take the shirt that you have on."

Sweet fucking Jesus.

I turned to look back at her, and though she looked like the same Alexandria that I'd known since we were kids, she still looked different.

Rooted to the floor, I didn't move as Alex crossed the room, stopping when she was standing right in front of me. With those crazy icy eyes of hers looking up at me, my lungs stopped working when she reached for the hem of my shirt, lifting it to commandeer it for herself.

As soon as it cleared my head, I looked down at her as I asked, "Are you sure you know what you're doing Alexandria?"

She was looking at my chest, tracing one of my tattoos with the tip of her finger, and if ever there was a moment when all those hours at the gym had been worth it, it was now. Alexandria was looking at me like I wasn't her friend from her hometown. She wasn't looking at me like I was just friends with her cousin's fiancé. She wasn't looking at me like we were both here for moral support.

After getting her fill of my body, those light blue eyes looked back up my way, and I knew that there was no going back when she answered, "I know *exactly* what I'm doing, Hunter. The real question here is whether or not you know what *you're* doing."

With that green light, there was nothing left to do but wreck this fucking girl.

Chapter 8

The desire that consumes us.

Hunter~

Taking Alexandria's face in my hands, my lips came down on hers, and my knees almost weakened with how perfect my lips felt on hers. Whatever changed between us, it *really* fucking changed, and anyone that said getting into a serious relationship in college was stupid and could kiss my ass.

Reaching for the hem of her shirt, I began yanking it upwards, and Alex pulled off my lips long enough to assist me. Before her shirt even hit the floor, my lips were back on hers, her arms wrapped around my neck. Whatever buzz that I'd had going on before was gone; I was stone-cold sober now, and I needed to keep in mind that Alex was a virgin. No matter how desperately she was kissing me back, she was still a virgin, and even if she wasn't, this was Alexandria, for fuck's sakes. She wasn't some random college chick that I could use for the night with no expectations in the morning.

This was Alex.

When her hands went for my pants, I stopped her. "No fucking way, baby." Her head reared back as she blinked up at me in confusion. "I'm eating that pussy first."

"Hunter," she moaned, and I was certain that my dick hadn't ever been this fucking hard before.

With my lips back on hers, I walked us back towards my bed, and as soon as the back of her knees hit the mattress, I dropped on my knees before her, my hands automatically going to the button of her jeans. When Alexandria let out a low moan, her hands sliding into my hair, I couldn't get her jeans off fast enough.

Pulling them down over her legs, when the denim struggled over the thickness of her thighs, I almost came in my pants. I loved Alexandria's curves, and I wasn't sure how long I was going to be able to last as I watched her soft body bounce and shake with each thrust of my cock.

As soon as she was standing before me in just her bra and panties, I looked up at her from where I was resting on my knees. "Alexandria?"

She looked down at me, and those winter-colored eyes of hers looked dilated and eager. "Yeah?"

"Tell me you want this, baby," I demanded. While I was sober as a fucking judge, we'd both been drinking tonight, and I wanted to make sure that she was ready for this. If I were a better man, I'd wait and take her another night, but I wasn't a better man.

"I want you, Hunter," she breathed softly.

I stood up, taking her face in my hands. "I need you to be absolutely sure, Alex," I told her. "We only get to do this once." While I planned on being with her as much as I could, I'd only get her virginity this one time, and I needed this girl to be absolutely certain because I wasn't strong enough to stop this on my own.

Alex leaned up and kissed my lips. "I'm sure," she repeated as her lips moved against mine. "I've never been more sure of anything else in my life, Hunter."

Reaching around her back, I unhooked her bra, and when it slid down her arms, falling on the floor, I lost my train of thought.

Holy fucking shit.

My hands automatically reached up to cup both Alexandria's tits, and they spilled over, my hands not big enough to hold the weight, and there was no way that I wasn't going to worship her tits every fucking chance that I got. Lowering my head, I took her right nipple in between my

teeth, and my mouth was actually watering with how perfect she tasted.

“Hunter...oh, God...” she whimpered, her hands back in my hair.

I lavished her with my lips, teeth, and tongue, and just when I thought that I was going to lose my mind, I switched to her other breast. When I finally took a breath, that’s when I could smell her, and her scent was enough to make me feel high as fuck.

Pulling off her tit, I grabbed Alexandria by her hips, then sat her down on the bed. My hands immediately reached for her panties as she scooted back to get comfortable. However, before she could inch too far back, I had my hands wrapped around those mind-blowing thighs of hers, yanking her towards me, her ass perched on the edge of the bed.

Dropping to my knees again, I stuck my face in between her legs, and I knew that my fingers were going to leave bruises on the tender flesh of her thighs. However, as long as she wasn’t telling me to stop, I wasn’t going to. By the time that I was done with Alexandria Grant, I was going to have her in love with me.

Staring at her pretty, pink, trimmed pussy, I asked, “Have you ever had a guy go down on you?”

“No,” she panted. “Never.”

Thank you, God.

“Then you better hold on, baby,” I warned right before my tongue snaked out to lick up all the juices that already had her pussy glistening.

“Oh, Sweet Jesus...” she moaned as my tongue licked her from hole to clit, manipulating that sensitive bud with perfection. “Oh, God...Hunter...oh, Christ...”

Alexandria tasted sweet, fresh, and like I had imagined that she would. With her thighs over my shoulders, I worked my tongue through all of her secrets, and when I slid two

fingers inside her, I nearly went cross-eyed with how tight she was. While I'd had a couple of virgins in my lifetime, I wasn't used to them. I'd always gone for simple, eager, and uncomplicated. However, I wanted complicated with Alexandria like a motherfucker.

“Don't stop...” she choked out, and there was no way in hell that I was going to stop before she came for me. Virgin or not, I was going to have Alex forgetting all the guys that had come before me, and I didn't give a fuck if it'd been just a kiss. I was going to be this girl's every sexual memory if it killed me.

Alexandria's hands tightened in my hair, her body going taunt beneath me. While this probably wasn't going to be her first orgasm ever, it was going to be the first one she experienced from a guy's face in between her legs, and I was going to make sure that she never fucking forgot what it felt like.

“Cum for me, baby,” I coaxed. “Cum all over my face.”

“Oh, Jesus...” she cried out, her cunt clamping down hard on my fingers while her thighs shook all around my head. “Oh, God...Hunter...oh, God...”

I kept working my fingers inside her as she rode out her orgasm, and when her body finally started to relax, I removed my fingers, then began licking her clean. I wanted the flavor of her pussy stuck in the back of my throat for days, that's how good she fucking tasted.

When Alex was no more than a twitching mess on my bed, I stood up, then removed my clothes at lightning speed. If Alex changed her mind, then I would respect that. However, I was going to do my best to make sure that she didn't.

~

Alexandria~

I'd never felt so overwhelmed by an orgasm in all my life. Hunter Finley had a magical tongue, and now I knew why girls had thrown themselves at him all through school. He had worked his tongue expertly over every inch of my center, and when he'd gone and added his fingers, it'd almost felt like too much. I never knew that you could experience such intense emotions and still remain halfway sane.

Instead of the happy buzz that I'd had going on at the party, now I felt as high as a heroin addict. I felt like Hunter had just injected me with the purest drug out there, and I wasn't sure if I was ever going to recover.

There was also how he touched and looked at me like I was his every fantasy come to life. Almost all girls had insecurities or something about their bodies that they didn't like, and I was no different. I wasn't slim, and there'd been lots of times in high school when I'd eaten a salad over a hamburger because of my figure. However, even though I was mostly over that, Hunter's reverence of my body had felt good.

I opened my eyes when I felt Hunter's body heat cover me, my legs automatically wrapping around his waist as he crawled up my frame. His body weight felt so good on top of me, and his hazel eyes were staring down at me like he wanted to look at me like this for the rest of his life.

God, he was so damn gorgeous.

When he leaned down to kiss me, I could taste myself on his lips, and I wasn't sure how I felt about that. While I'd bragged earlier about not being a naïve virgin, I also wasn't some confident sexpot, either. I was somewhere in between, and I couldn't lie and say that Hunter's extensive experience wasn't a little intimidating right now. He knew what he was doing, and I had only a clinical idea of what I was supposed to do. If I ended up being awful in bed, I'd be so embarrassed.

I closed my eyes when I felt the head of Hunter's dick nudge against my opening, and while I was still a bit nervous, my body was ready to accept him. I couldn't believe how

badly I wanted him to fill me up, my hips already moving with a silent invitation.

“Alexandria, open your eyes,” he ordered.

I opened them, those hazel eyes still burning down at me. “Hunter...”

“This is your last chance to change your mind, baby,” he said. “If you don’t stop me now, then I’m not going to stop until you’re cumming all over my dick.”

“Oh, God...” I whimpered.

“Tell me now, Alexandria,” he said. “I need the words.”

There was no doubt in my mind that I wanted to do this with Hunter. Even if we didn’t amount to anything more than this one night, I wanted Hunter to be my first. Even if I wasn’t wildly attractive to him, I trusted him. We were friends, and I couldn’t think of anyone else that I’d rather experience this with than Hunter Finley, the boy that I’d grown up with.

“I want you, Hunter,” I whispered. “Please...”

When Hunter surged his hips forward, I let out a broken cry, the painful discomfort pulling me out from under my high. It felt like Hunter was stretching me impossibly wide, and maybe he was. Because he hadn’t let me touch him or go down on him, I hadn’t gotten a look at his size beforehand. Whatever the case, I could feel the sting spreading across my hips, and the fullness clear up to my stomach. I knew that I was a virgin, but how goddamn big was he?

“Shh, baby,” Hunter said soothingly. “Just...give it a second, Alex. Relax for me.”

“It feels like you’re tearing me in half,” I panted, my fingers digging into his back.

“If I am, then I promise to kiss it and make it feel all better afterwards,” he promised, and all that did was make my body clench around him as I moaned out my consent. “I’ll kiss that pretty pussy until it doesn’t hurt anymore.”

“Hunter...Christ...” I whimpered, his dirty words turning me on.

Hunter started moving his hips slowly, and with each thrust into my body, I felt like I was going to go insane. My earlier orgasm was helping with the smooth glide in and out of my body, but it still hurt. I knew that I was going to be sore in the morning, but there was no way that I was going to ask him to stop. I wanted to experience it all, and I couldn't do that if I stopped him now.

“Fuck, I'm not going to last,” he confessed. “You feel so fucking good, baby.”

Even though my body ached, his words had me feeling brazen. I liked hearing that I could make Hunter Finley lose control. I liked knowing that he was just as eager as I was. It made me feel a sense of control that I didn't think that I could feel since I didn't have much experience.

“Don't stop...” I pleaded. “Hunter, don't stop...”

“Not until you're cumming for me again,” he vowed.

After a few minutes, the pain started to dull and all I felt was the crash of Hunter's hips against mine, his dick filling me completely. Each thrust felt purposeful and exhilarating, and when I started to feel nothing but pleasure, my hips started rocking back against his, and that's when the *real* Hunter Finley showed up.

Braced on his forearms, Hunter stopped with his previous tender ministrations, showing me what it felt like to really be fucked by a boy with a big dick, magnificent body, and perfect face. His grunts sounded like music to my ears, and the sound of my slick wetness sounded like the perfect lyrics. Soon, the room was nothing but the harsh sounds of our breaths, the bed rocking, and Hunter's body crashing against mine.

When that familiar sensation began to build again, I couldn't believe it. I'd heard that it was hard for a girl to cum during her first time because of the discomfort, but that's not

what was happening now. I felt the tightness building, the kaleidoscope of euphoria just beyond my reach.

“Hunter, please...” I cried out, begging. “Oh, God... don’t stop...please...”

“Cum for me, Alex,” he grunted above me. “Cum all over my cock like a good girl.”

My entire body exploded in a wave of heat and desire so intense that all I could do was hang on as Hunter pushed in and out of me with enough force to practically tip the bed over. My nails broke the skin on his back, but he didn’t seem to care. Hunter just kept slamming into me, the intensity of each movement changing me forever.

“Alex, Alex, Alex...” he chanted above me. “Fuck, Alexandria...”

I let out a low whimper when I felt Hunter swell up inside me, and I knew enough to know what that meant. Already too far gone to care, I let Hunter use me until his body broke on top of me, my name on his lips as he let out a low roar, a boy cumming in me for the first time ever.

Hunter didn’t stop pushing inside me until he started to go soft, and only then did he stop trying to possess me. With my eyes closed and my heart beating a mile a minute, a part of me resisted falling asleep because I wanted more. Even though I knew that I was going to be hurting soon, I still wanted more. Two orgasms had rocked my world, and I wanted more of that feeling. I wanted more, and I wanted Hunter Finley to be the one to give it to me.

However, when I felt his arm wrap around my waist, hauling me closer to him, the heat from his body felt too hypnotizing to resist. I felt spent and still a little high, sleep coming for me fast.

A kiss on the top of my head was the last thing that I remembered before falling asleep.

Chapter 9

The shame that overwhelms us.

Alexandria~

Clutching the sheet to my chest, I sat up, my naked body sore, my mouth dry, and my head pounding. Apart from my nakedness, I'd been here before, so I recognized the slight hangover for what it was.

Jesus Christ.

Glancing around the room, I saw that I was alone, and a part of me felt grateful. I needed to process last night and what I was going to do about it. I never thought that I'd be the type of person to take advantage of someone else, but that's exactly what I'd done last night. Hunter had been very honest about having had too much to drink, and I had seduced him anyway. I'd known exactly what I'd been doing when I had asked him for his shirt to sleep in, and what kind of person did something so despicable? Women weren't the only ones that could be taken advantage of, and I'd done that to Hunter.

Letting the sheet fall to my waist, I ran my hands down my face, wondering what in the hell to do now. Even though I couldn't see Hunter holding it against me, things still were never going to be the same between us. We'd had sex twice last night, and even halfway asleep, the second time had been just as intense as the first, and I was going to go to Hell for what I'd done.

When I started glancing around again to locate my clothes, I saw a note on the nightstand next to Hunter's bed. Picking it up, my heart thumped in my chest with regret and shame.

Alex,

I went to pick up my car. Call or text me when you wake up, and if I'm not back before then, I'll grab us some breakfast.

Hunter

Scrambling off the bed, I reached for my jeans on the floor to grab my phone and check the time. I had no idea what time it was, and the last thing that I wanted was to be naked in Hunter's bed when Baron came back to the dorm. It was bad enough that I had to figure out what to do about Hunter, I didn't need Baron's teasing while I did the walk-of-shame.

Ignoring the dull pounding in my head, I quickly got dressed, choosing not to address the mess between my legs. I would check it out when I got back to my dorm, not needing to see the blood right now as proof of what I'd done last night. My sore body was proof enough.

After I got dressed, I raced towards the door, but then dropped my head against the wood. Hunter had been kind enough to leave me a note, so taking off without doing the same or sending him a text was a rather shitty thing to do. If I wanted to remain friends with Hunter, I couldn't take my guilt out on him. It wasn't his fault that I'd waited until we'd been drinking to make a move.

Instead of texting or calling him, I decided to take the coward's way out. I walked back over to the nightstand, grabbed the pen that was lying next to the paper, then wrote a note of my own.

Hunter,

Woke up with a headache, so decided to just go home and sleep it off. I'll text you later after I've gotten rid of my hangover.

Alex

I re-read the note three times, and each time it felt cold and impersonal, but what else was I supposed to write? *Sorry I took advantage of you while you were intoxicated, but it's all*

good? I had no idea what I was supposed to do, but I did know that Hunter deserved an apology for last night. However, it wasn't anything that I wanted to do over the phone. I also didn't want Baron walking in on us while we talked it out.

Leaving the note, I snuck out of Hunter's dorm room and kept my head down as I did the classic walk-of-shame. Unfortunately, in this instance, my one-night stand wasn't someone that I could ignore for the rest of the semester.

Afraid of Hunter coming back too soon, I hurried my way down the sidewalk until I rounded the corner. Only then did I pull my phone out to order a ride. While it was safe enough to walk back to my dorm, the walk was too long to make while feeling as sore as I felt.

Luckily, when I finally got back to my dorm, Jessica wasn't there. Wanting to hide my shameful secret, I quickly gathered my stuff to take a shower and wash off my sins. The last thing that I needed was for Jessica to catch me in the middle of my emotions, especially when we really weren't actual friends. While I had no real reason *not* to trust her, I didn't have any real reason *to* trust her, either.

After taking a shower, I was sitting comfortably in a t-shirt and sweats, still tired as hell. However, any thoughts of sleeping some more vanished when Jessica came rushing dramatically through the door. She looked awful but very awake.

"I had the best night of my life last night," she announced as she dropped on her bed.

"I'm hungover," I remarked, hoping that she'd take the hint.

She didn't.

Rolling onto her side, propping her hand underneath her head, she asked, "Have you ever had a threesome?"

I could feel my eyes nearly popping out of my head. "Uhm...no."

“You should,” she gushed theatrically. “I mean, every girl should try it at least once in her life.”

“You...you had a threesome last night?”

“What’s college if not for threesomes?” she asked as she shrugged.

“An education?”

“Oh, I was very educated last night,” she laughed.

“Uhm...”

“However, now I need a shower because things were done,” she added, and no way in hell was I going to ask her what things.

“Well, I’m hungover, so I’m going to take some aspirin, then do my best to get in a decent nap.”

“Actually, that sounds perfect,” she replied. “I think I’ll do the same after my shower.”

Luckily for me, I was able to fall asleep as soon as Jessica left the room.

~

Hunter~

I’d done some shitty things in my life, but nothing like last night. When I’d woken up with a hangover, all I could do was think about how Alexandria had drunk as much as I’d had at the party. While I had believed that we had sobered up before getting back to my dorm, if we’d had, then my head wouldn’t be pounding the way that it was.

I had fucked a drunk Alexandria.

Waking up with Alex in my arms had felt like everything, even more special than taking her virginity last night. Alexandria had slept in my arms all night long, and she

had been just as eager as I'd been the second time that she'd let me slide inside her. It'd all felt so fucking perfect that I'd gotten caught up in what I'd wanted, ignoring what'd been best for Alex.

Needing to clear my head, I'd left her a note before walking back to the party to get my car. Even though the walk had been a long one, I'd needed the space. I had taken advantage of a drunk Alexandria Grant, and I felt like I was about to crawl out of my skin because of it. There was nothing more precious on this earth than a woman's consent, and I had ignored that fact last night, letting a drunk Alex answer my questions; something that I knew better than to do.

When I'd gotten to my car without hearing from Alex, I'd been part relieved and terrified. Relieved because I'd needed more time to figure out what to do, terrified because I wouldn't know what to do if I lost her as a friend over what I'd done. I could go over it a million times in my head, try to convince myself that things had been different last night because Alex and I were friends, but the facts of the matter didn't change. We'd both been drinking, and the last thing that we should have done was sleep together. I mean, as much as I cared for her, would she have given me her virginity if she hadn't been drinking? Even if she hadn't been exactly drunk by the time that we'd gotten back to my place, would she still have given it up if we hadn't been partying and having a good time?

Parking my car, I let out a deep breath before pulling out my phone to see that Alex still hadn't called or texted. She was probably still passed out, and I really couldn't blame her. Even without all the drinking last night, her body was probably feeling spent, and taking her a second time had been a real asshole move. You didn't start screwing a girl like she was experienced just because you got her virginity out of the way. Even though Alex had been onboard, I should have been more considerate of the fact that, while no longer a virgin, she'd still been inexperienced.

Growing a pair, I finally got out of my car, then made my way to my room. If Alexandria was still in my bed, then I was going to have to wake her up, even if it was just to get her dressed. No matter where we went from here, there was no way that I was going to let Baron see her naked in my bed. I didn't want him getting ideas about her, or spreading any rumors that might make other guys think that Alex was available.

Opening the door to my room, I immediately noticed my empty bed, and the disappointment felt like a kick to the chest. Even though I knew that it was for the best, the part of me that wanted more with Alexandria was disappointed that she was gone.

Walking over to my bed, I grabbed my pillow, bringing it to my face, and with the scent of her shampoo still on the fabric, I groaned, dropping down on the bed. Like a certified creeper, I was already thinking of not washing my sheets, though they clearly needed to be washed. Even if Alexandria hadn't bled last night, I'd still made a mess of her.

That was another thing that was occupying real estate in my head. For the first time in my life, I'd wanted a girl badly enough to forget the condom. Growing up in a household where money had been tight, an accidental pregnancy had been avoided at all costs. When Lars and I had gotten 'the talk', Dad had done more than just talk to us about what went where. He'd done his best to educate us on the financial and emotional repercussions of an unplanned pregnancy, and having had front-row seats to seeing our parents struggle financially most of their lives...well, yeah, Lars and I had always wrapped our shit up whenever we would hook up with a girl.

Alexandria was the first girl to ever get my cum, and it'd been fucking mind-blowing. The feel of her wet heat wrapped snugly around my cock had been everything. My dick was twitching just remembering what it'd felt like sliding inside her for the first time. There was also something primal

about cumming inside a girl. Alexandria's womb was flooded with my swimmers right now, and that was hot as fuck to me.

After setting the pillow down, that's when I noticed my note had been turned upside down. Reaching for it, I saw that Alex had written me a note back, and though the words seemed reasonable enough, it still bothered me that she hadn't texted me or called me. My note had been written because she'd been asleep; her note seemed...impersonable.

"Dude, you missed the best night last night." I turned to see Baron walking through the front door, a huge smile on his face. "College girls are fucking *freaks* in bed."

I thought about Alexandria's nail marks on the back of my shoulders, and I'd take a quiet night with my virgin than a crazy night with some college chicks all day. I'd been fortunate enough to be popular back in high school, so as far as I was concerned, I wasn't missing anything by not sleeping around now.

"Glad to hear that you had a good time," I replied, grinning at him.

"Dude, you just don't know," he went on as he dropped on his bed. "For a second there, I thought that my dick was going to fall off."

"Nothing I need to know, man," I chuckled.

Sitting up, he looked over at me. "I heard a rumor." I arched a brow. "I heard your girl is roommates with Jessica Branch. Is it true?"

"I know that her roommate's name is Jessica, but I don't know her last name," I replied hesitantly.

"Blonde, blue-eyed, big tits, a fuckable ass, and *quite* friendly? Yeah?"

"I don't know," I answered. "I haven't met her yet."

"Well, ask Alex about her for me, will you?" he asked. "I saw her at the party last night, but I was already busy with

someone else. However, when I heard that she took off with Charles Nelson and Billy Henderson, I figured that she might want to hang out with me and the guys.”

“Seriously,” I deadpanned.

Baron laughed. “Hey, consider it a consolation prize after you crushed Corbin’s dreams of getting to know Alex better.” I could feel my tongue snake out to lick my lips. “Luckily, Darrell and Rico convinced him that it wasn’t worth getting tangled up with you when there are plenty of other chicks on this campus.”

There was no getting away from the truth as I digested what Baron was saying. Alexandria and I were going to have to come to an understanding before I got kicked out of school for fucking up anyone that tried their hand at hooking up with her. There was no way that I was going to be able to stand back and watch her date other guys after last night.

Before I could say anything about me and Alex, Baron added, “Just do me a favor and ask her about Jessica, yeah?” He winked at me like a douche. “I appreciate girls that like to be shared.”

While I tried not to judge how people got their jollies, I knew for a fact that there’d never be any sharing Alexandria with any-fucking-body.

Chapter 10

The support that we look for.

Hunter~

After spending all day checking on all my job applications and not hearing a fucking word from Alexandria, I decided to do the only thing that I could think of doing.

I decided to call Talon.

Sitting outside on one of the stone benches that decorated the outside of my dorm building, I'd been able to find one that wrapped around a huge oak tree, shading me from the sun. Though it wasn't hot enough to be uncomfortable, sometimes, if the sun was beaming right on you, it was hot as hell.

Luckily for me, Talon answered on the third ring. "Hey, what's up?"

"Hey," I greeted back. "How are you doing?"

"Me? I'm good," he answered easily. "It's a lot to get used to, but I'm good."

"How's Kenzlee doing?" I asked, genuinely wanting to know. Kenzlee Mitchell was good people, and she was good for Talon.

"I'm taking care of her," he answered, and it was such a Talon thing to say. While I wasn't a pussy, Talon took alpha status to a whole different level.

"And Edie?" I asked. "I haven't talked to Lars in a couple of days, so I haven't been able to ask."

"She's good," he said, the smile in his voice obvious. "Lars is driving her nuts, but she'll get used to it."

“Yeah, I can see how he could get on her nerves,” I chuckled. “After all, the last thing that he’s going to do is disappoint you. He knows how much you trust him to take care of Edie.”

“Well, I trust both you and Lars with my life,” he replied matter of fact. “If I’m going to trust anyone to watch out for Edie, it’s Lars or you.”

“I slept with Alexandria last night,” I blurted because I was a fucking idiot.

After a heartbeat of silence, he asked, “Alexandria Grant?”

“Yep,” I replied. “The one and only.”

“Oh...uhm...okay,” he muttered, sounding just as confused as I felt. “On purpose?”

“Get fucked, Tal.”

The bastard started laughing. “C’mon, Hunter,” he chuckled. “What did you expect me to say? You’ve never once mentioned liking her or anything like that.”

“That’s because I didn’t know that I liked her before now,” I argued unreasonably.

Once Talon stopped laughing at me, he asked, “Okay, so what happened?”

Starting from the very beginning of when I had run into Alex that first time, I told Talon everything. I told him about how I’d begun to see her differently, getting jealous of Baron flirting with her, that bullshit with Corbin, about the rest of the party, our drinking, and how we had ended up back at my dorm. Leaving out the more personal details, I told him about how she’d made the first move, and how I’d made the last one. Since Talon already knew that Alexandria had been a virgin, I didn’t have to explain to him the importance of last night. I even told him how I was feeling like shit for taking advantage of her, and how I wanted to fucking do it again.

When I was done, he asked, “And you’re sure that she was too drunk to know what she was doing?”

“Well, I mean...she didn’t *seem* drunk, but we’d been drinking, Tal,” I reminded him. “It never should have happened while we’d been drinking. It’s got me fucked-up. It’s got me thinking that it only happened *because* we’d been drinking.”

“Look, Alexandria isn’t some shy wallflower,” he said. “Even if she did have a few too many, I just can’t see her as the type that would let a guy manipulate her into giving her virginity away, not that I’m saying that’s what you did.”

“Then why does it *feel* like I did?” I challenged.

“Because you’re a good guy, Hunter,” he replied. “Because you have respect for women, and you’re not a fucking douchebag.”

“Thanks,” I chuckled.

“It’s true,” he insisted. “I think that you just need to talk to Alex. Just ask her how she feels about last night and put all this doubt to rest. Knowing Alex the way that I do, she’ll have no problem being honest with you. If you did anything wrong, she’ll let you know it.”

“Need I remind you that she hasn’t reached out to me at all today?”

“If you woke up with a hangover, it’s quite possible that she’s just sleeping hers away, Hunter.”

“And what if she’s not?” I posed. “What if she’s avoiding me because I took her fucking virginity after she’d been drinking?”

“Then you apologize for it,” he suggested. “Time machines don’t exist, Hunter. If she really feels like you took advantage of her, apologize, explain yourself, then give her time to process it all.”

“I can’t do that,” I admitted.

“You can’t apologize?”

“No, I can apologize and explain myself,” I corrected. “It’s the giving her time that’s going to be a bit of a problem for me.”

I could hear Talon sigh over the phone. “You really like her, don’t you?”

Even if Talon wasn’t my best friend, I wasn’t going to lie about something this important. “I do.”

“If that’s the case, then you gotta be totally honest with her, Hunter,” he advised. “Alexandria is the type of girl that would rather get her heart broken with the truth than get strung along by a lie.”

“I know,” I sighed. “I just...it really would help if I had an idea of how she felt about me.”

“Is that your way of asking me to ask White to pick Alex’s brain?” he chuckled.

“Well, you are supposed to have my back,” I chuckled back.

“I’ll see what I can do,” he promised, and that was Talon for you.

“You know, after all these years of knowing her, I never imagined that I’d feel this way about Alexandria Grant,” I admitted. “It came out of fucking nowhere, Tal.”

“It happens like that sometimes,” he chuckled softly.

“Anyways, thanks for listening,” I told him. “I actually have to get back to my job applications.”

“Anytime,” he replied. “Also, I wouldn’t worry about it too much, Hunter. Alex has no problem telling someone when they’re wrong. Just don’t kidnap her again.”

“Hey, she said that I couldn’t kidnap her again at *your* request,” I reminded him.

Talon laughed. "You got me there."

~

Alexandria~

When I had finally woken up after my nap-which, let's face it, had been way longer than what constituted a nap-I'd had no messages or missed calls from Hunter, and why would I? He was probably trying to figure out a way to not hold what I'd done against me. No matter how Hunter felt about me, he was too loyal to Talon to create problems within our little group. Plus, he owed Kenzlee just like the rest of us did, so I couldn't see him wanting to upset her by ditching me completely because of last night.

Running my hands through my hair, I knew that I wasn't going to put our conversation off much longer. Though young, we were still adults, and communication was the key to every relationship in this world, and it didn't matter what kind of relationship it was. Festering was a real thing, and if you didn't speak your mind, those unresolved emotions could quickly turn into poison.

However, before I jumped off that bridge, I was going to do my best not to land on my head. So, with my stomach growling and Gibson's Diner just a few blocks away, I decided to call Kenzlee for some advice. Even though I'd grown up with Hunter, she knew him better than I did. With as close as Hunter, Lars, and Talon were and are, Kenzlee had spent a lot more time with the trio than I'd had last year.

As soon as my feet hit the sidewalk, I called Kenz, and because God was on my side today, she answered on the fourth ring. "Hey," she greeted.

"Hey," I greeted back. "I'm not interrupting anything, am I?"

She laughed good-naturedly. "Talon's not here. He's out picking up dinner."

“Lazy night in tonight?”

“Yeah,” she answered wistfully. “You know how he is.”

Talon had a problem sharing Kenzlee with the public. If you were to ask a therapist, they’d say that it was the worst kind of co-dependency. However, if you asked Talon, he’d just say that it was love. When Talon had fallen for my cousin, he’d fallen hard, and he wasn’t embarrassed by that fact at all.

“Well, I need to girl talk, so Talon being gone works in my favor right now,” I told her.

“Ooohhh, girl talk,” she teased. “What’s his name, and on a scale from one to ten, how hot is he?”

With my heart thumping inside my chest, I said, “His name is Hunter Finley, and on a scale from one to ten, he’s a goddamn fifteen.”

Silence.

Finally, she asked, “Uhm, Hunter *who*?”

“Finley,” I repeated. “F.I.N.L.E.Y.”

“Ha. Ha,” she deadpanned.

“Well, quit making me feel more anxious about this than I already do,” I grumbled.

“Holy crap,” she explained. “You like Hunter?”

“Kenz?”

“Yeah?”

“I...I forced my virginity on him last night,” I confessed, the words making my stomach tighten.

“I’m sorry, what?”

Clutching the phone to my ear, I let out a deep breath before telling her everything. I told her about how I’d begun to see him differently and about the unwelcomed jealousy that kept making an appearance whenever other girls were hitting

on him. I told her about how we'd held hands, the party, the mixed signals on both our parts, how I'd thrown myself at him last night, and how I was avoiding him because I was ashamed of how I'd taken advantage of his kindness.

When I was finished, she said, "Wow."

"Wow, indeed," I agreed.

"Are you absolutely sure that he feels that way, Alex?" she asked. "Are you certain that he thinks that you took advantage of him?"

"Well, no," I admitted. "We haven't talked about it, but...c'mon, Kenzlee."

"What?"

"Hunter never would have slept with me had he been sober?" I argued. "He's never looked at me like that before, and instead of respecting that we're just friends, I threw myself at him, knowing that it doesn't take men much to cave."

"Alex, this is Hunter Finley that we're talking about," she replied. "Since when have you known Hunter to ever do anything that he didn't want to do. Hunter is not a follower, Alex."

"Oh, please," I snorted. "Most men will follow a naked girl to a bed without much thought."

"Hunter's not thirteen with his first erection, Alex," she chided. "That boy has seen enough action not to succumb to a pretty face or hot body."

"True, but this is a big deal, Kenz," I told her.

"I agree," she replied. "However, you can't keep avoiding him, Alex. You're going to have to talk to him about it. At least, you're going to have to if you want to remain friends."

"What if I want to be more than just friends?" I asked sadly.

“Oh, Alex,” she whispered.

“I wish I could say that it was the sex that had me feeling this way, but it’s not,” I told her. “I started liking Hunter before we had sex, and...and now I don’t know what to do.”

“You’re going to hate me, but I have to ask.”

“What?”

“Was the sex hot?”

“While I might not have anyone else to compare him to, if it gets any better than Hunter Finley, then I’ll never survive it,” I admitted.

Kenzlee chuckled. “Wow.”

“Yep.”

After a few seconds of silence, she said, “Look, you’ve never been one to pull any punches, so my advice is to just talk to him. Tell him that you’re sorry, then go from there. Since Hunter’s not a dick, I can’t see him not being honest right back.”

“True,” I agreed.

“The worst thing that can happen is that he doesn’t feel the same way about you that you feel about him, but the truth is a lot better than the unknown,” she pointed out.

“It just sucks,” I muttered.

“Yeah, love isn’t for the weak,” she agreed.

“Okay, enough about me,” I said, trying to shake off my regret and uncertainty. “How are things going with you?”

“Do you really think that I’m going to let you get away from telling me how your first time was, Alexandria Grant?” she asked sternly.

“I guess not,” I mumbled.

“You guessed right,” she huffed, and so I told her everything.

Chapter 11

The opportunities that we need.

Alexandria~

With no calls or texts from Hunter, I had managed to avoid him all day yesterday, and I didn't care if that made me a coward. I still hadn't figured out what I wanted to say to him yet, so I was biding my time until I could come up with something that would make him not hate me.

However, thoughts of Hunter Finley had taken a backseat to the call that I'd gotten earlier this morning from Jersey Montague, the owner of The Tomes. The Tomes was a bookstore/study center. The place was designed to cater to broke students that needed books, computer use, computer help, or anything else academic. From what I'd read on the webpage when I'd applied, the place also had tutors that were available on Tuesdays and Thursdays for free. According to the bio on the webpage, Jersey Montague was a philanthropist, though that might not be the best word for her because I hadn't been able to find anything else on her when I had looked her up. Apparently, The Tomes was her only baby, and she had family money that made it all happen.

Walking into the building, I had dressed in my best, excited about the callback. I'd begun losing hope of finding a decent job, so when Jersey had called me to set up an interview, I'd been over the moon with the opportunity. When she'd given me a short explanation of her expectations over the phone, it was my understanding that I'd be working the register and assisting people on the computers if needed. Now, while I wasn't a computer guru, I knew enough not to look like an idiot.

When I approached the counter, I saw a very good-looking guy manning the register, and holy crap, there really

was something inherently sexy about college guys. He had to be about six-foot or so, had dark brown hair, dark blue eyes, and a face that looked like it belonged on a magazine cover. If he was an internet model, he was probably a very successful one.

Smiling, he asked, "Can I help you?"

Smiling back, I answered, "I have an interview with Ms. Montague."

He cringed. "Don't let her hear you calling her that," he advised. "She hates it."

"Shut up," came a voice that had me and Sexy-Cashier-Guy looking over.

Walking through an arched doorway just behind the second register was Jersey Montague herself. Since I was five-two, Jersey had to be about five-five, and she was five-foot-five-inches of pure artistic beauty. Though The Tomes' website had a picture of her on it, the picture was of her pretty face only. With dark brown hair, light amber eyes, and a face that reminded me of a cartoon Belle from *Beauty and the Beast*, there was no denying that Jersey Montague was very pretty. However, she also had tattoos starting at her neck and covering almost her entire body.

Jersey Montague was a certified smoke show.

Sexy-Cashier-Guy said, "What? It's the truth."

Jersey grinned at him. "I'm trying to *hire* her, not scare her away, Cannon."

Cannon shrugged. "Then you should let me do the interviews," he quipped.

Jersey rolled her eyes. "Ignore him," she said. "I just keep him around for his pretty face."

I laughed when Cannon wrapped his arm around her waist, hauled her close, then nuzzled her neck. "You keep me around for a lot more than just my pretty face, babe."

She pushed him off her as she shot me a grin. “You’ll have to forgive him,” she said cheekily. “No matter how many times I review the sexual harassment policies with him, he just doesn’t get it.”

Cannon winked at her. “Do you blame me?”

Ignoring him, she said, “Let’s go to the back and talk, Ms. Grant.”

“Alex, please,” I insisted. “Or Alexandria.”

“I like Alex,” she announced, and I just grinned as I followed her towards the back, giving Cannon a small wave.

Once we walked into her office and sat down, she said, “Sorry about that. I really am working on his professionalism.”

I smiled. “I think it’s sweet that he can’t keep his hands off you.”

“It is until someone gets offended and wants to sue me for traumatizing them,” she snorted, and sadly, she wasn’t wrong. “At the end of the day, we’re still a business, and I have a reputation for having deep pockets.”

“Well, for the record, I think it’s sweet, and if Cannon wants to love on you while I’m here, I have no objections.” I wrinkled my nose when a thought occurred to me. “Just...as long as you’re both clothed.”

Jersey laughed. “I like you, Alexandria Grant.”

“Hopefully, you like me enough to hire me,” I joked, but not really.

Jersey leaned back in her chair, regarding me carefully. “Actually, I think I do.”

I sat up straighter. “Nevertheless, I’d feel better if you gave me a proper interview, so that I feel like I actually *earned* this job.”

The pretty girl smiled. “Now I *know* that I like you.”

I eyed her. “You’re not hitting on me, are you?”

“And if I was?” she teased.

“I’d have to tell you that I’ve already given my heart and virginity to someone else,” I sighed dramatically, my lips twitching to keep from laughing.

“Haven’t we all,” she sighed back. “Nonetheless, I don’t swing that way. Plus, even if I did swing back and forth like a pendulant, I’m completely, irrevocably, and stupidly in love with that nitwit out front.”

I laughed. “Why stupidly?”

“Love always makes women stupid,” she replied dryly. “Case in point, if I wasn’t stupid over him, I would have fired him years ago for continuously violating the sexual harassment policy.”

I couldn’t stop laughing; Jersey Montague was great. “You got me there.”

Cracking her neck, she said, “Okay, enough about Cannon and his adoration for me. Let’s start this unnecessary interview.”

An hour later, I had a job, and one that was more than willing to work around my class schedule. The job also paid more than minimum wage, and Jersey had informed me that there was an overtime list that her employees could sign for extra money if they needed it. She was a believer in education, and it was her passion to see students succeed. It was funny how she was only a few years older than me, but she sounded and acted like she was full-grown.

Leaving The Tomes, this day couldn’t get any better.

~

Hunter~

When I still hadn't heard from Alexandria a day later, I'd been ready to storm over to her dorm and demand a fucking explanation. No matter how much I regretted the other night, I couldn't let either of us take the easy way out. Talon hadn't been wrong when he'd said that the truth was the only option that I had here.

However, just as I'd been about to storm the castle, I'd gotten a call from Jersey Montague, the owner of The Tomes, and she had requested an interview with me. While a job wasn't more important to me than Alexandria, life wasn't about personal priorities; it was about practicality, and I needed a fucking job. Besides, the job interview wasn't going to take all day, so I could always call Alex this evening.

So, now I was sitting across from Jersey Montague, and holy shit. Though extremely pretty, she wasn't my type. When we'd met in the store a few minutes ago, my first thought was that Lars would lose his mind if he ever had the chance to meet the beauty. Of course, that train of thought came to a halt when it was clear that she was spoken for. For all that my brother loved the ladies, the guy didn't poach. Lars wasn't a fan of cheating, even if it wasn't him that was technically cheating.

Ready to give all the rehearsed answers to most interview questions, Jersey threw me for a loop when she said, "Look, I've just hired two other people, one to man the registers and assist anyone using the computers. In addition to my other three employees, I don't need any extra help on the registers." Her light brown eyes regarded me closely. "I need someone to assist on the computers and do all the heavy lifting. The other person that I hired today was hired for the same thing, and I'm not going to bullshit you, Mr. Finley. The girl got hired to man the registers, and the guy got hired to stock the shelves." Even though I was sitting down, her eyes still raked over me. "You look like you can carry a box or two."

"Thanks," I deadpanned.

Jersey's amber-colored eyes twinkled as she leaned her arms on her desk. "I'm going to be honest with you, Mr. Finley-"

"Hunter," I insisted, interrupting her. "Please call me Hunter. I'm too young to be a mister anything."

Her lips twitched a bit at that. "Fair enough," she said as she leaned back in her chair. "As I was saying, I want to be very honest about the type of employer that I am, Hunter."

"By all means."

"While I am a huge champion of women in general, I'm not an extremist," she said. "If there's heavy lifting to be done in my shop, then I expect the men to do it."

I liked Jersey Montague.

"Now, if you want to sue me for saying that, then get in line," she went on. "You'll get your money, but it'll be a while because I've offended a shitload of people way before you, and they're still waiting for their day in court. As you know, these things take time."

I had no idea if she was serious or not, but that had me cracking a smile. "Rest assured, Ms. Montague, if there's any heavy lifting to do, I have no problem doing it."

"Call me Jersey," she instructed. "I hate being called Ms. Montague."

"Of course," I agreed easily.

"At any rate, if you work here, you're going to see a lot of shit that isn't socially or politically correct, and if that's going to be a problem, then I'd really appreciate it if you let me know now."

"I'm not here to change the world, Jersey," I told her. "I'm here for the chance to earn a paycheck; nothing more, nothing less."

She nodded. "That being said, there are three things that I will not tolerate in my store," she said pointedly.

“Racism of any kind, sexual harassment of any kind, and any rudeness towards the customers that come here.”

I just shot her a look.

Jersey rolled her eyes, and she really was something else. “Look, if you’re dating someone here and she doesn’t mind you slapping her ass in public, then I don’t care about that,” she clarified, doing her best not to be a hypocrite. When I’d met her earlier, I had walked into the store to her boyfriend kissing her on the lips like he’d been away at sea for months, and it must have been business as usual, because no one else in the store had seemed surprised. “I’m talking about asking a customer out and not taking no for an answer. That’s the kind of shit I’m referring to.”

“Understood,” I replied.

Her eyes narrowed a bit. “Do you have a girlfriend?”

My brows shot up. “Does the answer have any bearing on whether I get the job or not?”

“No,” she answered. “I’m just curious because I can see a lot of girls needing help with the computers all of a sudden.”

Though flattering, I wasn’t interested in other girls. “There’s someone,” I semi-lied. “All of your female customers are safe from me.”

“But are *you* safe from them?” she snorted.

“If I have to slip on a wedding ring, so that no one else gets any ideas, I will,” I told her truthfully, this thing with Alexandria becoming very serious, very quickly.

Jersey’s head tilted a bit. “I like you, Hunter Finley.”

“Does that mean that I’m hired?” I asked. “No offense, but I need a job more than I need you to like my charming personality.”

She laughed, and even her laugh was pretty. Still, no matter how stunning Jersey Montague was, she wasn’t doing anything for me. My dick only twitched for stubborn brunettes

with white eyes, a bangin' fucking body, and the face of an angel.

“You’re hired, Hunter Finley,” she announced. “While I’m more than willing and capable of working around your class schedule, I am asking that you show up here tomorrow evening for an orientation. I like to show my new employees around when there’s no one here to distract me from laying out my expectations. The other two new hires have already assured me that they can make it.”

“Yeah, I’ll be here,” I told her. This job paid enough that I wouldn’t need more than two jobs right now, so there was no way that I wasn’t going to show up tomorrow evening.

“Good,” she said, standing up as she reached out to shake my hand.

Taking it in mine, I said, “Thank you for this opportunity.”

Jersey planted her hands on her hips after shaking my hand. “Just don’t be a dick, Hunter,” she said, making me chuckle. “Come to work when you’re supposed to, do a good job, and don’t be an asshole to anyone. That’s all I ask.”

“I’ll do my best to manage,” I quipped, causing her to throw me a wink.

As soon as I left The Tomes, I fired off a text to Lars, Talon, and my parents, letting them know that I finally had a job. Yeah, I wasn’t going to have time for much else now, but like I’d said before, life was about practicality. I was also going to have to talk to Alexandria tonight. We needed to talk about what happened, and we needed to do it before my schedule took up most of my time.

After all, while I might need a job, I still wanted Alexandria.

Chapter 12

The regret that shuts us down.

Hunter~

I was doing my best to calm the fuck down, but I wasn't sure that it was working. Alexandria was avoiding me, and while I might deserve it, that logic didn't help me much. I didn't appreciate how she wasn't giving me a chance to apologize or even see for myself that she was okay. Sure, she had finally texted back that she was fine last night, but how did I fucking know that?

Nevertheless, as much as I'd searched for her today on campus, I hadn't been able to find her, so I had to wait to demand an explanation for her disappearing act. Before leaving my interview yesterday, Jersey had informed me that we were going to get our weekly schedules tonight during our orientation, so I was going to need to find a time in between classes and work to drag Alexandria aside and demand that she let me apologize. That's where I was at right now with the fucking girl, and if she didn't want me getting us both kicked out of school for breaking into her dorm room, then she better quit avoiding me.

Annoyed as fuck with Alexandria's stubbornness, I did my best to snap out of it as I parked my car in the back of The Tomes. I needed to get my shit together if I didn't want to lose my job before it even started. Jersey had made it clear that she and her business were all about customer service, so I could hardly go around snapping at people because Alexandria Grant might be rightfully hating me right now.

Walking around towards the front of the building, I saw that the store was already locked up for the evening, so I had to knock on the glass to get in. Luckily, since Jersey had been

expecting me, I hadn't had to wait long before her smiling face was opening the door for me.

"There he is," she greeted.

"No way am I late," I greeted back.

Jersey just kept smiling. "You're not. However, the rest of your team got here extra early."

Great.

"Well, I'm here now," I stated like an idiot.

I walked past her as she shut and re-locked the door, and my feet almost tripped over themselves when I spotted Alexandria fucking Grant standing next to a guy that wasn't ugly by any means. He looked to be about an inch shorter than my own six-foot-one, had brown hair, brown eyes, and it was obvious that he kept in good shape. He was also standing a little too close to Alex.

"Hunter Finley, I would like you to meet Alexandra Grant and Anthony Mendez," Jersey announced, introducing us all.

Ignoring Alex, I reached out to shake Anthony's hand. "Hey."

He took my hand in his, and he had a solid grip. "Hey."

Letting go of his hand, I turned to look back at Alexandria. "I've been texting you all day today," I said in lieu of a greeting, not caring that I was airing our dirty laundry.

Alex's icy-colored eyes started darting around nervously. "I texted back."

"Wait," Jersey said, interrupting our awkward reunion. "You two know each other?"

"We grew up together," Alex informed her, and I could feel my hands fist at my sides and my tongue peek out to lick my lower lip. "His best friend is engaged to my cousin."

Jersey smiled. “Oh, that’s perfect,” she exclaimed. “I love it when my employees all get along. It makes things easier.”

Apparently, Jersey Montague didn’t know how to read a room because the vibes that I was giving off were not friendly ones. I had just taken this girl’s virginity, but she was explaining our relationship as one of being childhood friends only. Just yesterday, I’d told Jersey that I had someone in my life, but Alex was making it clear that I was nothing more than a friend.

Yeah, I was pissed.

Luckily, before I said anything that got us both fired, I quickly reminded myself that I’d taken her virginity while she’d been drinking. In all honesty, I was lucky that she was even claiming me as a friend right now. Alex was doing her best to keep things civil, and I needed to respect that. At least, I needed to respect that for the time being. However, all bets were off after we were done with our orientation.

“Yeah,” I bit out, doing my best to calm my voice. “We’ve known each other most of our lives.”

“Great,” Jersey said. “Granted, you two won’t be working together much because of your schedules, but it really does make things easier when my employees already know each other or mesh well together.” She let out a dramatic sigh. “While I’m not afraid to break up a fight, Conner gets all alphy when there’s tension among my employees.”

“Oh, you don’t have to worry about any of that with us,” Alex jumped in, probably fearing for her job already. “I can pretty much get along with anyone.”

“Same here,” Anthony said, finally joining in on the conversation. “As long as everyone’s respectful, I have no issues.”

“I couldn’t agree more,” Jersey concurred. “I’m all about individuality, and I really don’t care how others live their lives. However, in my store, you’ll live it showing each

other and our customers the upmost respect. I will not accept less, though I don't ask for much.”

“Understood,” I told her.

Jersey gave me a terse nod. “Well, now that we've cleared that up, let me give you guys the tour of the store and a rundown of my expectations.”

For the next hour, Jersey gave us a very detailed tour, from the storage rooms to the communal area, to the restrooms, to the employee breakroom, and to her office. The store was a decent size, and I'd been surprised to find out that the building was actually three-stories high, Jersey's apartment taking up the entire top floor. The second floor was used as the storage area, the employee breakroom, and had another set of restrooms for employee use. Jersey Montague had a good setup here, and I could think of worse jobs to have.

After Jersey was done with the tour and all the expectations that had been laid out for us, she asked, “Now it's pizza time.”

“Pi...pizza time?” Alex echoed.

“While I do my best to respect my employees' privacy, I also like to know who is working for me,” Jersey explained. “So, after each orientation, I order pizzas and question my employees like I'm the FBI and they're on America's Most Wanted.”

“Oh...uhm...okay,” Anthony mumbled.

Jersey grinned. “I'm just messing with you.”

~

Alexandria~

Now, while it wasn't an interrogation worthy of the FBI, Jersey had been serious about pizza and getting to know us better. Thankfully, she'd started with Anthony, and it was clear

as day that Anthony Mendez was the shy and quiet type. Though he'd been a good sport about sharing and telling us a little bit about himself, it was still rather obvious that the guy was the silent type, which wasn't a bad thing. While that cocky, good-looking, alpha bad boy appealed to most girls my age, it was the serious ones that felt like they might be worth your future.

I could also appreciate how Anthony taking center stage had been a good buffer between me and Hunter. When I'd seen him walking through the doors of The Tome, I had almost fainted. I'd done a good job of avoiding him last night, never imagining that I'd be working with him along with going to school with him. While I knew that I couldn't avoid him forever, the coward's way out had felt possible after not hearing from him Saturday morning, then managing to avoid him all day yesterday.

Nevertheless, as soon as Hunter had mentioned how he'd been texting me, the coward's way had come to an end, something that my stomach was still churning over. While the pizza smelled great, I was dreading having to talk with Hunter. I felt horrible about what I'd done, and I was actually scared that he might not accept my apology. Even though I might deserve it, it would suck to lose the only real friend that I had here. While I could make new friends, my feelings for Hunter were more than just friendly.

“Alex?”

It took me a second, but when I shook myself from my thoughts, I saw Hunter, Jersey, and Anthony all looking my way. “Huh?”

Jersey's lips smirked. “I asked how you're liking school so far,” she informed me.

“Oh...uhm...” I let out a steady breath. “It's...it was quite intimidating when I got here, but it's not so bad now,” I answered honestly. “I think...when you grow up in a relatively small town, the rest of the world can feel overwhelming at times.”

“Yeah, but having Hunter here with you had to have helped with that, right?” she asked, and I just wanted the ground to open up and swallow me whole.

“Hunter’s been great,” I admitted, leaving out the part about repaying him by violating him with my virginity while he’d been too intoxicated to consent. “It’s nice to have a genuine friend in a place filled with nothing but strangers.”

“So, are you the partying type or the studying type?” she asked, and while most people would claim that Jersey was overstepping, I didn’t see it that way. She’d been very honest yesterday about the type of person and employee that she was, so with this being America and me having choices, I didn’t have to answer her questions if I didn’t want to.

“A little of both, I think,” I answered. “I used to love going to a good party back in high school.” I shrugged. “I think I’m too terrified of failing here to let the partying suck me in.”

“Like I’m going to let you fail, Alexandria,” Hunter remarked, and that little sentence gave me hope. If Hunter cared about whether I failed or not, then that must mean that he didn’t hate me, and I could work with that. Though I wanted more, I’d take what I could get at this point.

Looking over Hunter’s way, Jersey asked, “So, what about you? Parties or study groups?”

“Same as Alexandria, I guess,” he answered. “Besides, I’ve done enough partying in my life to know that I’m not missing much.”

I looked back at Jersey. “Hunter used to run with an underground fighting circuit.”

Jersey’s amber-colored eyes widened. “Oh, really?”

“I placed bets for my friend,” he clarified, shooting me a look. “I didn’t fight.”

“You did a couple of times,” I reminded him.

“Not like Talon,” he replied, clearly not wanting to talk about it.

“Holy shit,” Anthony exclaimed. “You’re friends with Talon Draven?”

Hunter let out an annoyed sigh. “How in the hell does everyone know about Talon? Those damn fights were supposed to be a secret.”

“Dude, everyone that’s interested in any kind of fighting has heard of Talon Draven,” Anthony went on. “So, that means that you’re *the* Hunter Finley.”

“I’m not *the* anything,” Hunter denied. “I’m just friends with Talon.”

“Okay, I don’t like being left out of the loop,” Jersey announced as she pulled out her phone. “I’m looking up Talon Draven.”

Even though I knew that she was madly in love with Cannon, family loyalty had me saying, “He’s engaged to my cousin, Kenzlee. That’s another reason that me and Hunter hang out.”

“We knew each other way before Tal and Kenz got together, Alexandria,” Hunter pointed out, his voice a little hard.

I stared into his bright hazel eyes. “Yeah, but we didn’t become friends or start hanging out until they started dating,” I reminded him. “So, yeah, we’re friends now, but that’s because of them.”

Before Hunter could argue with me further, Jersey was saying, “Holy crap.”

I grinned as I looked back at her. “Yeah, he’s something else.”

Jersey’s brows jumped. “Your cousin is a very lucky lady.”

“Because Cannon’s not rocking a six-pack himself?” I teased.

She pretended to fan herself. “He is rather perfect.” Setting her phone down, she added, “Cannon, not Talon Draven.”

“So, are you going to tell us anything about yourself?” I asked, wanting to pull the attention off whatever relationship I had with Hunter, especially since I wasn’t sure what we were to each other right now.

“I’m an open book,” she boasted. “Ask me anything.”

“I don’t think that’s appropriate,” Anthony muttered. “I mean, you *are* our boss.”

“Well, since I’m not expecting any of you to ask me what position I like best in the bedroom, I think we’re okay, Anthony,” she replied, tossing him a little wink.

I started choking on my tea.

Hunter started slapping my back to save me.

“Uhm...” I looked over to see Anthony’s face beet red.

“I’m just teasing,” Jersey chuckled. “I didn’t mean to embarrass you, Anthony.”

“No,” he mumbled. “It’s okay.”

We ended up spending the next hour sharing superficial fun facts about ourselves, and because God had decided to bless me, Jersey had kept me behind after Hunter and Anthony had left to show me where the safe was and how to count the money in the cash registers. For safety reasons, the cashiers were the only employees with access, and though she trusted all of her employees, the less people that knew how to work the safe, the better.

Hunter had not been a happy camper when he’d left.

Chapter 13

The chances we take.

Alexandria~

I had today off, which was a good thing. After going over my new work schedule, I'd seen that I was going to have to work two days with Hunter this week, but not until the end of the week, so that would give us plenty of time to clear the air between us. When Kenzlee had called me last night to ask me how things were going between me and Hunter, I had confessed to being stupid and a coward, and her silent support had been all that I'd needed to get my head out of my ass.

So, the new plan was to finally talk to him, apologize, then hope to salvage our friendship. I was selfishly counting on Hunter being a good guy to get me through this, but even if he did forgive me, I still had these damn feelings for him that I had to deal with.

“Well, well, well, Alexandria Grant.” I looked up from my laptop to see Jessica walking into our room. “You’ve been holding out on me.”

I turned on my bed, my schoolwork momentarily forgotten. “What are you talking about?”

Jessica strolled in, setting her stuff on her bed before getting comfortable. “Hunter Finley,” she announced.

I could feel my stomach dip with trepidation.

How did she know?

“What about Hunter?”

“I share a class with Rico Tarsiers and Carrie Fenton, and Rico mentioned how you were friends with Hunter

Finley,” she went on, looking at me like she’d just caught me red-handed in something.

“I’m not following,” I replied. “I told you that I had a friend named Hunter.”

“You didn’t tell me that he was famous,” she accused.

“That’s because he’s not,” I clarified for her. “Rico is just fangirling over him because Hunter’s best friends with Talon Draven, and Rico is into the fighting scene. Hunter isn’t famous.”

She bristled a bit, looking every bit the haughty aristocrat. “Maybe not,” she said, relenting some. “However, I looked him up, and you didn’t tell me that he was fucking gorgeous.”

Jealousy was an ugly emotion, really.

“That’s not true,” I argued. “You asked me the other night if Hunter was hot, and I specifically remember telling you that he was.”

Ignoring the truth of that, she asked, “Why haven’t you introduced us?”

That had my head jerking back a bit. “Why would I? I had no idea that you were interested in Hunter, nor am I responsible for recruiting Hunter’s dates for him.”

“Is he single?”

I wanted so badly to tell her that he wasn’t, but that’d be a lie. As of right now, Hunter was very single, no matter what had happened between us. Of course, this mess was all my fault for avoiding Hunter and not clearing the air between us, but still. I also couldn’t tell Jessica that he was off-limits just because of the other night, because I wasn’t ready to share such a personal thing with her. Besides, it wasn’t only my business to tell. I had no idea if Hunter wanted anyone to know about us, especially since we’d both been drinking. If I was a regret in his life, the last thing that I wanted to do was broadcast that fact.

Nevertheless, the idea of Jessica and Hunter hooking up had me feeling nauseous. Though it wasn't anything that I could stop, I didn't want Jessica to know what it felt like to be taken by Hunter Finley. Hell, I didn't want *any* of the girls on this campus to know that. My feelings for Hunter were the real deal, and I didn't know what to do with them now that everything felt like a jumbled mess.

Regardless of everything that was going on between me and Hunter, I wasn't going to lie to Jessica, no matter how much I wanted to. "Yeah, he's single."

She got that sly look in her eye, and I could feel my stomach really testing me. "What about his roommate, Baron Memphis?"

"What?" I asked, praying that she wasn't going *there*.

"Well, when I looked him up, I found out that he's rooming with Baron Memphis," she replied. "Have you met Baron?"

I nodded slowly. "Yes, I have."

Jessica's grin matched that glint in her eyes. "Well, while I know that you're saving it for marriage, I wouldn't mind having a good time with those two." I had to let out a low, deep, steady breath. "Do you know if Hunter is into that kind of thing?"

I thought back to what Hunter had told me at the party, about not being into threesomes. "As far as I know, he's not," I answered as honestly as I could. "As for Baron, I don't know him like that."

Jessica wrinkled her nose. "Well, I know that some guys are okay with threesomes when there's two girls, but they're not really into threesomes when it's two guys."

I had no idea what to say to that.

Finally, I said, "I have no idea how either Hunter or Baron feel about that, so you'll just have to ask them yourself."

“Can you give me Hunter’s number?” she asked hopefully.

“Uh, no,” I answered. “Not only is it rude as hell to just hand out someone’s phone number without asking their permission first, but you can send Hunter a message through any one of his social media accounts if you want to introduce yourself, Jessica.”

She immediately stiffened. “Well, that’s rude as fuck.”

“It’s really not” I countered, even though I could have chosen my words better. “You’re asking me to help you set up a threesome with one of my dearest friends. Not only is that tacky, but you haven’t even considered to think that you might be putting me into an uncomfortable spot. I don’t need to know about Hunter’s threesomes.”

“Sounds like you’re jealous,” she accused.

I was.

I could admit that.

However, I wasn’t going to admit it to her. “Sounds like you can’t find your own dates,” I fired back.

“Whatever,” she huffed, pulling out her phone, effectively ending our conversation.

Not wanting things to be uncomfortable between us, I said, “Look, I didn’t mean to offend you, Jessica. I just really don’t want to get in between you and Hunter.”

“Still sounds like jealousy,” she insisted, and since she wasn’t wrong, I let it go.

~

Hunter~

I had to work at the store this evening, but that was okay. I had two shifts with Alexandria later on this week, so she was

going to have to talk to me sooner or later.

In fact...

Me: *Grabbing drinks after work Friday*

Alex replied almost immediately, which surprised me.

Kidnappee: *Is that a question?*

Me: *No. I'm telling u that we're grabbing drinks after work*

Kidnappee: *Just me n u?*

Fuck, this girl was going to have me losing my motherfucking mind soon. It shouldn't be this difficult to have one fucking conversation. If I'd had any fucking balls, I would have waited for her after our orientation yesterday, but things had felt awkward enough without causing a scene on our first day of work.

Me: *Yes, just u n me*

Kidnappee: *Yeah, ok*

"Dude, you looked pissed. Is everything okay?" I looked up from the bench to see Baron staring down at me. "Problems with Alex?"

That brought me up short.

"Why would you think that I'm having issues with Alexandria?" I asked cautiously.

Baron snorted. "You can tell me whatever you want about just being friends with the girl, but even as drunk as I'd been the other night, guy friends aren't *that* possessive."

"If he's any kind of man or real friend, then he is," I countered.

"Look, if you want to live in denial, I'll help you pack your bags and move you there," he replied easily, grinning down at me. "Honestly, whatever is going on between you and Alex is your business, and I can respect that. I just don't want

you ruining my chances with that roommate of hers.” Baron sat down on the bench next to me as other students walked past us. “Have you had a chance to talk to Alex about that hot blonde that she’s shacking up with?”

I rolled my eyes. “Seriously?”

“Hey, you might not want to tap that, but I do,” he said truthfully, and no matter how rude or harsh, I could appreciate honesty.

“Why don’t you just look up her social media and shoot her a message?” I asked. “Why do I have to get Alexandria involved?”

“Because I’m just supposed to slide into her DMs and tell her that I heard that she likes to be double stuffed?” he huffed. “Yeah, right.”

“Well, I’m not sure what you think *I* can do for you? What do you even want me to ask Alexandria?”

“Ask if the rumors are true,” he replied like I was an idiot.

“I am not asking Alex if it’s true that her roommate likes to ride multiple dicks at one time, Baron,” I practically spat. Even though I knew that Alexandria wasn’t like that, the last thing that I was going to do was put ideas into her head. Now that she was no longer a virgin, she might want to explore her sexuality, and that wasn’t going to happen on my fucking watch. If Alex wanted to experiment, then she was going to experiment with me and me only.

Baron let out a dramatic sigh. “How about you ask if she’s single, then?”

“Something that you can ask her yourself,” I pointed out.

“Yeah, but if you can get Alex to vouch for me, then I won’t have to try that hard,” he reasoned, and I could only look at the guy.

“Do you know how much of a douchebag you sound like right now?” I finally asked.

“It’s college,” he drawled out lazily. “I’m supposed to be a douchebag.”

“What happened to no girls or partying?” I asked like I was his father. “What happened to studying and putting your all into football?”

“I’ve found that I’ve got the energy to do both,” he grinned, and I had to remember that Baron wasn’t me. I should not be judging his life choices. If he flunked out of college or got kicked off the football team for partying too hard, that wasn’t my business. He was my roommate, not my son.

Finally giving in, I said, “Look, I’ll ask Alex about her, but no promises.”

Baron kept grinning at me as he stood up from the bench. “Thanks, man.” He patted me on the shoulder. “In return, I’ll let everyone know that Alex is off-limits.”

If I were truly a good guy, I’d decline his offer, letting him know that Alex was free to date whoever she wanted. However, I wasn’t that good of a guy, and I needed all the help that I could get until I finally spoke to the girl and laid out my expectations. However, before I could wrestle with my conscience more, Baron was giving me a salute before going about his business.

With my curiosity getting the best of me, I pulled Jessica Branch up on one of my social media accounts, and if the blonde looking back at me was the real Jessica, then I could see why Baron might enjoy a night out with her. She was undeniably pretty, though in that internet model commonality that you saw everywhere these days. It felt like every girl had the same face with the way that they did their makeup, and I wasn’t looking for physical perfection in a girl. I wanted a girl that felt comfortable looking her worst around me. I was possessive by nature, so the last thing that I needed was a girlfriend that craved attention. That shit sounded like a goddamn headache.

When I thought of a girlfriend, I automatically thought about Alexandria and all the times that I'd hung out with her while she had no makeup on, dressed in sweats, and not giving a fuck. When she would dress up, she weakened a man's knees. However, when she wasn't dressed up, she invaded a man's heart, and it was insane how done for I was.

Forgetting about Jessica Branch and Baron, I pulled up Alex's social media page, and I could feel myself literally growing a vagina with how much I wanted her to add me as more than just a fucking friend. If I could hold off for a couple of more days, then I was confident that I could make that happen. If not, then Alexandria Grant and I were going to have problems.

Luckily, I'd learn from the best how to conquer that particular obstacle, and if Alex thought that I was the type of man to give up easily, she was very wrong.

Chapter 14

The misunderstandings that ruin so much.

Hunter~

Because God was testing me, I was making my way to my car when I saw Alexandria sprinting past the library entrance, and there was no way that I wasn't going to stop her to confirm our drinks after work on Friday. Call it an excuse; I didn't care. I fucking missed her, and I wasn't going to pretend that I didn't.

"Alex!" I called out.

She stopped in her tracks as she turned her head to see who was calling out to her, and as soon as she noticed that it was me, I saw her back straightened, and I wanted that to be enough to deter me, but it wasn't. If she no longer wanted to be friends with me after what happened, then she was going to have to tell me that to my face.

"Hey," she muttered quietly once I was standing in front of her.

"Hey," I greeted back. "I'm on my way to The Tomes. It's officially my first day."

"Yeah, I saw that on the schedule," she remarked. "I still can't believe that we were both lucky enough to get these jobs. If I budget just right, I might not have to get a second one."

"Same here," I agreed. "Plus, with the option to sign up for overtime, that helps."

Alexandria nodded. "I know. It kind of feels like a bit of a safety net."

Letting out a slow breath, I said, “Anyway, I just wanted to confirm drinks on Friday.” Her icy gaze widened a bit, and I knew that I couldn’t put it off any longer. “We need to talk, Alexandria.”

She started nibbling at her lower lip, and I hated that she felt nervous around me now. “Yeah, I know,” she finally mumbled in agreement.

“Look, I need to get to the shop, but I’m serious about Friday,” I told her. “We need to talk, and short of you dying, I am not going to let you brush me off like you have been.”

“I haven’t been-”

“Stop,” I ordered. “No lying between us, okay?” I stepped closer to her. “Whatever happens between us, no lying, okay?”

Alexandria nodded. “No lying,” she agreed, though she didn’t sound happy about it.

“Also, really quick,” I said as I glanced at my watch.

“Yeah?” she asked, still sounding a bit nervous.

“What can you tell me about your roommate, Jessica?” I asked, glancing at my watch again.

“What? Jessica?”

I looked back at her. “Her name’s Jessica Branch, right?”

Alexandria nodded slowly. “Yeah, that’s her.”

“Is she single? Or does she like to date around?” I asked, the minutes ticking in my head. I really didn’t want to be late on my first day of work, but I also didn’t want Baron bugging me about this shit anymore.

“She...uh, she’s single, as far as I know,” Alex answered.

“Good,” I sighed. “That’s a start.” I shook my head. “I gotta go. I don’t want to be late.”

Alexandria blinked up at me, but then she said, “Yeah, no. I get it.”

Reaching out, I grabbed her arm, then pulled her forward as I kissed her cheek. “I’ll talk to you later, baby.”

I left Alexandria staring at me wide-eyed as I hurried to get to work. While I would still be getting to The Tomes early, after being the last one to show up for orientation, I was going to make sure to show up extra early today. Plus, I could get some schoolwork in if I was *too* early for my shift.

When I finally arrived at the shop, I shot Baron a quick text.

Me: *She’s single, but that’s all I managed 2 find out right now*

Baron: *That’s it?*

I shook my head as I let out an annoyed sigh.

Me: *It’s better than nothing. Just DM her for fuck’s sakes*

Baron: *I need 2 know more b4 I do that*

Me: *Just DM her, dude*

Baron: *Ok*

Grabbing my stuff, I got out of the car, then made my way into the shop. I was surprised by how packed it was, but I considered that a good thing. That meant that the hours wouldn’t drag by, and that was a good thing. I never could understand lazy workers. Sitting around and doing nothing for hours did not sound appealing to me at all.

So, in addition to a vending machine, coffee maker, and soda dispenser, the employee breakroom also came with individual lockers for the employees, so that we could safely store our stuff. Now, while my laptop wasn’t super expensive,

it was the only one that I had, and I had no desire to have it stolen. The plan was to do some schoolwork during my breaks, so I'd needed to bring it with me, and having the lockers available to us made me feel a lot better about it.

After getting situated, I headed back downstairs, deciding to get an early start. I still could have gotten some schoolwork done, but I thought I'd chop it up with Cannon for a few minutes before starting my shift. I considered it a sort of pass down to find out what the vibe was for the day.

"Hey, Cannon," I greeted as I walked up to the register. "How's it going?"

He shot me a look. "You know, I'll never understand women," he remarked.

"You mean that you actually try?" I joked.

"Jersey gets on me about all my PDA, but I don't know what else to do," he replied. "She won't marry me or let me be rude to the customers, but some of these college girls need to be treated rudely."

"She doesn't ever get jealous?" I asked, not that Jersey should with how beautiful she was.

"No," he answered, grinning. "Only because the only woman's name that I ever utter is hers."

Oh shit.

~

Alexandria~

As much as I was dreading Friday night, it needed to happen. When Hunter had asked me about Jessica, I'd never felt so heartbroken before. I mean, we weren't even dating, and I'd felt like he had just cheated on me; stupid but true. I'd been upset enough that my next class had come and gone without

me hearing a single word. So, even if Hunter Finley broke my heart, our talk still needed to happen.

Kicking off my shoes as I dropped on my bed, my phone chimed, and I could feel my stomach tighten when I pulled it out of my pocket and saw who the message was from. Still, I had just vowed to stop being a coward, so I had no choice but to check the message.

Kidnapper #1: *I'm an idiot*

Not sure if this message was even for me, I still replied back.

Me: *Am I supposed 2 say that ur not? Not sure what u want from me right now...LOL*

Like a loser, I tacked on the LOL to make it seem like we were still casual friends.

Kidnapper #1: *Ur just supposed 2 agree, then 4give me*

I could feel my heart skip a beat, not sure where Hunter was going with this, but still hopeful because I was a glutton for punishment, apparently.

Me: *I've already 4given u 4 kidnapping me TWICE, I'm pretty sure ur 4given 4 whatever u did now*

Kidnapper #1: *We didn't kidnap u. We bought u lunch*

Me: *Yeah, AFTER kidnapping me. N what about the 2nd time?*

Kidnapper #1: *We were just keeping u safe from the crowd*

Me: *That's so not what happened. Still, what did u do this time, Hunter?*

Kidnapper #1: *I asked u about Jessica bcuz Baron's interested n her, not me.*

I stared at his text, and while I couldn't deny that it made me feel better, I still didn't want to get my hopes up.

Nevertheless, if Hunter was upset at me for what I'd done to him Friday night, then he wouldn't be clearing the air about Jessica, right? If he was upset with me, then he wouldn't have called me baby or kissed me on the cheek, right? I mean, he could still be just trying to keep things civil because of Talon and Kenzlee, but my stupid feelings couldn't help but hope that it might mean more. Even if Hunter wasn't interested in me like that, if he wasn't mad at me for what happened, then I hadn't lost him as a friend. Yeah, it'd be hard to be just friends, but I could do it.

I could do it.

The only problem now was that I didn't know how to reply to his text without coming off like a loser. I wasn't sure if I should tell him that it's okay because we're just friends, or was acknowledging that it mattered the right move? I also couldn't believe that I was at a point in my life when I didn't know how to handle something this simple. It wasn't like I was thirteen with my first crush.

When my phone chimed again, I knew that I had to reply to him.

Kidnapper #1: *Alexandria?*

Me: *Sorry. Sum1 was at the door*

God, now I was lying.

Perfect.

I replied back, deciding to keep things simple.

Me: *U can tell him that she's single and adventurous if that helps*

My heart felt like it was in my throat as those dots began dancing, and I wondered how much more I could screw this thing between me and Hunter up.

Kidnapper #1: *It does*

His response was so anticlimactic that I wasn't sure what to do now. I also wasn't sure how I felt about Jessica and

Baron hooking up. That would have her around Hunter more, and I felt jealous enough for it to bother me.

Maybe I needed to get drunk.

Dropping back on my bed, staring up at the ceiling, I wondered if maybe I just needed to hook up with another guy. Maybe I was overthinking everything because my virginity had gone to a guy that I actually liked. Had it gone to just some random college guy, maybe there wouldn't have been any feelings clouding up my thinking process.

When my phone chimed again, I groaned.

Kidnapper #1: *Gotta get back 2 work. C u on Friday*

Me: *Ok*

Setting my phone down on the bed beside me, I chalked it up to PMS. I was due to start my period in a couple of days, so it really could be just hormones making me crazy. Hell, maybe my feelings for Hunter weren't even real. Maybe it was just PMS wreaking its usual havoc.

Yeah, right.

Ignoring my heart and head, I decided to blame this entire mess on PMS and call it a day. If I still felt like an idiot after my period started, then I'd address it. Until then, I could keep my head in the sand for just a little while longer.

Chapter 15

The shock that blinds us.

Alexandria~

I had worked with Hunter yesterday, and things had gone well. In fact, things had felt good; like we were friends again. We had shown up to work around the same time, and Hunter had even suggested that we ride share on the evenings that we worked together. We had talked about how Baron was trying to hook up with Jessica, and how Jessica might actually be right up his alley. It'd been a good night, and I had even chitchatted with a couple of people that I had recognized from a few of my classes.

However, today was a different story.

I could barely look at Hunter, and by the way that he kept eyeing me, he knew that something was up. Nevertheless, I was going to have to find a way to ditch our talk after work because I could feel myself close to having a goddamn heart attack.

When I'd woken up this morning, it should have been to my period. In fact, I should have woken up to it yesterday. Since the beginning of dawn-or my thirteenth birthday-my period had always been regular, ruining my life once a month like clockwork. I had always been painfully regular, and as much as I wanted to blame my lateness on stress, deep down, I knew better.

My mind was going crazy with the possibility, and who in the hell got pregnant their first time having sex?

No one.

That was the answer.

No one.

Yeah, biology could argue against that fact, but still.

Then there was the insane amount of stupidity on top of the possibility of being pregnant. I'd been so wrapped up in my attraction to Hunter, and the fact of it being my first time, that I hadn't even given any thought to insisting on protection. It also hammered home the fact that Hunter must have been drunker than I'd originally believed for him not to have used any. When I'd woken up the next morning, I honestly hadn't given any thought to the mess between my legs apart from needing a shower.

I wanted to cry.

No matter what, I wasn't a stupid girl. I'd taken biology in high school just like everyone else, and I knew how a woman's body worked. In addition to knowing that nothing was foolproof, I also knew what ovu-fucking-lation was, so there was no excuse for letting Hunter have sex with me unprotected so close to my period. Hell, I shouldn't be letting *any* guy have sex with me unprotected at all, no matter when my period was due. If nothing else, STDs were not the business.

Now, if the worst were to happen, it would change my entire life, but it wouldn't be the end of the world for me. Luckily for me, I had great parents, and I knew that I would always have Kenzlee in my corner. Yeah, I might have to put school off for a few years, but there'd been a countless number of single mothers that had come before me, making their dreams come true and still raising a child while young. In fact, there were probably a few of those young mothers on campus right now, and I wasn't too proud to ask for help or sacrifice to do what needed to be done.

The biggest issue that I had now was Hunter. Not only had I already taken advantage of him while he'd been drinking, but I might have gone and gotten pregnant from one freakin' night together. Yeah, everyone could argue that he was just as much to blame as I was for this mess, but at the

end of it all, *I* was responsible for my body and health. I never should have thrown myself at Hunter, and I definitely never should have had unprotected sex with him.

Unfortunately, Hunter was a good guy. While that would normally be a point in favor of his character, it wasn't in this particular case. There was no way that Hunter Finley would let me do this on my own, and I'd honestly rather do this alone than allow guilt to ruin his life. He'd be a nineteen-year-old father, and he was already doing everything that he could to get by. Hunter was the type of guy that would drop out of school to work three jobs just to put food on the table for his child or children, and he was also the type of guy that would feel like he'd need to pay Kenzlee back for the wasted tuition money.

I also realized that I might be panicking over nothing. I had no idea if I was really pregnant or not, and a couple of days late shouldn't be that big of a deal. Maybe my body was just adjusting to losing my virginity. I mean, I didn't know if that was a real thing or not, but it could be. My body had experienced something big, and between that and the stress of all the guilt that I was carrying, maybe I was just late because my body was going through some things.

I could feel a headache coming on with everything that I didn't know and everything that could be happening. If I was pregnant, would it even show up on a test this early? I mean, how reliable were those store-bought tests anyway? Plus, it wasn't like I could avoid Hunter for a month until I *really* missed my period. I didn't know what to do, and I could only pray that I'd be thinking straight later, after I panicked.

“Hey, are you doing okay?”

I looked up from restocking the counter to see Jersey eyeing me carefully. The Toms provided pens, pencils, calculators, etc. for anyone that might need those kinds of supplies, and since Jersey didn't care about the cost of the little things, we were constantly restocking the little help-yourself trays.

“Who? Me?”

Jersey arched a brow. “Uh...yeah. You.”

Because my misery was probably written all over my face, I said, “I can feel a headache beginning in the back of my eyes.”

Her face immediately softened. “Oh, those are the worst.”

I nodded like an idiot. “Yeah, they can be.”

“Well, I have some aspirin in my office. I can go grab you some,” she offered.

“Thanks,” I muttered, trying to give her my best smile.

I waited patiently in my lie until Jersey came back with some aspirin, and maybe it wasn't a lie. I could really feel a headache coming on, though it wasn't as bad as I was letting on just yet. The coward in me hoped that Jersey would take pity on me and send me home early, but even if she did, I wouldn't do it. This was my first week of work, and I was not about to come off as unreliable when I needed this job.

When she reappeared with my aspirin, I gave her a grateful smile. “Thank you.”

“No problem,” she replied kindly as she handed me the pills. “The only thing worse than a headache is being on your period.”

I wisely kept my mouth shut as I swallowed the pills.

~

Hunter~

I watched as Jersey gave Alexandria some pills, and while it bothered me that she might be feeling unwell, it *really* bothered me that we might not get to talk after work because she wasn't feeling up to it. I didn't feel comfortable putting

our talk off any longer, but how much of a dick would I be if I forced her to talk when she was feeling sick?

I let out an irritated sigh as I rotated the box of earbuds out. I really felt like we couldn't put our talk off much longer, but what choice did I have? Honestly, if she didn't look so pale, I'd accuse her of faking it just to get out of having to talk to me. Even though I really had no reason to believe that she'd do such a thing, I was beginning to feel paranoid where Alexandria was concerned. With each passing day, it was like Friday night had never happened, and I refused to let what happened fade off into a distant memory. I had taken the girl's goddamn virginity and that should count for something. Alex should *want* to talk about it, right? Didn't girls like to dissect that kind of stuff?

"Fuck," I hissed.

"Everything okay?" I turned at the sound of Cannon's voice. "That sounded like a very serious fuck."

I cracked my neck as I set another box down on the shelf. "Just a lot on my mind," I semi-lied.

Cannon regarded me carefully. "Really?" I eyed him back. "I thought you might be upset about the guy that'd been hitting on Alex earlier."

My entire back snapped straight. "What? What guy?"

The asshole smirked as he said, "I'm lying. There's no guy."

"What the fuck, Cannon?" I replied exasperated.

"Jersey mentioned that there might be a little something between you and Alex, so I was just being nosey and feeling you out man," he chuckled.

"That's not fucking funny."

Even though he still had a grin on his face, he said, "No, it's not. I'd be pissed if someone mentioned some guy flirting with Jersey."

I rolled my eyes. “Oh, well...as long as you understand,” I drawled out sardonically.

“So, what’s the deal?” he asked, not caring that it really wasn’t any of his business. “Jersey said that you guys are childhood friends or something.”

“We grew up in the same town together,” I confirmed.

“And when did it become more?”

I cocked my head as I folded my arms over my chest. “And why do you care?”

“Because this is my girl’s shop, and she believes in what she does here,” he answered easily. “As much as I think that you’re good people, I don’t need you causing problems at the shop because guys are hitting on your girl.” I opened my mouth to argue, but Cannon threw his hand up to stop me. “Alexandria is a very beautiful girl, Hunter. Guys are going to hit on her here, whether you like it or not. Is that going to be a problem for you?”

“Not as long as they take no for an answer,” I replied, half-ass lying.

“Is there any reason why she *wouldn’t* say no?” he posed.

I dropped my arms at my sides, but not before running one hand through my hair. “It’s...uh, complicated.”

“No, it’s not,” he argued. “It’s never as complicated as we make it out to be. Either you’re with her or you’re not, Hunter. Decide before shit gets messy.”

“We haven’t had a chance to discuss the details of what we’re doing,” I semi-lied again. “We were supposed to talk tonight, but I don’t think that she’s feeling well.”

He immediately looked concerned. “Yeah, I saw Jersey giving her some aspirin earlier. I guess she’s got a pretty bad headache coming on.”

Shit.

“Well, when I’m done in here, I’m going to go check on her,” I informed him. “Hopefully, the aspirin helps, and then we can talk.”

Cannon clapped me on the shoulder. “Good luck, man.”

“Do I need it?”

“Every man needs luck when dealing with a woman,” he snorted. “No matter how happy she might seem.”

“You do realize that you sound like a complete misogynist, right?”

The guy just kept grinning. “Ask Jersey just how much I love women.”

I couldn’t help but laugh. “Thanks for the advice, but I think I’m good.”

“Just get your shit together, Finley,” he said. “I don’t like it when my girl’s upset, and she really likes you, Alex, and Anthony.”

“Look, I get where you’re coming from, but you don’t have to worry about me or Alex,” I assured him. “We’re good.”

Cannon gave me a terse nod, not calling me out on my lie before he went back to doing whatever he’d been doing. He pretty much had run of the place, but then why wouldn’t he?

After rotating the boxes, I went to go check on Alexandria. When I walked out into the shop, I noticed that a lot of people had already left for the day, the clock ticking quickly to closing time. When I spotted Alex, she still looked slightly pale, but I decided that I wasn’t going to let that deter me. Yeah, she wasn’t feeling well, but this was important, and we’d put it off long enough.

Approaching her, I asked, “We still good for tonight?”

If possible, her face paled even more. “Wh...what?”

“We were going to talk after work, remember?”

“No, yeah...” she muttered. “I just...I think I feel a headache coming on-”

“Okay, so instead of meeting up for a beer, I’ll meet you at your dorm,” I offered, feeling a bit like an asshole, but not letting her get out of this.

“Hunter, can this wait-”

“No,” I said, interrupting her. “We need to talk, Alexandria.” Her entire frame deflated. “I get that you don’t feel well, and I’ll let you rest. However, you can rest after we talk.” I cupped the left side of her face with my hand. “I’ll even take care of you afterwards.”

“Fine,” she relented, but she sounded fucking miserable, pricking at my conscience.

“I’ll be by about an hour after we get off work,” I informed her. “Do you want me to bring some food?”

She looked like she was going to argue, but then she said, “Yeah, that’d be great.”

I lifted my other hand, cupping her face in both my hands. “It’s just a talk, Alex.” She didn’t look convinced. “If things get...heated, then we can call it quits until you feel better.”

Her hands came up to wrap around my wrists. “No,” she sighed. “Might as well get this over with now, right?”

Yeah, that didn’t sound encouraging at all.

Chapter 16

The mistakes that we repeat.

Hunter~

I knocked on the door, praying that Jessica wasn't here. Nevertheless, even if she were, then we could just go to my place. For all that Baron had claimed that he wasn't going to get swept up in the partying, he'd been heading to another frat party when I'd been leaving the room myself.

When Alexandria opened the door, she didn't look happy to see me, which sucked. However, I didn't let that deter me. If she really wasn't feeling well, then I'd go easy on her, but that was it. We were having this talk, even if it killed me.

"How are you feeling?" I asked as she stepped back to let me into her room.

"I feel better," she mumbled, shutting the door behind her.

"Are you hungry?" I asked, turning to face her.

Alexandria shook her head. "No, I'm good." My eyes tracked her as she walked over to her bed. "I grabbed a couple of tacos after work."

Making my way over, I didn't wait for an invitation before taking a seat next to her. "Alexandria, look at me." As soon as those light eyes looked up at me, I said, "I'm sorry about Friday night."

Her head jerked back in surprise. "What?"

No one liked to admit when they were wrong, but this was about more than just being wrong. I considered Alexandria to be one of my closest friends, and it was hard to

admit that I hadn't treated her as she'd deserved when giving away something so fucking precious.

"I never should have slept with you after you'd been drinking," I finally confessed, the weight on my chest easing up a bit. "I know that you never would have done it had you not been drinking, and...honestly, I'm not the type of guy that sleeps with drunk girls and-"

"What?"

The sound of her voice had me pulling back a bit. "Uh...I'm...I'm just trying to apologize for taking advantage of you Friday night."

Alexandria stared up at me blankly.

Then she blinked.

Then she blinked again.

Finally, she said, "Let me get this straight. You're here to apologize for taking advantage of me Friday night?"

Her voice still had me feeling wary. "Well, yeah," I answered. "I knew that you'd been drinking heavily, and I know that you never would have given me your...virginity had you been sober."

Alexandria's tongue peeked out from the corner of her lips. "You think that I was drunk?"

I shrugged. "Maybe not *drunk* by the time we'd gotten back to my place, but still inebriated enough to do something as stupid as give me your virginity."

She ran her hands through her dark hair, muttering, "I can't believe this."

"I'm sorry," I repeated. "I'm sorry, and I want you to know that I don't want to lose you as a friend, Alex."

Her hands dropped back in her lap. "You don't want to lose me as a friend," she echoed.

I was fucking this all up.

I knew that I was.

Standing up, I ran my hands through my own hair, feeling agitated by how much I was fucking this up. As I stared down at her, Alexandria was just looking up at me like I'd grown an extra set of ears. She looked confused, and I had no idea what to make of that. Granted, I should probably just be happy that she wasn't screaming at me that she hated me, so there was that.

Sitting back down next to her, I grabbed her hands in mine. "Look, Alexandria-"

"Stop, Hunter," she said, and my chest tightened at the sound of her voice. "Really, just stop."

This wasn't good.

"I'm not going to let you stop me from apologiz-"

"Hunter, stop," she repeated, squeezing my hands. "Honestly, you have nothing to apologize for."

I shook my head. "Don't do that, Alex."

Her brows furrowed. "Do what?"

"Let me off the hook like that for the sake of civility," I told her. "I get that you might not want to cause any issues for Talon and Kenzlee, but what I did was wrong, and-"

Alexandria started laughing, but it didn't sound humorous to my ears. Her laugh sounded troubled, and I didn't like that. I was already feeling like an asshole where this situation was concerned, so I definitely didn't need Alex laughing at me about it.

"Alex, what's wrong?"

She let out a heavy sigh, those icy eyes looking up at me again. "Do you want to know why I've been avoiding you?"

“God, yes,” I blurted.

“I felt bad for taking advantage of *you* after *you*’d been drinking,” she drawled out.

“Uhm, what?”

She nodded. “Yep.”

“You...” I shook my head. “You thought that *you* had taken advantage of *me*?”

“I knew that you never would have slept with me if you hadn’t been drinking, so, yeah.” She shrugged like this wasn’t embarrassing as fuck for the both of us. “I know that it doesn’t take much for guys, so I felt bad about...throwing myself at you like that.”

“Throwing yourself at me?”

Alexandria nodded again. “What else would you call it?”

I dropped my head, running my hands through my hair again. “God, we’re fucking stupid.”

She let out a choked laugh. “What do you mean?”

I looked back over at her. “Alexandria, you did *not* take advantage of me Friday night.”

“Of course, I did,” she scoffed. “We both know that you don’t think of me like that, Hunter.”

I eyed her. “Alexandria, you’ve known me for a long time,” I reminded her. “When have I ever done anything that I hadn’t wanted to.”

She gnawed on her lower lip. “Well, I mean...never that I’ve ever seen.”

“Exactly, baby.”

~

Alexandria~

Now, while this wasn't the first time that Hunter had called me baby, this was the first time that it felt different. We weren't talking as friends, we weren't drinking, nor were we having a good time, surrounded by friends. So, I could only assume that he'd used the endearment as meaning something.

"What do you mean?" No matter what was running through my head, I needed clarification.

"Alex, I slept with you because I *wanted* to," he said, my chest tightening. "I didn't sleep with you because we were drunk, or I was horny, or because you were available." His hand landed on my thigh, and I could feel it burning right through the fabric of my jeans. "I slept with you because I've been wanting to sleep with you for a while now."

"You have?" I asked, my voice sounding like it belonged to someone else.

Hunter shook his head as he ran his other hand through his hair again. "Christ, I keep fucking this up," he muttered.

"What are you fucking up?"

He let out a heavy sigh. "I didn't mean that I wanted to sleep with you," he corrected, and when I opened my mouth to express my confusion, Hunter put his hand up to stop me. "Saying that implies that I only want to sleep with you, Alexandria, and that's not true." My heart started beating hard in my chest again. "What I meant to say was that I like you. I've liked you for a while now."

When I was finally able to find my voice, I asked, "You like me?"

Hunter nodded. "Yeah, and not as just a friend."

I took my top lip in between my teeth, thinking about my next words. If Hunter had said these words to me two days ago, I'd be over the moon with all that new-love novelty. If we

would have just had this conversation a couple of days ago, stress wouldn't be making me miss my period. There were so many damn 'what ifs' where Hunter was concerned that I wasn't sure whether to be happy that he returned my feelings or to feel remorseful because I might actually be freakin' pregnant.

"Alexandria, say something," he prodded.

"I'm not sure what to say," I admitted. "I just spent the last week thinking that I had damn near sexually assaulted you with my virginity, and now..." I let out a deep sigh. "I feel relieved, but seriously stupid at the same time."

Hunter grinned, and my entire body flashed with heat.

I almost started fanning myself.

The guy was seriously hot as hell.

"I understand completely," he remarked graciously. "I've done some stupid shit in my time, but not talking to you about this earlier tops the list."

"So...what does this mean for us now?" I asked, not sure that I wanted to know the answer.

No matter what Hunter said, if I was pregnant, I'd be changing his entire life around, and that felt heavy on my chest. After all, he'd only said that he liked me; he hadn't said anything about pledging the rest of his life to me because he was madly in love with me. Even if we did start dating, there wasn't a rule that read where it had to be serious. Hunter wasn't obligated to see forever when he looked at me, and getting pregnant would make our relationship forever. Even if it would be just as parents to the same child, Hunter would be in my life forever, same as me for him.

Still, was two days long enough to give him a heart attack?

"Well, I mean..." He looked unsure, and that was something new. Hunter Finley had confidence in spades, so to

see him looking unsure was kind of sweet. “Well, I was hoping that you felt the same way, and that we could start dating.”

Everything in me wanted to say yes, but I didn’t want to be a regret later on in Hunter’s life. At the heart of it all, we were friends, and I’d like to keep that between us since Talon and Kenzlee were going to be together forever. While some people might say that was a premature prediction with how young we all were, I had no doubt in my mind that Talon and Kenzlee were going to grow old together. Talon was never going to let Kenzlee get away from him, and I knew that like I knew my own name.

“I want to be clear about something, Hunter.” He nodded for me to go on, but he still looked unsure. “I like you, too.” I watched his shoulders sag with relief. “However-”

“Don’t ‘however’ me, Alex,” he said. “Nothing good can come out of that word.”

“*However*, we’re only freshman, and we’ve only been here a few weeks,” I pointed out. “Aren’t you worried that you might miss out on meeting someone new and exciting?” The words made my stomach sour, but I didn’t want Hunter with me because he felt comfortable with me or because he felt responsible for my virginity now. “We’re going to be meeting so many different people in the years to come, do you really want to get serious with the girl from your hometown?”

His hazel eyes flashed with something that I couldn’t quite identify, but if the tone of his voice was anything to go by, the boy wasn’t happy. “I’m not interested in new and exciting, Alexandria,” he said, a little bite to his voice. “I’m interested in real, and with how long that I’ve known you, I know that you’re about as real as it gets.” His tongue peeked out to lick his bottom lip, and I knew what that move meant. “You’re talking to me like I haven’t done my fair share of partying or meeting new people. For fuck’s sakes, we spent years working that damn fighting scene, Alex. I’ve met plenty of new and exciting people already.”

“Hunter, I just don’t want to be the reason that you-”

“Are you interested in someone else?” he asked, licking his lips again, and why did Hunter look so damn sexy when he was worked up? “Is that what this is about?”

“No,” I squawked dramatically. “I’m here to get my degree, not sleep with everyone on campus.”

“Then what’s the problem?”

“I just don’t want to be the reason that you regret college, Hunter,” I told him honestly. “It’s a given that we’ll always be friends because of Talon and Kenzlee, so I don’t want you thinking back on these years, wishing that you’d lived a little.”

Hunter reached for my hips, then dragged me across his lap until I was straddling him. “Baby, I’ve lived plenty,” he said, his hazel gaze looking deeply into my blue eyes. “And even if I hadn’t, whatever I feel for you, I feel it for a reason, Alexandria.” My heart thumped. “For whatever reason, I didn’t feel it last year, the year before that, or the year before that one. Nonetheless, I feel it now. That’s also another reason that I trust that what I feel for you is more than just wanting to get my dick wet. Especially, when I can do that with anyone that’s willing.”

“Hunter, if this is about my virginity-”

“It’s about *you*, Alex,” he said, cutting me off. “While I’ll always cherish what you gave me last Friday night, this isn’t me being noble about taking your virginity. Had I been feeling noble, I never would have slept with you in the first place. At least, not after we’d been drinking like that. I would have waited until I told you how I felt about you first.”

I wanted to believe him. “So, what now?”

“Now you let me make up for the past week of sleeping alone,” he answered wolfishly.

Chapter 17

The guilt that doesn't go away.

Alexandria~

Chills ran down my spine, but they were the good kind; the kind that Hunter had introduced me to last week. His voice sounded like every dirty word come to life, and even if I didn't have anyone else to compare him to, there was no arguing that Hunter Finley was good at this.

As soon as I felt Hunter's lips on my neck, I dropped my head back, letting out a throaty moan, and I could feel him chuckle against my skin, his hands gripping my hips. "I love that sound," he murmured.

"Hunter?"

"Yeah, baby?"

I felt like my heart was in my throat when I said, "I'm not protected."

Hunter's entire body froze below me. "You're not?"

"No," I answered, my head still thrown back because I was a coward.

His lips were back on my neck, but it wasn't to pepper kisses on the delicate column. I felt Hunter's teeth sink into my skin, then pull, giving me a hickey where the entire world would be able to see it without a scarf to hide the damage. My core clenched with need, and I could feel the rush of approval seep from between my legs. Instead of being put off, Hunter seemed needier, and that need had my body responding.

My hands gripped his shoulders as he went to mark me a second time, and even through my jeans I could feel how hard he was underneath me. When his hands slid upwards to

remove my shirt, I let him. As soon as the garment cleared my head, Hunter's lips were back on my body, only he was marking my breasts this time.

"Fuck, I love your tits," he rasped against the left mound. "Your body is fucking incredible."

Pleasure was already spiking down my spine, but I couldn't let him ignore the comment that I'd made about not being protected. My late period was scaring me enough to not let Hunter distract me with his hands and lips.

"Hunter?"

Ignoring me, his hands went towards my back, unsnapping my bra like a professional. The lacey fabric cascaded down my arms, and Hunter wasted no time removing it, then tossing it on the floor along with my shirt. Luckily, Jessica was out for the night, so I didn't have to worry about her walking in on Hunter undressing me, though Hunter didn't seem like he cared one bit.

"Hunter?"

"Shh, baby," he crooned, another mark on my chest completed. "Just let me savor you, Alex."

My eyes rolled to the back of my head when his lips wrapped around one of my nipples, his mouth working expertly to arouse the hard peak. As my hands sunk into his soft hair, it was getting harder and harder to concentrate on what was important. Nevertheless, I had to.

"Hunter, do you have condoms?"

I felt him growl softly against my breast, and I had no idea why it sounded so damn sexy. When his hands slid up my back to pull me closer, I felt another rush of pleasure soak my panties, and it was so easy to see how people could become so irresponsible when it came to sex. While I didn't condone it, I could see how it happened now.

Instead of answering me, Hunter rolled us over onto the bed, his large body pressing down on mine, and he felt so good

there. His masculine weight felt decadent, and for whatever reason, safe. I felt safe whenever Hunter was with me, and that was a dangerous kind of addiction for a girl.

I didn't protest as Hunter worked his way down my body, his hands unbuttoning my jeans, pulling them down my legs, past my feet. My chest thumped at the sexy smirk on his face as he removed my socks. It was something utilitarian, but Hunter made it feel like he was removing the softest silk from my body.

As soon as I was laying naked before him, Hunter was wrapping his hands around my thick thighs, yanking me towards the edge of the bed, and I couldn't help but remember how we'd done this once before. I knew that he was going to rock my world with that tongue of his, and while I wanted him to, I also remembered what he'd said last Friday.

"When is it going to be my turn?" Hunter let out a deep groan right before his tongue snaked out to get a taste. "Oh, God...Hunter..." Despite wanting to return the favor, my hands slid into his hair, keeping him right where he was.

"You sound desperate to suck my cock, baby," he growled against my drenched flesh. "Is that what you want, Alexandria? You want to know what my dick tastes like?"

Before I could answer, Hunter started making out with my pussy, and all thoughts of returning the favor fled from my mind. I closed my eyes, giving myself over to the way that Hunter was expertly manipulating every nerve in my body. I didn't want to think about how he'd gotten so good at what he was doing, but I couldn't complain and say that I wasn't benefitting from it now.

"Hunter..."

"Keep saying my name, baby," he instructed around what he was doing to me. "I love the way it sounds falling from your lips like that."

I moaned, my hands lost in his silky hair, my body clenching every time that his tongue hit my clit. While I'd

done my fair share of masturbating during my lifetime, nothing felt like having Hunter's hands, mouth, and tongue on my body. I never knew that I could be this turned on, especially by a boy that I hadn't ever entertained before arriving here.

When that heat began to curl in the pit of my core, I spread my legs more, giving him more access. "Hunter, I'm going to cum..."

"I hope you do," he growled against my flesh. "I love it when you cum on my face, baby."

As soon as Hunter slid two fingers inside my needy body, I exploded on his tongue, my moans sounding like they were being ripped from my soul. The pleasure was addicting and indescribable as Hunter worked his fingers like a team, forcing me to ride out my orgasm all over his face. His hands were tight around my thighs, and his grip was painful enough that I was finally grateful for my thick thighs.

"Hunter..." I groaned as my body came back down from paradise.

I let out a yelp when Hunter's teeth latched onto the inside of my right thigh, and I couldn't believe that he was actually giving me a hickey there. While I hadn't ever given it much thought before, there was something incredibly hot about walking around with hickeys in that area.

"Fuck, I can't get enough of you," Hunter rasped hungrily.

"I know the feeling," I muttered, completely onboard with whatever he wanted to do next.

~

Hunter~

As much as I wanted Alexandria to swallow my cock, I wanted her too badly for that kind of foreplay. In fact, I'd

probably shoot off as soon as her lips wrapped around the head of my dick, and I wasn't looking to disgrace myself like that in front of this girl. I was trying to convince her to love me forever, not make her run for the hills.

I quickly got rid of my clothes as Alexandria did her best to catch her breath and enjoy what I'd just done to her. She looked peaceful, and if I didn't want her so fucking badly, I'd go back to eating her pussy again. I'd pull two or three more orgasms out of her before the sensitivity forced me to stop. For whatever reason, with Alexandria, I *craved* her taste.

Once I was naked, I crawled back onto the bed, and I made sure to kiss my way back up her body, the feel of her skin like Heaven underneath my lips. Everything about this girl felt phenomenal, and if I could keep her naked in my bed forever, I would.

Bracing myself over her body, it was incredible how much she meant to me now. While always a friend, I couldn't imagine going an entire day without Alexandria now. As I stared down at her flushed face, I knew that I wanted to stare down at it for the rest of my life. People could say whatever they wanted about young love, but what I felt for Alexandria was the real deal. It was real enough that I wasn't scared that she wasn't protected from pregnancy.

When she'd mentioned condoms earlier, I had immediately felt defensive. The possessive side of me couldn't understand why she would think that we'd need them. After all, I had absolutely no plans on even looking at another girl, much less fucking around with one. As for Alexandria, I dared another guy to look her way. She was mine, and I loved the idea of her being filled with my cum. I also loved the idea that she'd never know anyone else but me, making what we had even more special.

Nevertheless, I knew that if I wanted things to work between us, I couldn't ignore her request to use condoms. Not only was I not a douchebag, but I also wasn't one to sexually assault a girl, and that's exactly what it'd be when a girl asked for a condom and a guy refused. Plus, even if I did see forever

with Alexandria, I wouldn't be the one having to juggle classes and pregnancy if I did end up getting her pregnant. I also couldn't see her quitting her job because she was stubborn like that. I mean, in the end, I'd make her quit, but it'd be a long fucking nine months, for sure.

So, staring down at my beautiful girl, I said, "I want inside you, Alexandria."

Her crystalline eyes snapped open as she pulled her knees wider to accommodate me, her hands latching onto my waist in favor of sliding my dick inside her. My dick was nudging her entrance, and I wanted nothing more than to just push every inch into her tight cunt. I wanted to be inside her more than I wanted to take my next breath. I wanted this with her, and I needed to find a way to make this happen every fucking damn day.

"Hunter...please..." she begged as she rubbed against my dick.

Like a complete asshole, I asked, "Do you still want me to put on a condom?"

Alexandria froze, and I cursed under my breath as I broke the spell that she'd been under. Instead of looking flushed and ready for more, her eyes were wide, and she looked unsure.

"Uhm..."

"Baby, it's okay," I quickly assured her. "I'll grab one right now."

I climbed off her body, hating everything about what I was about to do. Alexandria wasn't just some random fuck that I needed to protect myself against. She wasn't just some girl that I was going to forget in a couple of weeks. I wanted inside her like what we had was as serious for her as it was for me. Yeah, she didn't need to get pregnant to prove herself to me, but it wouldn't be the end of the world if she did.

Reaching for my jeans, I quickly grabbed the condom that I kept in there, then put it on. While the feeling was a very familiar one, it still felt wrong. It felt wrong to be wearing one with Alex, especially after having already experienced what it felt like to cum inside her. I had coated her womb with my seed twice, and I was surprised that my dick wasn't softening with how much I resented the latex right now.

Climbing back over Alexandria's body, her eyes still looked unsure, and I fucking hated that. I hated that she no longer needed me like she'd been feeling earlier. There was too much thinking happening right now, but I refused to let that ruin this for me. Alexandria was my girl, and it was my job to take care of her.

"Tell me you want me, baby," I ordered as I repositioned my dick near her entrance. "Tell me what I want to hear."

Her blue eyes searched mine as she obeyed my command. "I want you, Hunter."

"Are you sure?"

Alexandria's eyes flared, and that uncertainty was quickly vanishing from her gaze. "I'm sure," she swore, her hands back on my waist.

"Say my name, Alexandria," I growled low as my dick started sliding inside her paradise.

"Hunter..." she panted, her fingers digging into my muscled frame.

"Again," I demanded as I wet my dick, inch by inch.

"Hunter..." she whimpered.

I stared down at her as I bottomed out, then made demands that I had no right to make on a woman. "After this weekend, you're going on the pill or whatever." Her body tightened around my cock. "I want to feel *you*, Alexandria. I want to fucking feel *all* of you, baby."

“Yes...” she choked out. “God...yes...”

My hips began fucking her in a steady rhythm, and her body was responding beautifully to my invasion. The slick sounds of her cunt were almost enough to make me nut off after only a few thrusts, but I refused to go out like a punk. I wasn't going to stop until Alexandria was cumming for me again, and since I'd had only one condom with me, I was going to draw this time out for as long as I could. After that, I could go back to eating her pussy, and if she really was serious about wanting to suck my dick, then we could spend the rest of the night pleasuring each other that way. However, after tonight, I was going to make sure to carry a few more condoms around with me until we got her on some birth control.

“Fuck, you feel so fucking good, Alex,” I grunted above her.

“Hunter...please...” she begged.

“You need to cum again, baby?” I teased.

“Yes,” she cried out, not caring who heard her.

“Then tell me what I want to hear,” I ordered again.

She immediately said my name. “Hunter...”

“Tell me that you're mine, Alex,” I added. “Tell me that I own this fucking delectable body of yours.”

With no hesitation at all, she said, “You own me, Hunter. You own all of me.”

“Fuck,” I hissed as my hips started hitting deeper inside her, my hopes of making this last fading fast. “Fuck, baby.”

“And I own you,” Alexandria panted, ruining my stamina with just four little words.

Luckily, we managed to cum together before I lost myself to her completely.

Chapter 18

The passions that erupt.

Hunter~

While I was tired, I wasn't so tired that it didn't register that Alexandria was trying to sneak out of bed. Not wanting there to be any confusion, I slung my arm around her waist, then I pulled her back against my chest, ignoring how her entire body felt frozen with the move.

"It's too early to get up," I muttered against the back of her neck.

"We both have to work today, Hunter," she reminded me, her voice sounding strained.

"Not until ten," I pointed out. "We still have a few hours."

"Not if we want to get a shower and breakfast in," she replied, and her tone had me gritting my teeth. After clearing everything up last night, she shouldn't be acting this uneasy with me.

Choosing my words carefully, I said, "Well, I can go back to my dorm, shower, pick up breakfast, then we can meet back up here."

"Or we can just both go about our business, then meet up at work later," she countered, and I had to grit my teeth again against her casual dismissal of waking up with me in her bed.

Lifting my head, I looked over to the other side of the room, and I saw that Jessica's bed was still empty. Now, had Jessica shown up last night, then I'd be a little bit more understanding of how Alexandria seemed desperate to get me

out of her bed. However, that wasn't the case. Alex was trying to boot me out, and there was no Jessica as an excuse.

I pushed my morning wood against her ass. "Or we can stay in bed a few more minutes, baby," I suggested, my arm tightening around her waist.

"The last thing that I need is Jessica walking in on us having sex," she huffed. "She's already made her interest in you known."

"I'm not interested in Jessica," I reminded her, trying hard to keep my voice even. "I thought we cleared all that shit up already."

Alexandria let out a heavy sigh. "That still doesn't mean that I'm open to letting her watch us have sex, Hunter."

"Goddamn it, Alex," I grumbled rolling onto my back. "That wasn't what I was suggesting."

"I just want to start my day, Hunter," she muttered, sounding uncomfortable.

"Then start it off without the lies, Alex," I snapped, sitting up to get out of bed. "If you want me gone, then just fucking say so." I stood up, already reaching for my discarded clothes on the floor. "You don't have to make up a bunch of bullshit about showering, breakfast, or work."

"That's not what I'm doing," she lied.

"That's exactly what you're doing," I shot back. "Unlike you, I wasn't a virgin coming into this relationship, Alex. So, I've done the awkward morning-after shit." I didn't look at her as I hurriedly got dressed. "I could fire off a laundry list of excuses when you want to get someone out of your bed. Maybe I'll text you some better suggestions for next time."

"That's not fair, Hunter," she said softly, and her tone hit me harder than I would have liked.

Ignoring how I was softening, I sat on the edge of her bed as I quickly put my shoes on before I did or said something to make matters worse. My tongue snaked out to lick my lips, and it was something that Lars and Talon had always teased me about growing up. It was a warning to all that I was about to lose my temper, and nothing good ever came out of me losing my shit.

Once my shoes were on, I stood up, then turned to finally face Alexandria. If I were a lesser man, I'd be down on my knees, begging her to forgive me for being an asshole. However, I was tired and done with her pushing me away. No matter what, we were supposed to be friends. She had never treated me with kid gloves before, so I had no idea what all this bullshit was about.

Staring into her troubled gaze, I said, "It might not be fair, but it's accurate. From the second that your eyes opened, you've been thinking of how to get me out of your bed, Alex. So, I'd appreciate it if you wouldn't insult my intelligence on my way out of your room."

Alexandria flinched, and that was my cue to leave.

Without another word, I stormed out of her dorm room, feeling so fucking pissed off that I could only hope I worked it out before we both had to show up for our shifts at The Tomes today. Jersey had been adamant about not wanting any drama in her shop, and I liked my job. Sure, other offers had finally come through earlier this week, but I liked the vibe at The Tomes. Plus, if I got another job right now, I'd literally have no time for Alex, and that wasn't going to happen.

After getting into my car, I started banging on the steering wheel, wondering what the fuck her problem was. It was like she was only agreeable when my dick was inside her, and if that's what it was going to take to make our relationship work, then that's what I'd do. I'd keep her pumped full of my cock twenty-four hours a day if need be.

Finally pulling away from the curb, I headed back to my dorm room, admitting to myself that I really did need a hot

shower. Though we'd only been able to have sex once last night because of Alex's condom rule, that hadn't stopped me from making a mess out of both of us. I'd had her cumming all over my face until she couldn't take it anymore, and she'd had me jacking off all over her stomach and big tits.

Alexandria had also sucked my dick for the first time last night, and for a fucking virgin, she had turned me cross-eyed with how she had swallowed me whole. At first, she'd been tentative, but after praising her and assuring her that she was doing everything right, Alex had turned into every single adolescent fantasy that I'd ever fucking had. I knew that her jaw had to feel sore this morning, and that gave me a bit of sick satisfaction.

As I pulled up to my dorm, I shook my head with how insecure Alexandria had me feeling. I'd never felt this way about a girl before, and it wasn't a fun feeling. I wasn't used to feeling jealous or unsure. Not for nothing, I hadn't had to work that hard for a girl before Alex, so this was new territory for me. Nevertheless, Alexandria was worth the struggle; I just had to work on my temper.

Walking into my room, I saw that Baron was already up and about, and I knew that the questions were going to start because the guy had no boundaries.

When he saw me, the idiot grinned. "Where have *you* been?"

"Don't act like you're not just walking in also," I huffed.

"Dude, let me tell you about Jessica fucking Branch," he gushed.

"I'll pass," I replied.

Yeah, that was the last thing that I needed right now.

~

Alexandria~

With all the ways that I kept screwing this up, I had to be the world's biggest idiot. However, in my defense, I'd never woken up in bed with a guy before, so I'd been feeling rather unsure. Yeah, Hunter had said a lot of pretty things last night, but the cold light of day had a way of bringing shame and/or insecurity with it.

There was also the fact that I still hadn't started my period, and I felt like I was lying to Hunter with every passing minute that I didn't tell him what was really bothering me. As long as I wasn't being totally straight with Hunter, this thing between us still felt fake to me. Well, maybe not fake, so much as...fragile. This was serious, and I knew that I was being an asshole by keeping my suspicions from him. Still, I wanted to be sure before I changed our lives forever.

"Hey, do you think you could help me for a quick second?"

Snapping myself from my guilt-filled musings, I looked up from the register to see a very attractive guy smiling down at me. He had that dark blonde hair thing going on where the roots were dark, but the tips were light, and it looked good on him. An All-American face with blue eyes, and the only thing missing was his letterman jacket.

"Sure," I answered, smiling back as I remembered that I was at work. "What can I help you with?"

He jerked his head towards his workstation. "I keep trying to convert my report to PDF, but the program won't let me," he answered. "I like to save my work in multiple formats because you just never know who will ask for what."

I let out a soft chuckle. "You're not wrong."

"Do you have time to take a look?"

Nodding, I said, "Sure."

His smile widened. "I'm Conrad, by the way."

“Alexandria,” I returned. “Or Alex if you prefer. I answer to both.”

He gave me a sweet nod before we both made our way to where he was logged onto one of the community computers. When Conrad pulled the chair out for me, it surprised me a bit. While I was used to manners from Hunter, I wasn’t really used to them from other guys. Yeah, opening the door for someone was common enough, but it wasn’t often that someone pulled your chair out for you.

“Okay, let’s see what we have here,” I muttered as I took the seat.

“Yeah, it just won’t convert,” he repeated. “Maybe a new version needs to be installed.”

“Could be,” I agreed. “I’ve only been working here a week, so I’m not as familiar with the setup as I should be.”

“Well, maybe we can figure it out together,” he suggested, but there was something in the tone of his voice that had me calling myself an idiot again.

Conrad did *not* need help.

Trying to brush off the inuendo, I said, “If I can’t figure out a simple format conversion, then I don’t deserve to work here.”

Before he could say anything more, a shadow covered me, and I was always going to know Hunter’s cologne anywhere. He always smelled like sex, and for all I knew, maybe that was just him and not the damn cologne.

“Need any help?” he asked, his hand landing on my back because Jersey would fire him if he just whipped his dick out, then pissed all over me.

“Conrad’s report won’t convert to PDF,” I told him. “I’m just trying to help him figure it out.”

“Well, if you can’t figure it out, let me know,” Hunter replied smoothly. “I’ll see if I can help.”

I finally glanced up at him, and when he looked down at me, he was licking his bottom lip, and I *did not* need Hunter kicking Conrad's ass for nothing. Conrad couldn't have known that I had a boyfriend, even if it still felt weird to call Hunter that.

"I'm sure that I can figure it out," I assured him. "Plus, it'll help me get more acquainted with the computer setup. I've been doing mostly register work, so this will be good for me."

"No problem, baby," he said before kissing the top of my head, and I cursed how Jersey didn't mind that kind of stuff.

Suddenly, the old Alexandria came out of hiding. "I thought you were mad at me?"

Hunter's lips twitched. "I am," he replied.

"Then why are you offering to help me?" I challenged, forgetting all about Conrad and his poor attempt at hitting on me.

"Because it's my job to take care of you *all the time*, Alexandria," Hunter replied. "In fact, it's more important to take care of you when I'm mad at you than when I'm not."

My brows furrowed. "How's that?"

"To prove that you don't only matter to me when things are good between us, Alexandria," he said, and I could feel my heart hit my ribs painfully. "You mean everything to me, no matter if you're wrapped up in my arms or if I'm so mad at you that I can't stand to even look at you."

"Hunter..." I sighed, wondering how he could be so damn perfect.

Ignoring me, he looked over at Conrad. "In case you've missed it, Alexandria belongs to me," he told him. "So, while I have no problem with you asking for her help, do it with the understanding that she's spoken for."

Conrad threw his hands up in mock surrender. “I didn’t know, dude.”

“Well, now you do,” Hunter retorted.

It was complete silence as Hunter headed off to do whatever he’d been doing before he’d seen Conrad ask me for help. Had I not been lost in thought with my missed period, then I would have seen this coming in time to prevent the little dose of drama.

“Sorry,” Conrad finally muttered. “I didn’t know that you had a boyfriend.”

“Yeah, he’s...a bit much at times,” I sighed.

“He looked like he wanted to kick my ass,” Conrad snorted.

“He gets like that sometimes,” I admitted.

“Want some advice?”

I finally looked up at him. “On Hunter?” He nodded. “Sure.”

“Marry the guy already before he ends up in prison for killing someone,” he replied, and that had me barking out a laugh, despite how tense everything felt right now.

“I’ll give it some consideration,” I chuckled.

“Now, if you don’t mind, I’ll figure out the formatting myself,” he drawled out.

I stood up, eyeing him. “So, the program really was messing up?”

“Yep,” he answered. “However, I had also wanted to use it as an opportunity to meet you.”

“Nice to meet you,” I deadpanned.

Conrad let out a heavy sigh. “Just marry the dude already.”

If only life was that easy.

Chapter 19

The cowardice that shines brightly.

Alexandria~

It was Sunday morning, and Hunter was still mad at me, and I probably deserved it.

I was eighty percent sure that I deserved it.

After that nonsense at work, we'd gone to dinner together, but we'd both been too much into our feelings to have a good time. So, ever the gentleman, Hunter had dropped me off at my dorm, stating that it might not be a bad thing to take a night off from each other. I'd felt rejected and stupid, and that was the only reason that I'd gone out this morning to buy a damn pregnancy test.

So, now I was sitting on the edge of my bed, looking at the little stick in my hand, grateful as hell that Jessica was off doing whatever she was doing. I hadn't seen much of her this weekend, but I'd seen her long enough last night to let me know that she'd had hooked up with Baron and a couple of his friends. She had also insisted that I was missing out by not riding all the penises-her words, not mine.

However, looking at the stick in my hand, it looked like I wasn't going to be riding any penises after a while because I was pregnant. Like a goddamn amateur, I'd gotten pregnant by the first guy that I'd ever slept with, and if that wasn't the definition of a Greek tragedy, then I didn't know what was.

After wrapping the third stick and its packaging into some paper towels, I shoved all of it into my purse, so that I could get rid of it later. There was no way in hell that I was going to toss the evidence in our little trash can for Jessica to see. Even if she wasn't the type to tell my secrets, I didn't need

Jessica in my ear as I tried to process what I'd gotten myself into.

Nevertheless, because I needed someone to talk to, I called Kenzlee, and I felt such relief as she answered. "Hey, Alex." Kenzlee sounded so cheerful that my eyes welled up, and if this was going to be the norm during my pregnancy, then I was in for a rough nine months. "What's going on?"

"I'm pregnant," I blurted out with no kind of workup.

Silence.

More silence.

Then a little bit more silence.

Finally, she asked, "I'm sorry, what was that?"

I choked out a hollow laugh. "I'm pregnant."

"Ho...how can you...you be...pregn...pregnant?" she sputtered. "You only slept with Hunter a week ago, Alex." God, it sounded so stupid when she said it out loud. "I mean, can those tests even show up that early? Plus, how could you have gotten pregnant? Didn't you guys use protection?"

"Not the first night," I muttered.

"Uhm...the *first* night?"

"We...he came over to talk a couple of nights ago, and...well, we did more than talk," I admitted weakly. "Supposedly, we're dating."

"Supposedly?"

"I don't know," I whined like an idiot. "I'm a goddamn mess, Kenzlee. This thing with Hunter was never supposed to happen. I don't even know how any of this happened. One second, he's my hometown friend, and then the next, I'm giving him my virginity." I let out a heavy sigh. "Who in their right mind has sex without protection the week before their flippin' period, Kenzlee? How could I have been so damn stupid? I mean, there's stupid, and then there's me."

“Okay, calm down,” she said kindly. “Let’s...okay, tell me how many tests you took. I mean, if you only took one, it can be-”

“Three,” I informed her. “I took three, and they all came out positive, and they’re all stuffed in my purse like they’re stolen gems I took from the Mafia.” Kenzlee smothered a laugh. “This is not funny, Kenz.”

“No, of course,” she replied softly. “I just...I can see you freaking out, Alex.”

“Hell yeah, I’m freaking out,” I squawked. “I’m *pregnant*, Kenzlee. I’m pregnant with Hunter Finley’s baby. I’m about to ruin both our lives with this, so I think that I have the right to freak out.”

“Hey, I know it’s scary, but a baby doesn’t necessarily mean your life’s ruination, Alex,” she said. “You know that we’ll all be here to help you with whatever you’re going to need.”

I sighed again. “I know that, but what about Hunter?”

“What about him?”

“Kenzlee, you and I both know that Hunter Finley will insist on doing the right thing.”

“And that’s a *bad* thing?”

“It is if he’s only going to be with me for the baby,” I replied.

“But...he’s already with you, Alex,” she pointed out.

I could feel my eyes well up again. “Yeah, but it’s one thing to be with me because he wants to see where dating me might go, and it’s quite another to feel like he can never break up with me because he got me pregnant,” I clarified. “I don’t want there to be this...this constant doubt about his commitment to me. No one wants to be with someone because they feel obligated to be.”

“I think you’re short-changing Hunter,” she said. “Even though we’re all young, Hunter’s not flighty, Alex. He’s not the type of guy that doesn’t know what he wants.”

I snorted. “Mothers-to-be aren’t as sexy as young coeds, Kenz.”

“C’mon, Alex,” she murmured. “That’s not fair. Don’t let your insecurities make Hunter out to be something that he’s not.”

“That’s the thing, Kenz,” I told her. “I used to never have insecurities until Hunter. I used to be confident, strong, outgoing, and personable.” I shook my head, though she couldn’t see me. “I have no idea where this new Alexandria came from.”

“The old Alex is still there,” she said supportively. “I just think that she’s got a lot going on right now.”

I wasn’t so sure about that, but even if I was in the middle of an identity crisis, I still had bigger issues to deal with at the moment. “How do I tell him, Kenzlee?”

“You just tell him, Alex,” she answered. “The reality exists, no matter how you try to phrase the words. In the end, Hunter’s not going to care about your delivery of the news. All Hunter is going to care about is that you’re pregnant with his kid.”

“How did I fuck things up so badly, Kenz?”

“Do you need me to get pregnant, so that we can do this together?”

Just when I thought it impossible, I laughed. “Could you?”

“I’ll tell Talon to get right on it,” she chuckled, and that just made my eyes well up again.

~

Hunter~

“I’m about to lose my motherfucking mind,” I said, not being able to take it anymore.

“Calm down-”

“Look, Pot or Kettle or whichever you prefer, do not tell me to calm down,” I bit out.

Talon just chuckled as he said, “I’m just not sure exactly what you’re pissed off about. You said that she didn’t argue about you being her boyfriend at work yesterday, so... what am I missing here, Hunter?”

After I had pissed a circle all over Alexandria at work yesterday, I’d gone to confess my sins to Jersey, and the crazy woman had thrown me for a loop when she had just laughed it off. As seriously as she took her shop, I’d been certain that she would fire me. Instead, she’d gone on to suggest that I put a ring on Alexandria’s finger if she was driving me crazy enough to risk a job for her. When I’d looked pointedly at her ringless finger, Jersey had flipped me off, then had gone about her business.

Jersey Montague was definitely a weird one.

At any rate, after work, I had followed Alex back to her dorm to drop off her car, then we’d gone to dinner. However, dinner had been strained and awkward enough for me to need a night off from how badly we were fucking things up between us. For whatever reason, Alexandria had her doubts about us, and those doubts were turning me into a raving lunatic.

“I just keep getting the feeling that she’s trying to find ways to let me down easily,” I answered, finally voicing my real concerns.

Talon chuckled again. “You know what I think? I think that you need to check your ego, Hunter.”

“What the fuck is that supposed to mean?” I grumbled like a damn child.

“Dude, you’re forgetting that I was there.”

“Where?”

“During your entire childhood,” he retorted. “In all the years that I’ve known you, I’ve never seen you need to fight for a girl’s attention before.”

“Like you have room to talk,” I snorted.

Talon laughed. “All I’m saying is that I think you’re overreacting because you have no idea what to do with a girl that can take you or leave you,” he went on. “Alexandria isn’t a groupie, Hunter. She’s not going to fall all over you just because of your pretty hazel eyes and six-pack abs.”

“You’re such an asshole,” I said, though you could hear the laugh in my voice.

“Honestly, I think that it’s just good, plain, old-fashioned insecurity that’s turning you stupid,” he continued. “After all, this is Alexandria Grant that we’re talking about. No matter how awkward things might be between you two, she’s still the girl that threatened to kick all our asses once.”

I let out a heavy sigh. “The doubt sucks, Tal.”

Talon snorted. “You’re preaching to the choir, dude. I’ve got the love of my life worth more than I’ll ever be, and it fucking sucks.”

“How is my favorite millionaire?”

“Perfect,” came his automatic reply. “Always perfect.”

“Okay, quit being a pussy; that’s your advice,” I surmised.

“Pretty much,” he agreed. “In fact, that’s always going to be my advice if asked.”

“Well, fair warning, if Alex is trying to find a way to ditch me, it’s going to get ugly,” I told him. “I’m pretty sure that I’m in love with her at this point, so ditching me isn’t an option for me.”

“So, you’re telling me that I should warn Kenzlee?”

“That’s exactly what I’m telling you,” I confirmed. “Alex is it for me, and I don’t care that it’s happening too fast. She does something to me, and I want her doing it for the rest of my life.”

“I fell in love with Kenzlee when I first laid eyes on her, Hunter,” Talon drawled out. “I’m the last person that’s going to tell you that it’s too fast. Besides, it’s not. You two have been friends long enough to know what you’re getting into and what you’re feeling.”

Glancing at my watch, I saw that I had ten more minutes on my break. While Alex had today off, I had to work the afternoon shift, though it wasn’t a full eight hours. I’d still have time to grab something to eat before begging Alex to assuage my fragile male ego.

However, before I did that, I asked, “Hey, has Lars called you lately?”

“Yeah,” he chuckled lightly. “Apparently, Edie’s driving him crazy.”

That had me smiling. “I talked to him last night, and he said that Edie’s under the misconception that she’s got unlimited amount of freedom now that you’re not at Lakeside. Something about Edie being a full-time job now.”

“It’s definitely cramping his style,” Talon agreed. “He said that he hasn’t gotten laid in forever because he’s constantly babysitting her, and he’s not having a good time.”

“What’d you tell him?”

“I told him that I had no problems with Edie having a life as long as she did it safely,” he replied.

“And what did Lars say to that?”

Talon laughed. “He said that I was a horrible big brother, and that if I could only see how many guys were sniffing around my sister, then I’d force her to quit school and go on independent study.”

“Well, in all fairness, there’s no way that you’d be okay with Edie dating, Tal,” I pointed out.

“While that’s true, I can’t keep Edie six-years-old in my mind forever,” he sighed. “Besides, I’d rather have her start dating now while Lars is there to keep an eye on things than make her wait until she’s in college with no one watching her back. My sister might be smarter than Einstein, but I could see some asshole getting over on her in college because she had no experience with dating.”

“I didn’t think about that,” I muttered. “You’ve got a point.”

“Besides, if anyone can handle her, it’s Lars,” he went on. “Plus, even though Lars is known for fucking his way through Lakeside High, everyone knows that he can still fight with the best of them. Any guy asking Edie out would be stupid to screw her over with Lars waiting in the background.”

“Not to mention that we’d be making a visit back home really quickly,” I huffed.

“There’s also that,” Talon agreed.

“Okay, I gotta get back to work,” I announced. “Thanks for the advice, Tal.”

“Anytime,” he replied easily. “Just remember that this is new for Alex, too. Yeah, she might be a bit of a spitfire, but you’re the first guy that she’s ever slept with, Hunter. Sometimes, girls need to process that shit before they realize it’s going to be okay.”

“I’m the *only* guy that she’ll be sleeping with, Talon,” I corrected.

“Then it’s even more important to let her process that at her own pace,” he said. “No matter what, you’re asking Alexandria to get rather serious at a very young age, Hunter. That’s a big deal.”

“Need I remind you that you’re engaged,” I deadpanned.

“That just means that I know what I’m talking about,” he shot back good-naturedly.

Glancing at my watch again, I said, “Okay, gotta go.”

“Good luck,” Talon replied, and I was pretty sure that I was going to need it at this rate.

Chapter 20

The confessions that we didn't see coming.

Hunter~

So, while Talon's words had sounded reasonable, mature, and positive, Alexandria texting me one-word answers last night had pissed me off all over again, and I was so done with her bullshit. She could not want me all that she wanted, but she was going to have to say it to my face.

Knowing her schedule as well as I knew my own, I knew that she had an hour between classes right now, and I also knew that she had a weakness for the croissants at the deli down the corner from campus and would try to sneak in a breakfast snack before her next class. So, armed with that information, I was leaning up against her car, waiting on her, prepared to miss my second morning class.

I waited patiently as Alexandria made her way towards her car, and when she finally spotted me, her feet tripped a bit, but she wasn't turning around to run the other way, which was something.

As soon as she was standing in front of me, I asked, "What the fuck is your problem, Alexandria?" She started chewing on her bottom lip, but I ignored that before my dick got hard. "What's with the hot and cold? I thought we cleared that shit up las-"

"I'm pregnant," she blurted out, and it was like my eardrums vibrated with unfamiliar sounds.

I stared down at her, my mind kick-starting again, wondering how that was possible. I mean, I knew how it could be possible, but what were the odds that she'd get pregnant our first night together? Outside of Lifetime movies, did that shit really happen? Biology aside, who got pregnant on the very

night that they lost their virginity? Plus, how could she possibly know that only a week later?

Finally finding my voice, I said, “Explain it to me, because it’s...it’s only been a week, Alex.”

Her face fell, and I’d never felt like a bigger asshole in all my life. “I’m not lying, Hunter,” she whispered quietly.

I wanted to kick my own ass.

“Baby, I’m not calling you a liar,” I quickly assured her. “I just...how can you know so soon?”

“I was supposed to start my period last week,” she explained. “I’ve always been regular, and...and I hadn’t given any thought to how I’d been ovulating that...that first night together when we didn’t use...we didn’t use anything.”

“Is that why you’ve been acting weird all this time?”

Alexandria nodded. “I...at first, it really was because I thought that I had taken advantage of you. However, when...when my period didn’t come, I started to panic.”

“That’s why you asked me to wear a condom, isn’t it?”

She nodded again. “I just...I’m going to go to a clinic and find out for sure, but I just...I know that I’ve been all over the place, giving you mixed signals and everything, and I didn’t want to ruin our friendship because I...because I made a mistake.”

Talk about your chest getting kicked in.

“Made a mistake,” I echoed.

“We should have used protection, Hunter,” she muttered sadly, and it was fucking killing me.

I stared down at her worried face, and I just couldn’t find it in myself to agree with her. Cumming inside Alexandria would never be a mistake in my eyes, pregnant or not. While it couldn’t be argued that using condoms was the responsible

thing to do, Alexandria was it for me, so how could it have been a fucking mistake?

There was also how she'd mentioned not wanting to ruin our *friendship*. I mean, what the fuck was that? We weren't just fucking friends anymore. We weren't kids from Lakeside that just hung out together for fun anymore. I mean, what in the fuck was I doing so wrong that Alexandria couldn't see what she meant to me?

Doing my best to set my spiraling emotions to the side for a minute, I asked the one question that I did not want to fucking ask. I mean, I knew all the arguments about a woman's body, but I also believed that a man's feelings should also be considered when discussing an unplanned pregnancy. "So, if it turns out that you really are pregnant, have you... given any thought to what should happen next?"

"I might skip a day of classes and work, then drive home to see my parents," she answered, and it was taking everything in me not to lose my shit.

"You know what I'm asking, Alexandria," I said, trying to keep my voice even.

"I'm not expecting you to marry me, Hunter," she murmured softly, and I knew that I needed to get out of here before I did or said something stupid.

Everything in me wanted to demand that she keep our baby and marry me, but this wasn't the 1950s, and I had no say in what she wanted to do with her body or what she wanted out of her future. I could not force Alexandria to be a nineteen-year-old wife and mother, and that fucking sucked from my point of view. All I wanted was for Alexandria to be with me, but it didn't matter what I wanted. It didn't matter that I wanted her and our baby. Alexandria had the right to walk into any clinic in California with no regard for how I felt or what I wanted.

She also didn't owe me anything. While I'd be happy to take the baby if she didn't want it, she didn't owe it to me to go through the hardships of pregnancy just because I wanted

our child. Yeah, it'd be hard as fuck to be a single parent in college with a job, but I could do it. I'd *find* a way to do it. It might cost me sleep and a bit of my sanity, but I had no doubt that I could do it.

Nevertheless, none of that mattered.

Nothing mattered, except for what Alexandria wanted to do.

“Well, thanks for letting me know that you’re not interested in marrying me,” I said, losing the fight to keep my emotions out of what was best for Alexandria. “How about you...you get that test confirmed, and then you can let me know what...what you decide after that, yeah?”

Alexandria’s eyes started to shine. “Hunter, I-”

I put my hand up to stop her. “Look, there’s no point in getting excited about something that we can be wrong about, Alex. Let’s just...find out for sure, then you can let me know.”

“I’m scared,” she confessed, and her words broke my heart because if she trusted me, then she wouldn’t be scared.

I reached out, then tucked a strand of her dark hair behind her ear. “No sense in being scared before you know anything for sure, Alexandria.”

“I never meant for this to happen, Hunter.”

Little did she know that she was holding all my life’s dreams in the palm of her hand.

~

Alexandria~

I wasn’t sure how I had managed to get through the rest of my classes today, but I’d had, and I’d also been fortunate enough not to have to work this evening. After that horrible encounter with Hunter, I had no idea where we stood. He hadn’t reacted the way that I’d been expecting, but I wasn’t even sure if that

was a good thing or a bad thing. I had expected him to be pissed or panicked, but he'd been neither. All I could do was give him time to process that I was pregnant, hoping to salvage something, anything.

At any rate, instead of heading back to my dorm after classes, I'd driven out to Cooper's Landing, a beautiful park that was hidden away from the fast-paced life of Southern California. It was considered a bit of a hidden gem for the locals, and the only reason that I'd known about it was because Jessica had told me about it when we'd first met. She'd said that it was a good place to go when you were feeling overwhelmed. When I had asked her about knowing the place, she'd said that one of her sister's friends had told her about it. Since it wasn't a popular spot for college students, it was usually nice and quiet.

So, sitting on one of the many scattered benches that littered the greenery, I was staring out at the small lake that took up the center of the clearing. There weren't any ducks in it, but it was still very pretty and very peaceful out here.

However, that quiet peacefulness was interrupted by my phone chiming with an incoming text.

Kidnapper #2: *Whatever my brother did, 4give him*

I couldn't stop the grin that took over my face.

Me: *Why is this my fault?*

Kidnapper #2: *It's always the girl's fault*

I'd be offended if I didn't know Lars Finley the way that I did. Where Talon was the violent one, Hunter was the serious one, Lars Finley was the *friendly* one. He loved the females and made no bones about it. Though he had no problem swinging his fists, he preferred not to. According to him, he was a lover, not a fighter, and he liked it that way.

Me: *Untrue, but ur 4given*

Kidnapper #2: *I know all about u 2 hooking up, so just 4give him*

While I was grateful that Hunter hadn't spilled the beans about my pregnancy just yet, I wasn't surprised that Lars knew about us getting together. With as close as Hunter was to his brother, Lars had probably found out the next day. Either that, or Talon could have told him. I could also see Talon telling Edie and Edie telling Lars, not that it really mattered.

Me: *what makes u think that we're fighting?*

Kidnapper #2: *Bcuz I know my brother n when I call 2 complain about Edie again, he sounded off*

Unknowingly, Lars just gave me the perfect opening to deflect.

Me: *B nice 2 Edie*

Kidnapper #2: *She's the devil*

I barked out a laugh. Especially, since Edie Draven was the farthest thing from evil as you could get. The girl was brilliant, though a romantic at heart. She'd been Talon's biggest cheerleader when he'd fallen for Kenzlee, and she still was.

Me: *She is not*

Kidnapper #2: *We can agree 2 disagree, then u can get on 2 4giving my brother*

Despite it all, I found myself grinning down at my phone again.

Me: *Ur brother is safe from me*

Kidnapper #2: *Ur all the devil, but I luv u all anyways*

Me: *Luv u 2*

Kidnapper #2: *If u really luv me, 4give him*

Me: *Done*

Kidnapper #2: (thumbs up emoji)

Sliding my phone back in my pocket, I went back to staring out at the lake, knowing that there wasn't anything to forgive Hunter for. He'd done nothing wrong, and from the very beginning, he'd been handling this thing between us better than I'd had. I was the one that was messing things up, and I needed to own that and probably apologize again for being an idiot.

I shook my head because what I needed to do was take a real test. Deep down, I knew that I was pregnant, but it still made sense to confirm it. If nothing else, I needed to confirm it for Hunter's sake. While I could appreciate how he hadn't asked me if it was his, he still needed to know for sure if I was pregnant, and he also needed to know that it was, without a doubt, his.

Deciding to call Kenzlee, I pulled my phone out of my pocket again. I needed to let her know how badly things had gone and how it'd been my fault. She needed to be warned that things might get ugly. While I didn't think that Hunter would intentionally put her and Talon in the middle of our mess, she still deserved to know what happened.

An hour later, I was still crying into the phone.

Chapter 21

The bravery that isn't so brave.

Alexandria~

After crying my heart out on the phone to Kenzlee, I was ready to go back to my dorm and crash. I couldn't remember ever feeling this goddamn tired, and I was seriously contemplating skipping classes tomorrow and just sleeping the day away. I felt emotionally, mentally, and physically tired, and if I could fall asleep on this bench without getting arrested or mugged, I would.

Nevertheless, no matter how exhausted I felt, the sun had already started to go down, and I really wasn't looking to get mugged because I couldn't stop doing stupid things. No matter how nice a neighborhood might seem, unsavory people lived everywhere. Plus, I was less worried about the trouble that I saw coming than the trouble that hit you from behind.

Just as I was ready to head back to campus, I heard the sounds of a car pulling up, glad that I was done with my mental breakdown before some stranger wondered if I should be committed. Even though I knew that I had to look awful, at least I wasn't in mid-meltdown, and I would take what I could get at the moment.

However, when I turned to see the newcomer, my stomach dropped as I recognized Hunter's car, and there was only way that he could have known that I was here.

Kenzlee.

So, like a deer caught in headlights, my ass remained planted on the bench, waiting for him to come to me. My heart thumped in my chest as I watched him get out of his car, and if my child came out looking like a Finley, then I was going to have to ward off the females with a stick when he got older.

Even if I ended up having a girl, that brown hair/hazel-eyed combo was a pretty one.

I didn't say anything as Hunter quietly took a seat next to me. We both stared out at the lake, and I wasn't sure what he was feeling, but I felt like he could probably hear how hard my heart was thrashing around in my chest. His nearness had a way of turning me into a confused puddle of emotions, and I still had no idea how we'd gone from being just friends to this craziness. Back in high school, I hadn't felt an ounce of interest or jealousy when he'd go out and hook up with some random girl, never seeing him as anything more than just a friend. However, now, the idea of him with someone else bothered me enough to make me nauseous.

Or maybe that was just morning sickness.

"Kenzlee called me," he stated, finally speaking.

"I figured," I muttered. "She's the only one that knew I was here."

"Apparently, you have questions that only I can answer," he went on. "So, ask them, Alexandria."

I let out a shaky breath, my stomach threatening to turn on me. While I did have some questions, I had no idea where to start, and I was woman enough to admit that some of the answers might wreck me. In a world of uncertainties, I wanted guarantees, and if that wasn't proof that I was losing my mind, then I didn't know what was.

"While I'm not blaming you for a mistake that I also made, if you weren't too drunk to consent that Friday night, then how did you forget the condom?"

My hands were shaking.

"It wasn't the alcohol," he denied. "I'd just wanted you so badly that grabbing a condom hadn't occurred to me. I'd never been that swept up in a girl before, so I guess you could say that I just hadn't been thinking straight."

"What about the second time that night?"

“Same thing,” he answered. “After feeling you wrapped around me like that, a condom hadn’t crossed my mind the second time, either. In fact, had you not insisted on one the other night, I never would have put one on.”

“Even knowing what it could mean?”

While his answers had me close to having a heart attack, I was still finding it hard to imagine that Hunter Finley could have wanted me that badly. I’d always just been Alex to him. Flattering as it was, I still had my doubts because he was Hunter freakin’ Finley.

“Alexandria, you’re not just some random piece of ass that I hooked up with one weekend,” he said, finally looking over at me, but I kept my head facing the lake like a coward. “We’ve been friends for years, close friends this past year. Being with you doesn’t scare me, Alex. While ruining our friendship might worry me, being with you doesn’t scare me at all.”

“Dating me and becoming a father are two very different things, Hunter,” I pointed out.

“Yeah, they are,” he agreed, still looking at me. “However, I’m not scared of doing either of those things. I’m not some spoiled rich kid that doesn’t understand responsibility, Alex.”

That had me finally looking over at him. “That’s not what I’m saying, Hunter.”

“Then what are you saying, Alexandria?”

“This is going to be very hard, and I just don’t want to ruin the rest of your life by deciding that what I want is more important than what you want,” I told him, feeling like an idiot for not having this conversation earlier. It felt good to finally say the words.

“You have no idea what I want, baby,” he said softly. “You’ve never asked. You’ve just been assuming on your own this entire time.”

“What do you want?” I finally asked, my chest feeling tight with all the possible answers that he could give me right now.

“I want you to tell me that you *want* to have this baby,” he answered, and my body jerked with the incredible relief that was coursing through my soul right now. “I want you to tell me that you *want* to be with me, pregnant or not. I want you to fucking marry me if you want to know the truth.”

I choked out a teary laugh because I couldn’t help it. “I’m serious, Hunter.”

His brows rose. “And you think that I’m not?”

He looked so serious that I could hardly believe it. “Do you know how many people get married only because they got pregnant? Those marriages never work out, Hunter?”

“If we were only getting married because we got pregnant, then I’d agree,” he replied. “However, I was ready to marry you even before you told me that you were pregnant, Alexandria.”

That stopped my heart.

“Wh...what?”

“Not sure when it happened, but I’m in love with you,” he said. “I love you, Alex.”

~

Hunter~

Her icy-colored eyes widened, and she even paled a bit. “What?”

“I love you,” I repeated. “Again, not sure when it happened, but I know what I feel for you, Alexandria. I know how I feel about you like I know my own name, and I’m not freaking out that you might be pregnant.” I shrugged casually.

“Yeah, I’m surprised and wasn’t expecting anything like this, but I’m not freaking out about it.”

Alexandria still looked wary. “This is a lot, Hunter,” she said. “It’s a lot, and it’s a lot very fast.”

“Not arguing that,” I told her. “It’s also going to be hard to juggle school, work, and a baby, but I have no problem postponing my degree for a few years to take care of you and the baby, Alex.”

“Hunter...” she whispered brokenly.

“What, baby?” I asked softly.

“That’s what I meant about ruining your life-”

“Alexandria, you are out of your mind if you think that there’s anything more important to me than you and that baby,” I said, cutting her off. “Even if you decide that you don’t want to marry me, fatherhood will still always be more important to me than a college degree.” Alexandria’s eyes began to water. “You forget that I never planned on going to college to begin with. If it weren’t for Kenzlee’s money, I wouldn’t be here, Alex. I was always fine with working a regular job like millions of other people. Talon, Lars, and I had always planned to live life the hard way, baby.”

“Which makes this worse,” she sighed sadly. “You have a chance to do something different, and a child would-”

“Do nothing but steal some of my sleep, Alex,” I told her. “I’m not afraid of hard work. I’ll do whatever I need to in order to ensure that you have whatever you need while we go through this together.”

“It just doesn’t seem fair to-”

“Hey,” I said as I reached over, grabbed her hips, then set her over my lap. “You’re acting like I demanded to wear a condom, but you tied me down, then took advantage of me against my will, Alex.” Her shoulders sagged, and she looked so sad that it was killing me. “*I’m* the one that forgot the condom,” I went on. “*I’m* the one that decided that I’d rather

feel you wrapped around me naturally than grab a condom that second time. *I'm* the one that felt put out because you insisted on a condom this last time. Had you not said anything, I would have continued to fuck you without protection, damn the consequences, Alex.”

“Hunter, I just-”

“No, baby,” I said as I took her face in my hands. “Quit acting as if you got pregnant on your own, instead of the fact that *I'm* the one that got you pregnant.” My hands went back to her hips. “*I got you pregnant, Alexandria.* You can sit here and tell me all the fashionable 2023 reasons why this is all your fault, but it’s not. I’m the one that knew better, Alex. I’m the one that had the sexual experience where you had none. I’m the one that had made the decision to take you back to my place, instead of seeing you safely back to your dorm.”

“Yeah, but *I'm* the one that let you do all that,” she pointed out. “Since it wasn’t rape, I’m the one that allowed all that to happen, Hunter.”

“Fine,” I told her. “Then let this be *both* of our faults and quit fucking martyring yourself.” I reached up to push back an errant strand of hair behind her ear. “Let this be both of our faults, and let’s raise this baby together. Let’s do this *together, Alexandria.*”

Alexandria dropped her head on my left shoulder, and I just held her to my lap, dying to know what she was thinking and feeling. While we still needed to confirm if she was really pregnant or not, I honestly didn’t care anymore at this point. I just wanted Alexandria with me, and the more that I thought about marrying her, the more that I wanted to. Yeah, this shit was going to be hard, but I could do anything as long as I had the girl currently sitting on my lap with.

“It wasn’t supposed to be like this,” Alexandria mumbled softly, and I could feel my stomach tighten with dread. If she didn’t want our baby, I had no idea what I was going to do. “We were supposed to come here and live life beyond Lakeside, which doesn’t even have a freakin’ lake.”

Despite it all, I smiled. “Yeah, I’ve always wondered about that.”

“We were supposed to meet new people, learn new things, and make stupid life choices,” she went on. “However, we were not supposed to make the stupidest life choice out there.”

I couldn't take it anymore.

“Alex, I need to know what you’re going to do if you really are pregnant,” I finally said.

Alexandria lifted her head to look at me. “Like...if I plan on keeping the baby?”

I nodded. “You haven’t really said anything about your decision.”

Those blue eyes of hers looked troubled, but she still answered me. “I want to keep it.”

“Oh, fuck, thank Christ,” I rushed out as my head dropped on her chest.

While I’d been doing my best to convince myself that I’d respect whatever choice that she ended up making, it was a good thing that I was already sitting down because I felt fucking weak with relief. Though not planned for this stage in my life, I’d always known that I wanted kids one day. Faced with Alex’s other options, I was okay with one day being right now.

I felt her fingers slide through the back of my hair. “Did you really think that I wasn’t going to keep it?”

Lifting my head to look at her, I said, “I honestly had no idea where your mind was on this, Alex. While I understand that the decision is ultimately yours, I want this baby. I want you both in a way that you’ll probably never grasp.”

“I’m sorry,” she murmured. “I probably should have made that clear from the beginning.”

“As long as we’re both clear on it now, I’m good,” I assured her. “I just...I think we need to clear up one more thing before...before we tackle everything else.”

Her hands dropped from my neck as she looked wary again. “What’s that?”

“No more pushing me away, Alex,” I demanded. “No more hot and cold from you. I can handle whatever mood swings this pregnancy might put you through, but no more pushing me away. No more doubts or confusion about what we are or what we’re doing.” I cupped her face again. “Okay?”

To my immense relief, she nodded. “No more pushing you away.”

“No more doubt about how I feel about you, either,” I added. “While it might sound like a douchebag line, I’ve never felt like this about anyone, Alex. For whatever reason, we hadn’t been meant to be more than just friends before now, and I’m not going to wrack my brain trying to understand why. All I know is that I want to be with you now, and I meant what I’d said, Alex. I love you.”

“I might love you, too,” she replied softly, and while some people would have gotten their feelings hurt by her response, I appreciated her honesty. It meant that Alex wasn’t going to ever lie to me about her feelings, and if she married me, it was going to be because she wanted to and not because of the baby.

“Yeah?”

She nodded. “Yeah.”

Chapter 22

The peace that calms us.

Hunter~

I leaned forward, then placed a kiss on Alexandria's collar bone. She tasted and smelled familiar, and if it weren't for the fact that it was already dark, I'd sit here for another few hours just holding her in my arms.

When Kenzlee had called me to tell me that Alexandria was a mess and doubted what I felt for her, it'd been a no-brainer to hunt her down and clarify this shit, once and for all. While Kenzlee had been honest about feeling like she'd been betraying Alex's confidences by calling me, Kenz would never know how grateful I'd always be for her phone call. I wasn't ashamed to admit that I needed all the help that I could get with this situation, and that was even without the issue of the baby.

My hands tightened on her hips as my lips trailed up her neck. "Fuck, you feel good in my arms," I muttered against her skin. "I love how I have permission to touch you like this."

"I like being in your arms," she confessed on a breathy moan.

"Considering that I plan on keeping you in them for the rest of your life, that's a good thing," I said, grinning at how true that was.

Alex's hands slid up the back of my neck again. "Hunter..." she hummed quietly.

I could already feel my dick getting hard underneath her. "Tell me what you need, baby."

“We can’t,” she protested weakly. “We’re out in public.”

“Ask me if I give a fuck,” I replied as my left hand came up to capture her tit in my palm. “If I’m ever going to get arrested, let it be for this.”

Alexandria chuckled. “Hunter, I need you to focus.”

I pulled back to look up at her, and that beautiful face was staring at me like she didn’t want me to stop. “Oh, I’m focused,” I assured her. “I’ve never been more focused on something in my life.”

With those ice-colored eyes staring at me like I was her whole fucking world, Alexandria said, “I’m sorry, Hunter. I’m sorry that I’ve been making this thing between us harder than it needed to be.”

My hand let go of her tit, then slid upward until it gripped the back of her neck. “Never apologize to me, Alexandria,” I told her. “I’m strong enough to handle whatever you throw my way, baby.”

“That doesn’t mean that you don’t deserve an apology,” she argued. “I never want to be the kind of person that takes advantage of someone else.”

“Okay,” I said, simply to appease her. Little did she know that I’d forgive her just about anything, a weakness so powerful that I could only hope that she never found out what she really did to me.

When Alexandria went to get off my lap, I immediately felt disappointed. However, it’d been a long day and it was already dark. I needed to get Alex back to her dorm, set up an appointment at the nearest clinic, then get some fucking sleep. The next couple of days were going to be tough, and there was still the fact that we were going to have to let our parents know what was going on if it turned out that Alexandria really was pregnant.

Just as I was about to stand up, Alexandria was kneeling before me, and I immediately felt lightheaded as all the blood in my body started rushing south. I could feel my chest tighten with hope, but I wasn't so far gone that I'd forgotten where we were.

“What are you doing, baby?”

“Making it up to you,” she replied huskily as her hands reached for the button of my jeans.

“Alex-”

“I want to, Hunter,” she said, making my brain snap. “Let me.”

“Baby,” I groaned, torn between being decent and letting her suck my dick out in public.

When Alexandria ran her hand up the hard length of me, I realized just how weak I was when it came to this woman. We could very well get arrested, despite my comments earlier to the contrary, but I couldn't find it in myself to care as I felt Alexandria's warm breath on my cock.

“Alex-”

All protests died on my lips as Alex grabbed the base of my dick, then closed her mouth over the tip. My right hand automatically grabbed the back of her head as my other hand pushed down on the bench, my entire body shuttering as Alexandria took me to the back of her throat.

My eyes began to close as Alex started sucking my dick in earnest, but then I remembered that we were out in public, so they snapped open again, trying to keep an eye out while Alex drove me fucking crazy with her lips and tongue. For a girl that hadn't had much experience before me, she sure as fuck knew what she was doing now.

“Baby...” I hissed as her tongue worked the sensitive ridge underneath my dick. “Fuck, Alex...”

She moaned around my length in her mouth and the vibrations had me nearly coming undone. Not only was it sexy as fuck that she was sucking my dick, but she was doing it where anyone could see, and that was fucking hot, just ask any guy. Quiet girls with wild streaks were like kryptonite to the male species, and I had one knelt down before me with my dick in the back of her throat.

I glanced around to make sure that no one was coming, and as much as I wanted to finish in her mouth, I wanted to rid myself of the memory of how she'd made me use latex the last time that we'd been together. Yeah, there was still a chance that she wasn't pregnant, but I honestly didn't give a fuck at this point. I'd already made peace with marrying Alexandria and knocking her up, so it wasn't anything that I was going to worry about now.

“Alex? Baby?”

She looked up at me with pupils blown with desire. “Yeah?”

“I need to fuck you,” I told her. “I can cum in your mouth later. Right now, I need to fuck you.”

Her chest started heaving as she stood up from the ground. “Okay,” she whispered eagerly.

I reached for her hips. “Bend over the bench for me, baby.”

Like a fucking dream come true, Alexandria walked over to the edge of the picnic bench, then positioned herself exactly how I needed her. I glanced around the area again, making sure that no one was around as I walked up behind her, thankful that the table was the perfect height for where I needed it to be.

Placing my hands on her hips, I leaned down as I whispered, “How sure are you that you're pregnant?”

Alexandria froze for a bit. “I know it like I feel it. Why?”

“Because if you’re not already pregnant, then it won’t be long before you are,” I informed her. “I’m taking you like I did that first night, Alex.”

Like the answer to all my prayers, Alexandria moaned.

~

Alexandria~

If I’d had any sense or decorum, I’d be insisting on taking this somewhere more private. If I’d had any sense of decency, I wouldn’t have blown Hunter on the bench. If I’d had any sense at all, I would be arguing for protection until we found out for sure if I was pregnant or not.

Apparently, I had no sense.

Even though I knew that I was pregnant, this was still irresponsible. No matter how I felt, there was still a small chance that I wasn’t pregnant, making the decision to let Hunter take me without protection just as stupid as it’d been the first time. Still, I couldn’t find it in me to care with the way that his hands were pulling my jeans down over my hips and the way that his breath was hot on my neck.

Hunter’s hand automatically found its way in between my thighs, and when he found me already soaked, he said, “Fuck, I love how wet you get for me.”

I moaned as he slid two fingers inside me, and even though it felt incredible, I was still coherent enough to remember that we were in public and that we didn’t have time to savor the moment. This was going to have to be hard and fast, something that I wasn’t opposed to.

“Hunter, please...”

“Tell me that it’s okay, Alexandria,” he whispered in my ear. “Tell me that you’re mine.”

“I’m yours,” I obeyed easily. “I’m yours.”

Hunter placed one of his hands on the middle of my back, then pushed me forward until I was pressed down against the bench table. I was just about to grip the sides of the table to hold on, but then Hunter grabbed both my wrists, pulled them behind my back, then pinned them together with one of his hands. I closed my eyes, loving the way that the immobility felt.

Before I could really appreciate the way that Hunter was taking control, I felt him working the head of his dick into my body, the slickness hitting my ears even over all the outside noises. Instead of slamming into me hard and fast, Hunter was working his way inside my body slowly, making sure that I felt every inch of him, the delicious stretch making me forget all about how we could get arrested for doing this.

When Hunter was finally deep inside me, he used his free hand to grab a hold of my hip, then he started pumping into me with steady, even, measured strokes. My eyes closed as I let the pleasure wash over me, and even though it seemed impossible, I knew that things were only going to get better in the bedroom for us. The more experience that I gained, the more that I wanted to give back to Hunter.

“God, I love the way you sound when you’re taking my cock,” he grunted behind me. “It’s like you were made for me, baby.”

“Yes,” I agreed, not being able to think beyond simple words.

Every time that Hunter’s hips hit my ass, I felt him deep inside of me, and I only wanted more. I wanted to know everything that there was to know about being with a guy like Hunter Finley, and I also wanted to learn more about what turned me on. I wanted to learn about my own pleasure and also what would make me and Hunter explosive together.

“You have no idea how good you feel wrapped around me, Alexandria,” he groaned. “If I could live with my dick in your pussy all fucking day long, I would.”

“Hunter...please...”

Letting go of my wrists, he said, “Grab hold of the bench, baby. Things are about to get rough.”

I quickly grabbed a hold of the wooden slats as both of Hunter’s hands gripped my hips, then began slamming his entire length into my eager body. His thrusts were rough, deep, hard, and welcomed, and I couldn’t stop my moans, even though I was still very aware that anyone could happen by at any moment.

“Don’t stop...” I begged. “Hunter...oh, God...”

“Not until you’re cumming all over my fucking cock, crying out my name, baby,” he vowed. “I want to feel you soaking me everywhere.”

I started pushing my ass back against each thrust, doing my best to get to that glorious finish line. I needed to get there, and Hunter needed to hurry up and follow me. Regardless of what some people believed, quickies had their place in the world. Without quickies, a person could go days without sex, and now that I knew what the experience felt like, I didn’t want to be one of those people.

My body finally started clenching around him as pleasure began building deep in the pit of my core. It felt so good that I wanted to cry with knowing where Hunter was taking me with each one of his thrusts. I knew that I was going to feel the euphoria everywhere, and I relished it.

“I’m cumming, Hunter,” I warned him. “Don’t stop...”

“Fuck, Alex,” he grunted, his hips working harder. “Cum for me, baby.”

As soon as the tremors began to shake my entire body, white spots began to dance behind my eyes, and I knew nothing but the pleasure taking over. I didn’t care that we were in public, nor did I care that we were both being loud. I was going to ride this out until the very end.

“That’s it,” Hunter groaned, praising me. “Cum all over me, Alex. You’re such a fucking good girl for me, aren’t you?”

“Yes,” I whimpered, willing to be whatever he wanted me to be for him in this moment. Though I didn’t feel much like a good girl with Hunter screwing me in public, if he wanted to believe that I was his good girl, then I’d let him.

“Beg for my cum, Alex,” he demanded. “Prove to me that we’re in this together.” My body clenched around his some more. “Beg for it.”

“Hunter, please...” I begged, all common sense gone.

“Fuck,” he hissed as I felt him expand inside of me, a telling sign that I was finally becoming familiar with. Hunter was about to cum, and I loved how I knew that now.

Hunter let out a low roar as he came inside me, his fingers digging into my hips, the force of his final thrust pushing me up on my toes. However, as my body came down from its own release, I was vaguely aware of Hunter’s thrusts still working hard to make sure that he was cumming *deep* inside of me.

“Jesus Christ, baby,” he panted behind me. “Jesus fucking Christ.”

I didn’t comment; I couldn’t. I felt spent, lethargic, and still a bit high, so I just laid there as Hunter pulled my jeans and underwear back up over my hips. I was a soaked mess, but I didn’t care. It wasn’t anything that a shower wouldn’t fix once I got back to my dorm.

I smiled softly when I felt Hunter place a tender kiss on the back of my left ear. “You’re incredible, Alexandria.”

“Sure, I am,” I chuckled lightly.

“Ask my dick, and he’ll tell you that you’re a goddamn miracle,” he chuckled back.

I finally straightened, and Hunter automatically reached for my hips, lifting me to set me back on top of the bench. He walked in between my legs, and like I had no sense of self-preservation, my legs automatically opened for him.

Brushing some strands of hair out of my face, he said,
“I love you, Alexandria Grant.”

I couldn't help but smile. “I really fucking hope so,
Hunter Finley.”

Chapter 23

The facts that we can't change.

Alexandria~

After Hunter had followed me back to my dorm last night, we had both decided to skip our morning classes and go to the clinic to find out for sure if I was pregnant. While I had assured Hunter that I could go alone, he had put his foot down, reminding me that we were in this together, baby or no baby.

As I stared at the entrance to the clinic, I couldn't help but think about the guy standing next to me. I'd had so many doubts about Hunter before yesterday, and it might be a stupid thing on my part, but I believed him about wanting to be with me, regardless of whether I was pregnant or not. While it had taken a while, I believed that he was genuinely committed to me and whatever answers we were going to get here.

"You ready?"

I looked up at him. "Not at all."

Hunter grinned down at me. "I'd be worried about you if you'd said yes."

"I just...even though I already took those other tests, my period still hasn't come, and I...*feel* like it's my truth, going in there and having it confirmed just feels...big."

Hunter's face softened. "Baby, this *is* big."

"I know," I grumbled. "It's just...my whole life is going to change--"

"*Our* lives are going to change," he quickly interrupted.

"*Our* lives," I repeated.

Hunter put his arm around me, then pulled me to his chest. “C’mon, Alexandria,” he sighed. “Let’s get this over with.”

I nodded. “Okay.”

Turning to head inside, Hunter grabbed my right hand, then laced his fingers in mine. Together, we walked into the clinic, and the simple act of him opening the door for me felt comforting. In fact, it felt so comforting that I was hoping that they were going to let him go in the back with me.

When we walked inside, I noticed only one couple sitting in the waiting room, and my chest thumped a bit with regret and a bit of pity for the others waiting patiently in the seats. Granted, I had no idea what their story was, but there was something poignantly sad about seeing these young girls sitting alone in here.

I’d almost been one of them.

As we approached the counter, Hunter let go of my hand, then came up from behind me, placing his hands on my shoulders. He was making it clear to everyone that we were here together, and he would never know how much that meant to me.

“Hello,” I said as I leaned on the counter. “My name is Alexandria Grant, and I have an appointment this morning.”

The receptionist gave me a warm smile, and it was nice to see someone with compassion working in a place like this. “Okay, let’s see what we have.” I felt Hunter’s hands squeeze my shoulders as the receptionist typed away at her keyboard. “Yes, Alexandria Grant with Dr. Mourney.”

“I’m here for...just for a confirmation,” I stammered, nervous.

She smiled warmly at me again. “I understand. However, Dr. Mourney will still need to meet with you to discuss your choices afterwards, whether it’s to discuss

reasonable options or choose the best birth control choices for you.”

I nodded, feeling like an idiot. “Of course.”

Looking up behind me, she asked, “And are you her partner?”

“I’m her fiancé,” Hunter lied, and I did my best to keep my face straight. “Will I be able to go back there with her?”

Still smiling warmly at us, she said, “Yes, if you’d like.”

“I don’t want to leave her side,” Hunter huffed, causing my own smile.

“Well, you can’t follow her into the restroom for the urine sample, but you can sit with her while they draw blood,” she clarified, an approving glint in her eyes.

“I’ll take it,” he replied.

I watched as she placed a bunch of forms on a clipboard before handing it to me. “Please fill out all these forms, and then they’ll call you as soon as they’re ready for you.”

I nodded as I took the clipboard, letting Hunter lead me to a couple of empty chairs in the waiting room. I immediately began filling the forms out, most of it being standard form questions.

When I was finally done filling them all out, Hunter walked them back up to the counter, and it gave me a chance to scan the waiting room again. Apart from the one couple, there were four girls sitting in the waiting room, scattered about, no one interested in small talk or comparing stories. Everyone here was waiting for the information that might change their lives or not.

Hunter must have sensed what I was feeling because as soon as he took his seat next to me, he threw his arm around my shoulder, pulling me closer to him. I glanced over at the

other couple, and while they didn't seem out of sorts, they weren't comforting each other, either. The energy in here felt weird; was it a new beginning or a horrible occasion?

"I can hear you thinking," Hunter murmured quietly.

"I'd like to know what *you're* thinking," I replied just as quietly.

"Well, if you're thinking that I'm embarrassed to be here with you, I'm not," he said, and my eyes immediately started to well up. "No one in here should be embarrassed to be here. By being here, it's a sign that you're taking charge of your life, and not being a victim to your good or poor choices."

I choked out a laugh. "Christ, can you be even more perfect?"

"Baby, I'm far from perfect," he snorted. "But I'm perfectly okay with you thinking that."

Twenty minutes and two names called later, they finally called my name, and my stomach dipped with anxiousness, though I really had nothing to feel anxious about. I already knew that I was pregnant, and I wasn't here alone like those other women, so I really needed to get my shit together.

I gave the nurse an awkward smile as she silently escorted us into the back. The clinic had no warmth to it, but I supposed that no clinics did. Their only purpose was to be functional, and this one seemed very functional. However, being so close to a college, it probably needed to be.

Once we got into a room, the nurse handed me a urine cup, then directed me towards the restroom to give them a sample. Even though it was standard, it still felt cold.

Too bad Hunter couldn't come with me.

~

Hunter~

Even though I'd never been one to want to save the world, walking inside this clinic had felt like a real hit to the chest. I'd seen the one couple, but it'd been the other four girls, sitting alone, that had given me pause. Yeah, they could be here for a million different reasons, and it was even possible that their partners were at home with their other kids, or at work, or at school, or whatever, but the desolate feeling had felt heavy when I'd notice them sitting alone. Feeling the way that I felt now, I never would have forgiven myself had Alexandria come here alone.

When she walked back into the room, she looked uncomfortable but not sad, and I'd take uncomfortable over sad any day of the week. It was unacceptable to me for Alexandria to be sad. I could deal with whatever other emotion that she wanted to throw at me, but not sadness.

"Everything go okay?" I asked as she took a seat next to me, avoiding the bed.

"I've been peeing on my own since I was two," she replied dryly. "Things went fine, Hunter."

I reached over, then squeezed her thigh. "I'll let that slide since I know you're still nervous."

Alexandria let out a deep sigh. "I'm always going to be nervous," she announced. "I've never done this before, Hunter. I don't know the first thing about being pregnant."

I tried not to smile. "Most first-time mothers don't."

After a heartbeat of silence, she asked, "Was it wrong of me to feel sorry for those girls in the waiting room?"

"Nah," I answered. "I kind of felt sorry for them, too."

"I mean, I don't even know their stories, but seeing them sitting there alone seemed so...sad."

I nodded. "Yeah, I thought the same thing."

“Even if they’re here on their own because they want to be, it still seems sad,” she went on. “No one should walk through those doors on their own.”

I didn’t disagree with her. In fact, it felt like a fucking Greek tragedy for a girl to have to walk through these doors alone. Mistake or no mistake, unless a girl went out of her way to poke holes in the condoms, men were every bit as responsible if a sexual encounter resulted in pregnancy. Only abstinence was foolproof, and we all knew that going in. So, for a guy to wash his hands of an unplanned pregnancy was cowardly and foul. Of course, that was only my opinion. That was the double-edge sword of insisting that a woman’s body was her own business; it gave men the green light to let women handle this shit on their own.

Right, wrong, or indifferent, there was no going to be a clear-cut answer to unplanned pregnancies. Every angle was an opinion based on a mixture of how you’d been raised, what social experiences you might have experienced, what religion—if any—you practiced, etc. I could only be grateful that Alexandria and I were on the same page because I honestly wouldn’t know what to do if we weren’t. Even as her husband, I wouldn’t have had a say in what she ultimately chose to do about this pregnancy, and that just seemed crazy to me. All of it seemed so crazy to me.

“So, do we ask for the weekend off if it’s positive?” I asked. “Go home and tell our parents?”

Alexandria shook her head. “As important as this is, we just started our jobs,” she replied. “I think that we should put in a time off request for the following weekend.” She shrugged. “It’s the courteous thing to do, I think.”

I nodded in agreement. “Yeah, that would probably be best.”

“Plus, it’ll give me time to...”

I eyed her. “Time to what, baby?”

Alexandria let out a heavy sigh. “It’ll give me time to... not *find* a way to tell my parents, but to be able to answer their questions like I’m not...stupid.”

I reached for her hand. “You’re not stupid, Alexandria. If you are, then we both are.”

“I just want to be able to answer that ‘what are you going to do’ question,” she explained. “The rest of it is kind of irrelevant since nothing can turn back the hands of time. So, I just want to be able to...lay out my plan to them, so that they don’t worry.”

“Do you have a plan?” I asked carefully, already knowing that I had one.

“Not really,” she admitted. “I mean, if it’s a normal pregnancy, then I can still work and go to school. So, it’s the *after* I have the baby that I need to figure out.”

“There’s nothing to figure out, Alexandria,” I told her. “If you’re healthy enough to do it, you continue school, and I’ll allow you to work until your around seven or eight months.” She arched a brow at my choice of words. “If I can’t take classes and still work enough to support you, then I’ll quit school and get another job to take care of you.”

She was already shaking her head. “Hunter-”

“If we’re able to both go to school and work, then we’ll schedule next year’s classes to make it so that we don’t have to worry about childcare too much,” I went on, interrupting her. “It’ll be rough, but we can do it.” I took her face in my hands. “That’s the plan you tell your parents, Alex.”

Before she could argue with me, the door to the room opened, and in walked the doctor and the nurse that had escorted us back here. The doctor was smiling kindly, and I couldn’t imagine the kind of strength that it took to do a job like this.

“Good morning,” she greeted. “I’m Dr. Mourney.”

“Hello,” Alexandria muttered.

“Now, as I understand it, you’re simply here for a confirmation of your pregnancy, correct?”

Alex nodded. “I took three home pregnancy tests that came out positive, and I was also supposed to start my period last week.”

Dr. Mourney nodded in acknowledgement. “And you’ve engaged in unprotected sex?” Alexandria’s face turned bright red. “I’m not judging you, Ms. Grant.” Her voice sounded kind enough that I believed her. “I just need the complete picture.”

“I forgot to put a condom on,” I confessed, doing whatever I needed to do to protect Alex. “I got carried away-”

“I’m not judging her,” she repeated, still kindly. “Mr...?”

“Hunter Finley,” I grumbled, feeling a bit chastised.

“Mr. Finley, unless this is a rape situation, though I do need the full picture, I’m not overly concerned with *how* a patient got here,” she explained. “I’m more concerned with providing answers on where we go from here.”

I liked her.

“We had unprotected sex the first two times,” Alex finally answered her. “We used a condom the second night, but...we didn’t use any last night because I didn’t see the point.”

Dr. Mourney nodded again. “The horse out of the barn, huh?”

Alex grinned, and I could feel my entire chest ease with relief. “Something like that,” Alex chuckled.

“Well, how about we take some of that blood, yeah?”

I squeezed Alexandria’s hand in mine, ready for my entire life to change for the better.

Chapter 24

The satisfaction that makes everything okay.

Hunter~

I'd wanted us to do this together, but Alexandria had insisted on going to her parents' house by herself. I hadn't liked it, but I hadn't wanted to argue with her more. Nevertheless, I had insisted on meeting with her parents afterwards because I wasn't a coward, and I was not going to start my relationship with my future in-laws under those circumstances.

So, while Alex was informing her parents of our irresponsibility, I was at my parents' house, my brother and Talon here with me, even though Talon and Kenzlee already knew.

We were all gathered around the living room, and Lars looked unconcerned while my parents looked like parents that were familiar with how their children kept getting into trouble. While I hadn't been nearly as bad as Lars growing up, I hadn't been a saint, either.

"Just tell us," Dad sighed. "While I'd like to believe that you surprised us because you missed us, I'm very familiar with that look on your face, son." Lars laughed, making Dad look his way. "You're worse than he is, so I suggest that you shut it, kid." Lars quit laughing, but he didn't stop smiling.

"Alexandria's pregnant," I announced, ripping off the bandage.

"Alexandria Grant?" Mom asked.

I nodded. "Yeah."

"Oh, God," Mom whispered. "Is she okay? How is she feeling?" She shook her head. "I didn't even know that she had

a serious boyfriend.”

“Viola, honey,” Dad sighed.

“I mean, I know we don’t know her that well, but when you guys all became friends last year...well, I see Sheri and Allen all the time in town,” she went on, continuing to be oblivious. “Should we call them? See if we can help in any way?”

“Mom?”

Mom looked my way. “What about the boy? Is he going to do the right thing by her?”

Dad shot me a look, knowing what all the men in the room already knew. Even Lars was quiet as a tomb, knowing to keep his mouth shut when shit was serious. In fact, my mother was a very smart woman, so I had no idea how she wasn’t catching on. Maybe it was denial.

“If you’re asking if he plans on being there for her and the baby, then the answer is yes,” I told her. “In fact, he plans on marrying her.”

Mom’s brows scrunched up. “I’m not sure how I feel about marriage just for the sake of a baby. Couples should be in love when they get married.”

“I can promise you that they are very much in love with each other, Mom,” I assured her, trying not to whither underneath my father’s hard stare. “The baby might have been unplanned, but it’s not in any way unwelcomed.”

Mom let out a steady breath. “That’s good,” she muttered. “That’s good.”

“Viola, honey-”

“It’s fine, Henry,” she said, cutting him off. “I’m very aware that Hunter’s responsible for getting Alexandria in trouble.”

“It’s not the fifties, Mom,” I grumbled, not arguing how I deserved her torment. “I didn’t get Alex in *trouble*.”

She looked at me pointedly. “Well, that all depends on how Allen and Sheri take the news, now doesn’t it?”

“I love her, Mom,” I said, doing what I could to save myself from her disappointment. “We went from friends to something more, and I’m glad that we did. I *know* Alexandria. I have no doubts about wanting to marry her, Mom. The baby...I was already serious about Alex before the news of the baby.”

When the blood test had come back positive of Alex’s pregnancy, neither of us had been surprised. Though we hadn’t exactly reacted happily, we also hadn’t reacted miserably. We had taken the results as maturely as we could, listening to Dr. Mourney inform us of all our options, though that’d been unnecessary. However, we had walked out of there with the best birth control option for Alexandria for when after she delivered the baby.

“And you’re certain that Alexandria feels the same about you?” she asked. “Are you sure that she’s not just scared and making decisions based on that fear?”

“Don’t do that, Mom,” I told her, my voice hard.

“Do what, Hunter?” she asked challengingly.

“Create doubts in my mind when I don’t feel any,” I answered. “Alexandria loves me. She loves me, and she’s going to marry me, and if Allen Grant doesn’t end up killing me, then I’m going to spend the rest of my life making that girl happy.”

Her face softened. “I hope so. I really do, Hunter.”

“I love her, Mom,” I repeated. “This isn’t...this isn’t the mess that most people might think that it is.”

“Of course, it isn’t,” Mom immediately replied. “We didn’t raise you to be a douchebag, Hunter. I have no doubt that you’ll take care of Alexandria and how ever many children you choose to have.”

Even though my father was still eyeing me, my mother's words helped make me feel better. While I didn't expect or want them to clean up my 'mess', it made me feel better that my mother had confidence in me to do the right thing.

Looking over at my dad, I asked, "Is there anything that you'd like to say or ask me?"

"I just want to know that you didn't take advantage of that girl, or that you're not taking advantage of her now," he said, and though it stung, I understood where he was coming from. In my dad's eyes, it was the female that always needed to be protected.

"I was careless by forgetting the protection," I admitted, giving them more information than they needed. "However, I didn't take advantage of her. I'd never take advantage of a girl."

Dad nodded as he sighed. "I know that, son. I just had to ask in case Allen Grant loses his shit."

"If he does, I'll deserve it," I told him. "I'll also own it, Dad."

"This is fucking awesome," Lars announced, finally speaking, Talon just rolling his eyes. "I'm going to be an uncle."

"Can you focus?" Talon asked him. "This is serious."

"I need a distraction since your sister is driving me insane," Lars retorted.

Yeah, everything was going to be okay as long as Allen Grant didn't kill me.

~

Alexandria~

After the doctor had come back with the positive results, it'd felt...odd. While I hadn't been surprised, I'd still felt a bit taken aback by the news. It'd been a weird sort of out-of-body experience. Dr. Mourney had talked to us about our choices, but we hadn't been concerned with two of those three options. However, she'd given me her opinion on the best control for after giving birth, which was advice that I planned on taking.

With the news not being much of a surprise for either of us, Hunter and I had gone back to campus, finished out our day, then had met up for dinner. On the same page, we had put in our requests for needing the weekend off, and Jersey had surprised us both by guessing why we had needed the time off. According to her, I was glowing, and she was a firm believer that Hunter had been behaving like a growling dog protecting the Underworld because he'd felt how I'd been bred by him. It'd been the weirdest conversation that I'd ever had.

On the drive back to Lakeside, Hunter had done his best to convince me to let him accompany me to my parents' house, but as much as I appreciated how much Hunter was doing this best to take responsibility for me, it was important for me to tell my parents alone. While my parents knew that Hunter and I were friends, what I was about to tell my parents was going to possibly break their hearts, and my parents didn't need an almost-stranger seeing them during an incredibly personal and emotional time.

Now, while I had no doubt that my dad was going to want to talk to Hunter, no one liked to be blindsided, so I preferred that my father and Hunter talk after the initial emotional shock of the news wore off. Dad was going to be angry, and so I couldn't see anything positive coming from letting Hunter take the brunt of that anger. I was just as responsible for this mess as Hunter was, and it was only fair that I made that clear to both of my parents.

When Kenzlee and I had arrived unannounced on their doorstep, they'd been so happy to see me that I had actually contemplated not telling them. I'd felt guilty and wrong for

letting them think that this was a happy occasion, but Kenzlee had been great about not letting me chicken out.

The same night that the pregnancy had been confirmed, I had called Kenzlee to tell her the news. Hunter had done the same by calling Talon, waiting to tell Lars in person. Kenzlee had immediately offered to come with me for support, and I'd been too emotional to refuse. Not only was she the closest thing that I had to a sister, but I knew that my parents wouldn't mind her being here for this. My parents had stopped thinking of Kenzlee as their niece a long time ago; she was like a daughter to them now.

"So, tell us everything," Mom gushed. "How's college life?"

We were all gathered in the living room, my parents on the couch, Kenzlee sitting next to them while I sat in one of the armchairs near the television. Despite Kenzlee having paid off their mortgage, my parents hadn't gotten all fancy after that. The house that I'd grown up in still looked the same, and I loved that. I loved that my parents weren't the type to let a little extra money go to their head.

"I'm pregnant," I blurted out like a tool.

My mother's eyes widened as my dad's head jerked back in shock.

Yeah, this sucked.

"Wh...what?" Mom finally stammered.

I could feel my eyes start to well up, but I wasn't even sure if that was from the pressure or the hormones of the entire situation. "I'm pregnant," I repeated in a whisper.

In a steady voice that surprised me, Dad said, "I imagine that you wouldn't be telling us this unless you were certain."

I nodded. "I'm certain."

No one said anything for a long enough moment that my conscience pricked at the back of my eyes again. I didn't want to cry in front of my parents because I didn't want this to feel like bad news, though it really wasn't good news. I honestly had no idea what kind of news this was, and I'd never felt more grateful for Kenzlee's quiet support.

Finally, Dad asked, "Have you made a decision on how you want to...do you know what you want to do, Alexandria?"

"Are you mad at me?" I asked like I was seven-years-old all over again.

"I don't know how I feel right now," he answered honestly, and I could respect that. "I'd rather deal with the practicality of the situation first."

"I want to keep the baby," I said, and my mother's eyes immediately started to shine with tears.

Dad grabbed her hand, squeezed it, but kept looking at me. "Okay, okay," he said steadily. "That narrows down a lot of questions."

"Do you plan on staying in school or are you coming home?" Mom asked, and I knew she was hoping that I'd come home. Sheri Grant was a good mother, and I could see her wanting to see me through this.

"I plan on staying in school," I answered. "The plan is to keep going to school and working until I'm too far along to do both." I looked between my parents. "Next year, I might not be able to work, but I'll still be able to take classes, even with the baby."

"How's that?" Dad asked, eyeing me, avoiding the one question that he was dying to ask.

"I'll have a lot of support, Dad," I told him.

"So, the father *does* plan on being in the picture?" Mom asked, and the question sounded so tacky, though I knew that it was a fair question.

“Yes, he does,” I answered. “In fact, it was his idea to choose our courses next year to make sure that we won’t need any childcare during the year.”

“Who is he?” Dad finally asked. “Who is this boyfriend that we’ve never heard of?” I knew that was his not-so-subtle way of asking me if I was pregnant by a boyfriend or a one-night stand.

This was flippin’ embarrassing.

“Hunter Finley,” I announced, and it was comical how wide their eyes bugged out.

“Hunter Finley?” Dad echoed. “The Hunter Finley? Talon’s best friend? *That* Hunter Finley?”

I nodded. “Yes, that Hunter Finley.”

“How...wh...when did you two start dating?” Mom asked, still in shock.

“Almost as soon as the school year started,” I semi-lied, trying to keep my dad from killing Hunter. “We...our friendship turned into something more, and...and he’s a good guy.”

“Hunter Finley,” Dad repeated, muttering like he didn’t know what else to say.

After a few quiet moments, Mom finally asked, “And how does Hunter feel about all this?”

I couldn’t help but smile. “He loves me, Mom. He loves me, and I really wished that I had known it sooner.” Her face immediately softened. “I have no regrets.”

Her tears started to fall, Dad immediately wrapping his arm around her. “That’s good, honey.”

With Mom’s blessing out of the way, I looked over at my father. “Dad?”

“No, honey,” he said, finally answering me. “I’m not mad at you.”

I was nothing but a blubbering mess after that.

Chapter 25

The truth that was always there.

Alexandria~

It was surprising how well my parents had taken the news after discovering who the father of the baby was. At first, they'd had a lot of questions because they hadn't known that Hunter and I had become more than friends. However, the fact that Hunter was familiar to them, coupled with the fact that my parents knew and spoke to Henry and Viola Finley often, I could tell that my parents had been happy about Hunter not being a complete stranger.

After I had answered all of their questions and had assured them that I was as happy about the situation as I could be, I had called Hunter to let him know that the worst was over. We had shared our stories briefly before agreeing that it'd be a good idea for all of us to meet to discuss the situation some more. Though Hunter and I had already made our decision, we'd both known that our parents were going to need to feel included in all this. After all, we'd barely left the nest, so they were still grappling with us being so far away from home, and now this.

At any rate, everything had gone better than I could have hoped, and with everyone promising to help us in any way that they could, I couldn't have been more grateful. I knew that mine wasn't the typical happily ever after in a situation like this, and so while I still doubted a lot, I didn't doubt Hunter or his commitment to me. I'd found one of the good guys, and I planned on keeping him.

Once we'd all gotten done talking about the baby, we had called Edie and Mrs. Draven over to join us at my parents' house, and it'd been nice having everyone together again. Though we hadn't done it often, we'd all gotten together

during our birthdays and stuff like that a lot last year. It'd also been sweet how Lars couldn't shut up about being an uncle. Of course, that'd been when he hadn't been complaining about Edie and her 'wild' ways.

I also knew that I was going to have to make more trips back home now that I was pregnant. There was no way that my parents weren't going to worry about me, so it was the least that I could do after the way they had chosen to support me through all this, rather than cast me out.

"Do you think there's student housing for expectant parents?"

I turned to look over at Hunter. We were back at his dorm, Baron off doing whatever it was that Baron did. In this instance, that was a good thing for us since peace and quiet were a welcomed thing right now. Though I'd been happy to see my parents and get the worst part of all this out of the way, it'd been a lot, and I'd felt it on the drive back home.

"I'm not sure," I replied. "I'm guessing that we can find out."

"I'm thinking that they have to," Hunter went on. "In this day and age, we're not the only people in college while expecting a baby."

I laid my head on his chest, no longer spooning. "We can still take things slow, Hunter," I pointed out. "We don't have to move in together right away."

"You're fucking crazy, girl," he huffed, clearly offended. "If you think that we're going to continue living in the dorms if we don't have to, then you're out of your beautiful mind."

"The semester has already started, Hunter," I reminded him. "There's no way that there's any available housing anymore."

"We'll figure it out," he promised. "If we have to keep living in the dorms this semester, then we will. However, that

doesn't mean that we can't inquire for next semester."

Deciding not to get into a huge debate with him about it, I said, "Is it crazy that I still feel relieved at how everything went well today?"

Hunter chuckled underneath my cheek. "Not considering how I still feel relieved that your father didn't hunt me down and cut off my balls."

"He took it a lot better than I thought he was going to," I admitted. "Even though this isn't ideal for him as a father, I think he feels better knowing that it wasn't a complete stranger that knocked up his little girl."

"I didn't knock you up," he lied. "God presented me with an opportunity to be with the love of my life forever, and so I took it."

That had me choking out a laugh. "Oh, I'm sure that's exactly what happened."

"Can you prove otherwise?" he teased.

"Tell me that we're not crazy, Hunter," I told him. "When I think about it too long, I feel like we're crazy for thinking that we can do this."

I immediately found myself on my back, Hunter's large frame braced above me. He was looking down at me like we hadn't just been teasing each other a few seconds ago. He looked serious and focused, and it was a sexy look on the guy.

"While it might begin to feel crazy every now and again, that doesn't mean that *we're* crazy, Alexandria," he said. "Yeah, we might be taking on a lot, but that doesn't mean that we're crazy. It just means that we're committed to this and each other. That's admirable, not crazy."

"Hunter, I..."

His brows furrowed. "What, baby? You, what?"

"I know that there aren't any guarantees in life, and... and I'm not asking for one," I assured him. "I just want to be

clear about something.”

“What’s that?”

“Please don’t think that I’m doubting what you feel or your commitment to me, but if you ever…” The words kind of got stuck in my throat. While I’d do this alone if I had to, I wanted Hunter with me for this. “If you ever change your mind or start feeling differently-”

“Don’t fucking say it, Alexandria.”

“-about me, I want you to tell me,” I continued. “I don’t ever want you feeling guilty or whatever if you wake up one day and discover that you were wrong about us.”

“That’s never going to happen, Alex.”

“I’m not saying that it is,” I sighed, knowing that I’d offended him. “I’m just letting you know that *if* it were to ever happen, it’s okay.”

“It’s not okay,” he argued. “Because if it’s okay for me to change my mind or fall out of love with you, then you’re saying that it’s okay for you to do the same, and it’s not. It’s so fucking not, Alexandria.”

“Hunter, I’m just saying-”

His lips came down on mine, effectively shutting up any future doubts.

~

Hunter~

This girl was out of her fucking mind if she thought that I could ever change my mind about us. With the taste of her lips on mine, with the way that her tongue was dancing with mine, the feel of her body beneath mine, there was no fucking way in hell that I’d ever give Alexandria up. Regardless of what people might think, I wasn’t too young to know that what I felt for Alexandria was the real thing. I wasn’t too young to

understand the importance of commitment. I wasn't too young to love this girl for the rest of my life.

Alexandria drew her knees up, making room for my hips to press up against hers. I had no idea if Baron was going to come back soon or not, but there was no way that I was leaving from this spot until Alexandria got it through her thick skull that there was no changing our minds for either of us.

Pulling back, I stared down at her. "I will never let you change your mind about us, Alexandria." I pushed my hips against hers harder. "I will never let you fall out of love with me, baby."

"Hunter..."

"It's you and me, Alex," I told her. "Even when all the kids are grown and out of the house, it's going to be you and me."

"Okay," she whispered, nodding, but that wasn't good enough for me.

"Say the words, baby," I ordered. "Tell me that you believe me."

"Hunter-"

"Say it," I ordered again. "Even if you don't believe it right now, say it, Alexandria." I pushed against her again. "Just tell me what I want to hear, baby. Please."

"It's you and me," she obeyed. "Even when the kids are grown and gone, it's going to be you and me."

"I love you, Alexandria," I said, my dick hard and ready for her. "I love you, and you're marrying me. You're marrying me as soon as we fill out the fucking paperwork."

"Hunter, we don't have to," she replied. "We can still take things slow-"

"That's where you're wrong," I informed her. "We have to because I need you with me, Alex. I want it all with you, and I can't have it all if you don't marry me." I leaned down,

placing a kiss on her cheek. “Baby, I don’t want you to be my pregnant girlfriend. I want you to be my family. I want you to be my wife. I want you signing your goddamn name Alexandria Finley for the rest of your life. I want the world to know that you belong to me; I want *you* to know that you belong to me.”

“I love you,” she whispered, her voice breaking with emotion. “I love you, and I want it all with you, too. I want us to work so badly, Hunter.”

“We will, baby,” I promised her. “No matter what I have to do in order to make that happen, I will.”

“Hunter?”

“Yeah, baby?”

“Are you expecting Baron back any time soon?”

I could feel myself grin. “I thought you didn’t mind getting fucked in public?”

Alexandria barked out a laugh, and it sounded so perfect to my ears. Again, I could handle whatever she was feeling, but I hated thinking or knowing that she was sad; that one killed me.

Her hands reached up as she wrapped them around my neck. “You know, I heard a rumor that pregnant girls get super horny.”

“If you think that I won’t quit school just to keep you sexually satisfied, then you’re so fucking wrong, Alexandria,” I replied wolfishly. “In fact, I can’t think of a better reason to quit school.”

Her lips twitched. “You’re so noble, Hunter Finley.”

“I really am,” I agreed.

“So, *are* you expecting Baron back any time soon?” she repeated.

“I can text him and find out where he is,” I offered. “However, before we do that, I have something for you.”

Alexandria grinned. “Yeah, I imagine about eight inches.”

“Ha, ha,” I deadpanned before sitting up, then reaching for the bag that I had packed for our weekend visit back home.

Alexandria sat up with me. “What is it if it isn’t your penis?”

I laughed. “You’re making it hard to believe that you were a virgin just a couple of weeks ago.”

“You would know,” she muttered.

Shaking my head, I unzipped my bag, then reached inside. It was crazy how calm I felt with everything that was happening with us. I’d always felt older than my nineteen years, but I never realized how grown I really felt until this thing with Alexandria. I didn’t feel like we were moving too fast, and I wasn’t scared, even if we were moving at lightning speed.

Pulling out the little black box, I turned, then placed it in her lap. Alexandria let out a low gasp, knowing exactly what was inside. After we had invited Mrs. Draven and Edie over to join us yesterday, deciding to barbecue and turn our news into a celebration, Dad and I had gone into town to pick up some food to barbecue. However, I had asked him to stop by the jewelry store on the way to grab the food. At first, I thought that he’d try to talk me out of it, but instead of looking wary and regretful, he had looked proud of me, even offering to help me with financing Alexandria’s ring. I had declined his offer, and though I’d had to use some of my remaining tuition money to buy the ring, I’d do it again.

“I meant what I’d said, Alexandria,” I told her. “I want to marry you as soon as we apply for a license and can get it done. If you want a huge wedding, I’ll make that happen. Either way, I want my ring on your finger now.”

Those white eyes of hers looked up at me, tears already streaming softly down her face. “Hunter, I don’t need a huge wedding,” she said tearfully. “I just want you.”

“Are you sure?” I asked hesitantly. “Your mother doesn’t want a huge wedding for her only daughter?”

Alexandria shook her head. “My parents just care if I’m happy,” she replied. “I’m lucky in that way.”

Relief almost shook me as I opened the box, then pulled out a simple diamond solitaire engagement ring. I left the matching band tucked safely in the cushion, ready to slide that on her finger as soon as we got married.

“Alexandria Grant, I love you,” I told her. “I love you, and you can’t imagine how badly I want to begin the rest of my life with you and all the babies that you’re going to give me.”

I slid the ring on Alex’s finger, not even bothering to really ask her. I mean, it wasn’t really like she had much of a choice anyway. It was me and her forever, and I’d never been the type of man that let anything stand in the way of his dreams.”

Just as Alexandria threw herself in my arms and I pulled her into my lap, the door to the dorm room opened, and Baron said, “I knew you two were boning.”

We both started laughing, and my arms tightened around Alexandria when she said, “We’re not boning, thank you very much. We’re getting married.”

Epilogue

The ending we all deserve.

Alexandria – (Fiver Years Later)~

I walked into the house, and it just didn't feel right. It was quiet and that wasn't normal. Now, while I could appreciate a few quiet moments in my life, it also made me fear what my husband and kids could possibly be getting into. I never knew when it came to them.

After dropping my bag on the couch, I kicked off my shoes, then went in search of my family. It didn't take long for me to find Hunter in his office, clicking away on his computer. After getting our degrees, I'd gotten a job at Rottweiler Investments, and Hunter had gotten a job at Bright Light Engineering. Luckily for us, he was allowed to work a lot from home, and with daycare being what it was, thank freakin' God. Granted, our parents were always offering to babysit, but still. While the past five years had been a lot, I wouldn't trade Porter and Sela for anything in the world.

“Where are the kids?”

Hunter looked up from his computer, grinning at me. “My parents got baby fever,” he answered. “Ever since Talon and Kenzlee announced that they were pregnant, they've been bugging to see the kids more.”

After graduation, Hunter and I had decided to move back to Lakeside, despite our issues with the town not having a lake. Our families were here, and when Talon and Kenzlee had announced that they had planned on moving back here to start their lives, it'd been a no-brainer. Family was everything, and I couldn't imagine being anywhere else.

Walking further into his office, I said, “It kind of sucks that our kids aren't going to be close in age.”

“It won’t be that bad,” he said, leaning back in his chair. “Porter is only four, and Sela is only two.”

“Yeah, but by the time their baby is old enough to play with, Porter will be in kindergarten,” I complained. “I mean, I’m glad that they were responsible enough to wait, but it still kind of sucks.”

Hunter reached for me as soon as I was standing in front of him. Once he got me settled on his lap, he said, “I’m down to have one more.”

I laughed. “You’re insane.”

“What?” he asked, feigning innocence. “Three is a good number.”

“Two is plenty,” I argued. “Besides, we’ve only just... gotten caught up, Hunter. Do you really want to get pregnant again.”

Hunter reached up, tucking a wayward strand of hair behind my ear. “Baby, the past five years have been the most exciting years of my life.” I laughed at the way that he was choosing to describe the chaos of the past few years. “Alexandria, I’d do it a million times over if it’s you that I’m doing it with.”

It was hard to resist this man when he said things like that.

“All the same, I think a third kid might tip the scales,” I replied. “It’s nice to be able to shower every day now.”

Hunter grinned. “Well, if you change your mind, I’m more than willing to knock you up again.”

“Seriously, they should knight you,” I drawled out. “Always so noble.”

“Would you still think so if I told you that I wanted to violate you twenty different ways before my parents bring the kids back?” he smirked.

“I’d expect nothing less with our kid-free time, Mr. Finley,” I retorted.

“I do love it when you talk dirty, Mrs. Finley,” he teased back.

“Hunter?”

“Yeah, baby?”

“Just so you know, while I’m not sure about a third kid, I’d do it all over again, too,” I admitted.

That first year had been easy because my pregnancy had been easy. However, once Porter had been born, parenthood had been a rude awakening, and there was no way that I could have done it all without Hunter at my side. He had worked his ass off to provide for us and had gone without sleep too many times to count. He’d been a miracle every day, and when I’d gotten pregnant with Sela, he hadn’t broken a sweat with the extra work. If there was a better man than Hunter Finley on the planet, I wouldn’t believe it.

“I love you, Alexandria,” he said sweetly. “I will always love you.”

“I love you, Hunter Finley,” I replied. “I’m so glad it was you.”

“Even with that nasty kidnapping business in our past?” he teased.

“Especially with that nasty kidnapping business in our past,” I teased back.

The End.

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The first acknowledgment will always be my husband. There aren't enough words to express my gratitude for having this man in my life. There is a little bit of him in every hero that I dream up, and I can't thank God enough for bringing him into my life.

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About the Author



M.E. Clayton works full-time and writes as a hobby only. She is an avid reader, and with much self-doubt but more positive feedback and encouragement from her friends and family, she took a chance at writing, and the Seven Deadly Sins Series was born. Writing is a hobby she is now very passionate about. When she's not working, writing, or reading, she is spending time with her family or friends. If you care to learn more, you can read about her by visiting the following:

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