



UNEXPECTED

Addition

KARLA DOYLE

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UNEXPECTED

Addition

*an over-the-top, forbidden,
professor & student, age gap,
instalove romance*

KARLA DOYLE

CONTENTS

[Unexpected Addition](#)

[Content Notes](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Also by Karla Doyle](#)

[About the Author](#)

UNEXPECTED ADDITION

AN OVER THE TOP, FORBIDDEN,
PROFESSOR & STUDENT, AGE GAP,
INSTALOVE ROMANCE

This book contains taboo themes and content that may be uncomfortable for some readers. Please read the Content Notes section before diving in.

MILA

Getting pregnant from a fraternity-party one-night-stand wasn't part of my college plans. The sobbing when I saw those two lines on the test stick became tears of joy when the doctor placed my baby in my arms. Being a twenty-one-year-old single mother with an infant is hard. Doing it while trying to finish college is a whole other level of challenging. But I'm managing. Or I was, until my babysitter pulls a no-show on the day of my math exam.

Asking for a retake date is pointless. Everyone knows Professor Jerzey Harding is an inflexible stickler for the rules. Meaning I have two choices: Skip the exam and take a zero, or take my colicky baby to the exam and hope I can complete enough of it to earn a pass before Ashton's crying requires me to get up and leave. Which he does while I'm answering the first question.

When Professor Harding strides toward me while I'm packing up, I know I'll be lucky to escape with just a failing exam grade. The hard set of his features could mean he's kicking me out of the class altogether. Except he doesn't berate me when he reaches my desk. He gently lifts Ashton from the carrier, tells me to sit down and keep writing, then walks away, calmly rocking and hushing my baby. For the entire two hours.

Grateful doesn't begin to describe what I'm feeling, because suddenly, I'm not looking at the old-enough-to-be-my-father professor, I'm seeing the handsome silver fox of a man. And I very much want to be the teacher's pet...

CONTENT NOTES

This book is a very over-the-top, love at first sight, wide age gap romance with some taboo themes that may be uncomfortable or off-putting for some readers. If the following content isn't to your liking, you should not read this book.

Content Includes:

- Forbidden relationship between professor and student
- Wide age gap (he's 42, she's 21)
- Damsel in distress vibe
- Over the top behavior by the hero
- Unprotected sex
- Lactation kink
- Pregnancy
- Discussion of abortion and adoption
- Denying/withholding parental responsibility

CHAPTER ONE

If this book didn't open to the Content Notes, please go back and read them before proceeding. It's okay if this isn't the book for you. And if that list is your jam, then carry on and enjoy this quick & dirty little romp!



Early April

MILA

“What are you going to do?” The look of horror on my dorm roommate’s face is crystal clear, even through the blur of my tears.

“I don’t know.” My wholly accurate and inadequate answer is followed by an uncontrollable hiccupping sob. “I can’t believe this is happening to me.”

Everyone expects college to be full of new experiences. New people, places, knowledge, opportunities. A couple of obvious things *not* to experience while in college: failing out or getting knocked up from a one-night-stand at a frat party...

I’ve been an overachieving student my entire life. I go to all my classes, do all the homework, hand in assignments before their due dates, and study for every test. My grades are always in the top ten percent. Basically, I’m the textbook ideal student. Failing out was never an option or concern.

Being focused on schoolwork doesn’t leave a lot of time for dating. Since I’ve never had a serious boyfriend, I don’t do casual sex, and I’m not a partier, the other item on the *never do this* list didn’t even cross my mind. It just wouldn’t happen to me.

Until it did.

“I never should have gone to that party with you. Why did you have to beg me? I couldn’t say no.”

Amber sucks in a breath. “You’ve never had a problem saying no before. It’s practically your favorite word! Whether you admit it or not, you wanted to see what a frat house party was like just as much as I did. Also, I put *one* drink in your hand. *One, Mila!* I specifically told you to hold that drink as if your life depended on it. I told you to nurse it. When you wandered away, I expected you had ditched the drink and gone back to studying. Instead, I found you pounding tequila shots with frat boys, one of whom you were rubbing up against like

a cat in heat. So, if you're looking for someone to blame, look in the mirror."

"I don't want to look at myself." Not at the white stick in my hands either, but I can't seem to look anywhere else. Staring at it doesn't make the two blue lines vanish, no matter how much I want them to. "Oh God... what am I going to do?"

Amber's expression softens. "Look, you've got an accidentally fertilized egg in there. At this stage, you correct that mistake by swallowing some medically prescribed pills. You would've taken the day-after pill if you weren't sure the guy used a condom, so what's the difference? That's how I see it." She drops onto the twin-size bed beside me and squeezes my hand. "I'll go with you if you want. There's no shame in it, but if you want to keep it secret, then you do. *We* do. I'll take your secret to the grave. Okay?"

"I don't... God, I don't know what to do." I lean forward, folding myself over my lap. Something I won't be able to do in a few months if I decide to continue the pregnancy.

But why would I? I don't want a baby. Yes, I always pictured myself cuddling a bundle of joy. Holding a kid's hand as we walk to their first day of school. Doing all the mom stuff. But down the road. Maybe in ten years or so, not now. I want to finish college, get a good job, enjoy life. Call me old-fashioned, but I expected to do the motherhood thing after meeting the love of my life. Not because I got drunk and had sex with some random frat guy whose name I don't remember and whose face is a fuzzy memory. I'm not even sure I'd recognize him if he walked up and said hello.

Amber gently rubs my back, the way someone might do for a person with a stomach virus.

If only that were my problem. "Why did I assume we used a condom? That open condom wrapper on the bedside table could have been from someone else, or he could have pretended to put it on, then tossed it. God, I was stupid about everything that night."

"Excessive alcohol will do that."

Groaning, I shake my head where it's pressed against my legs. "I'm never drinking again."

"Well, not for nine months anyway, if you decide to keep it."

"I can't," I say. "Not while I'm still in college. I just don't know if I can terminate it either."

"It's your body and your choice, Mila. Don't let anybody tell you otherwise. What about adoption? Finishing out the spring term shouldn't be a problem, and you'd only have to miss a little bit of the fall term when the baby is born. If you talked to someone in administration, I bet they'd give you some grace for that time off."

It's so much to think about. A decision I never, ever, thought I'd have to make.

Putting the baby up for adoption would make someone else's dream come true. Maybe that's why a lifetime's worth of sensibility failed me that night—because this *accidentally fertilized egg* is meant to change someone's life for the better. All I have to do is get through the pregnancy. Sure, my mother will lose her shit when she finds out, but that's nothing new. She'll be glad I'm giving the baby up, though. How many times have I heard her say that's what she should have done... instead of keeping *me*.

That's how I'll be a better mother than the one I have—by giving my baby up. My one-night lapse in judgment will give some lucky couple the greatest gift imaginable.

After that, I'll continue on with my life as planned. Finish college. Get a great job. Experience life to its fullest. And later, when the time is right, I'll meet the right guy and start a family. This pregnancy is just a bump in the plans I made. It's going to be a big bump in my stomach, too. But afterward, everything is going to work out exactly the way it was meant to.

CHAPTER TWO

$$1+2=\heartsuit$$

A Friday in February, the following year

MILA

Calling again is pointless, but I do it anyway. Just like the other five times, the line rings and rings, then goes to my babysitter's voicemail, which is full. Full of my *where are you?* messages. I should have left the apartment fifteen minutes ago.

“Shit!”

At the sound of my raised, agitated voice, Ashton's bottom lip pushes forward and trembles, his big blue eyes becoming instantly glassy.

“It's okay,” I say, lifting him from his infant seat and holding him close while I rock. “Mommy's not mad.” Not at him. Never at my baby. The most unexpected thing ever to happen to me, and also the best. I can't imagine my life without him.

He nuzzles in, his sweet baby scent filling my nose. Calming me, as much as that's possible right now.

My math midterm starts in thirty minutes. It's a fifteen-minute drive to the college, then park and hike across campus to the business studies building, which isn't close to any of the student lots. That's another ten minutes. If I want to make it there before Professor Harding closes the door and hands out the exam papers, I need to leave *now*.

With Ashton in my arms, I hurry to collect the diaper bag and the bottle of expressed breastmilk from the refrigerator. There's not enough time to get him into his snowsuit, so I settle for his soft, knitted cap and a sweater, then buckle him into the infant carrier and tuck multiple snuggly blankets around him. He prefers that to the snowsuit anyway. With any luck, he'll fall asleep during the drive and stay that way through the two-hour exam.

The way my day is going, that amount of good luck isn't likely to fall into my lap. More likely is that I'll have *Ashton* in

my lap. Which is fine. That's how I do homework most nights.

But will I be allowed to write the exam that way? If there's a no-babies-allowed rule in the institution handbook, Mr. Stickler for the Rules will know about it and enforce it. He didn't get the nickname *Hardass Harding* because of his tight butt.

I have to try. If he kicks me out, then he does. It'll still be better than taking a zero for not showing up.

The traffic gods smiled on me, giving me green lights at every stop on the way to campus. Then the parking gods joined the party, because in the almost three years I've been here, I've never gotten a spot that close. The snow even stopped blowing long enough for me to get from the car to the building.

The miracles continue inside the classroom. Surrounded by voices and other assorted noises, Ashton continues to sleep in his infant seat, where I have it tucked as close to my legs as possible, with just the upper edge of it sticking into the outside aisle. I just might get through this disaster of a day after all.

Promptly on the hour, Professor Harding closes the door. The first step he took from the podium at the front of the lecture hall toward the door rendered the space silent enough for the click of the latch to sound as if it'd been amplified. That's the kind of presence he has.

This semester is my first time having the prof who never cracks a smile as a teacher. Rumors that he runs his classroom in almost militant style proved to be true. The laser-focused environment doesn't bother me. I even admit to silently feeling superior when Professor Harding rebuked a girl whose phone rang during class. And the time he kicked two students out because they were talking during his lecture... seriously hot. That was the day I discovered I have a crush on the silver fox.

Even while focused on the lessons he teaches, I manage to concoct mental scenarios where he keeps me after class, then ravishes me against the podium, or bends me over the front-

row desks and takes charge of my body the way he does with his class. The first time one of those images popped into my mind was a complete surprise. Older men have never registered on my radar. To be fair, men in general haven't—I've always considered myself a little broken in the libido department. But something about Professor Harding does it for me.

Good little rule-following student that I am, I'm sure he's never even noticed me. He rarely calls on me, even though I raise my hand for nearly every question. I don't stand out. I'm one of hundreds, if not thousands, of students he teaches every term. Just another face in an endless crowd.

If he takes note of me today, it won't be for fantasy-worthy reasons. It'll be for mom reasons. I've never brought my four-month-old baby into his classroom before. I'd be willing to bet nobody has brought a child of any age into his classroom, and certainly not to an exam.

The churn of nerves in my stomach isn't because I'm worried about the content on the upcoming test. I know my stuff. I'll get an A... *if* I can complete the exam.

“Mr. Telfer will place your paper face-down on your desk. Do not touch it until I give the instruction.” Harding's gruff voice booms in the silence as his gaze sweeps the room. There's a microphone on the podium but he doesn't use it. The man is more than capable of projecting his authoritative voice. “Writing implements and approved calculators should already be on your desk. If not, get them there now. Power off and put away all other devices. Any disturbance once the exam is in progress will result in expulsion from the room, and you will be graded only on the material completed up to that time. No exceptions.”

Now my stomach is in knots *and* my heart is pounding hard enough that Professor Harding can probably hear it from ten rows away. I steal a glance at Ashton in his infant seat and send up a prayer to any deity that might be listening. *Please, let him sleep for the next two hours. Please, please, please.*

Chris Telfer, a grad student who works as Harding's teaching assistant, pauses briefly as he places my exam on my desk. Chris's gaze drops to the baby I'm semi-hiding by my legs, then he meets my eyes, his eyebrows rising in what's clearly a non-verbal *holy shit*.

The urge to explain everything, to beg for pity or mercy, is right there, threatening to explode off my tongue. Instead, I pull my lips between my teeth and give a small shrug.

Chris is a nice guy. The soft-spoken type. He tips his head slightly and briefly opens his eyes wide. A silent *good luck* if ever there was one.

Within a minute, Chris has the rest of the exams distributed, then assumes a position near the door, his hands loosely clasped in front of his belted khakis. Sentry-like, yet relaxed.

The man in front of the first row of desks is the opposite of relaxed. Professor Harding stands with his arms crossed over his tweed-jacket-covered chest, essentially glaring at the group of us who are awaiting permission to begin our inevitably grueling exam.

Yes, it's my first exam with Harding, but not my first test. Despite what I've heard others in the class say, there's nothing unfair about the questions he asks. If it's on the test, the material is in the textbook. Stuff we've covered, no matter how briefly. Things we're expected to know. That we *should* know before we're working as professionals in our chosen mathematical fields. Life isn't always easy—a truth I know all too well. I respect the man for giving us challenging tests.

The lecture hall is a large room with a high ceiling and cold, impersonal lighting. It's not the abundance of fluorescents making the space buzz right now. It's anticipation. I already had it in droves, but when I feel the infant seat move against my leg, my anxiety spikes even higher.

Stay asleep, stay asleep... I hold my breath while ten rows ahead, Professor Harding shakes out his left arm from its clenched position.

“Hands remain above the desk. Face forward with your eyes on your papers,” he says, tapping a button on his wristwatch. “Your exam starts now.”

Rustling papers shouldn't seem loud. When it's a collective sound suddenly breaking complete silence, it might as well be an alarm going off.

Pencil clenched in my right hand, I flip through the exam, quickly scanning for the question with the highest value. Not my normal method, but I need to accumulate as many marks as possible, just in case the shifting baby carrier at my feet doesn't still.

There's a reason this question has the highest value on the exam. It's really fucking hard. I need to concentrate, except that's hard too, because Ashton's infant seat keeps brushing my leg. My baby is restless and I can't even look down or adjust the flannelette receiving blanket draped over the handle.

Hands remain above the desk. Face forward with your eyes on your papers.

Then I hear it. Soft whimpering. The kind that triggers my milk to let down. The gentle sound that precedes a not-so-gentle cry. Knowing what's coming, I turn my exam papers over and pull my coat from the back of the chair. Without looking, I know my actions have pinged on Professor Harding's radar. For the first time this term, I feel the weight of his attention.

Even though I'm doing my best to keep my eyes on my desk, his movement in my direction registers in my peripheral vision. I don't get the chance to explain. Ashton's shrieking wail slices the silence before the professor is within earshot.

Despite Harding's instructions, every head I can see turns in my direction.

“Faces forward,” he commands. “Eyes on your papers.” The most intimidating professor I've ever had bears down on me, stopping close enough for me to see that his piercing eyes are a shade of blue so pale, they're almost gray.

I crouch and unbuckle Ashton, then lift him onto my shoulder. The position instantly comforts my son, his crying quickly tapering into sleepy breathing. Heart pounding, I rise and force myself to meet Professor Harding's unwavering gaze. "My babysitter no-showed and I hoped he'd sleep through the exam. I'm so sorry."

"We'll discuss an appropriate penalty after the exam." He nods toward my chair. "Have a seat and get to work."

"You—you're going to let me hold him while I write?" I whisper.

"No, Ms. Hawkins." Tweed-covered arms extend toward me, his palms open at the end of each sleeve. "You're going to let *me* hold him while you write."

CHAPTER
THREE

$$1+2=\heartsuit$$

JERZEY

What the hell am I doing? Offering to hold a student's baby while she writes a midterm? No, not even offering. Demanding. I don't do shit like this. Not once in my entire teaching career. I've never even offered a spare pencil during an exam. If they're not prepared, I consider it another lesson they need to learn. I'm here to teach, not hold their hand. Not to care. Certainly not to get personal.

Yet, my damn arms are still out, waiting for a student to pass me her baby. Her *baby*. She's only twenty-one, something I know from digging deeper than I had a legitimate reason to do. There was nothing in her student records about having a baby.

Why the hell does a woman her age have a baby? How did I not know? I may not interact with my students, but I listen to them. I know more about them than any of them are aware. And I've listened for any and every speck of information about Mila. None of which included the fact that has an infant. Though, to be fair, she rarely makes conversation with anyone. Before or after class. Maybe that should've been my first clue that she had more happening in her life.

"Do you—" Mila bites down on her lip, the blush of humiliation on her smooth face deepening to a burning red.

"Continue. Do I what?"

"Never mind. I'm just going to leave now."

A wise man would let her leave the room. I'm smarter than many, but apparently not wise, because I don't turn around and walk away, I step closer. Close enough to drop my voice to a low whisper only she can hear. "Do I mean what I'm offering? Yes. Do I know how to hold a baby? Also yes."

War wages in her big brown eyes. Desperation too. She needs to write this exam and she knows it. Without a grade on the midterm, passing this course will be almost impossible.

I need her to pass this course the first time. Perfect student though she may be, I don't want to be her teacher any longer than necessary. I need her to graduate this spring.

"Take the opportunity standing in front of you," I say, acutely aware that my damn arms are still extended, that I'm potentially making a fool of myself in front of a room full of students who shouldn't be watching, but definitely are.

"Okay." Her shoulders drop with the breath she releases. "Thank you." The small space between us becomes little more than a sliver as she transfers the baby to my arms. "I'll write as fast as I can, but if he gets fussy, I—"

"I'll be fine and so will he." I hold her gaze as I carefully maneuver her baby into a safe, comfortable position. "Focus on giving me your best work, Ms. Hawkins, as you have every other time."

"Yes, sir," she whispers, shrugging her coat off and settling into her seat.

Logically, I know the "*sir*" is strictly professional respect. That doesn't stop my body from reacting. Heat flares low in my abdomen, and behind my fly, my cock thickens. I know all my students' names and I can match most to their faces in a classroom setting. But the memory of Mila's face follows me home. Her name rides my grunted moan every time I jerk off. Now I'll be hearing her softly spoken "*sir*" while I imagine burying myself to the balls in her petite, curvy body.

I've never fantasized about a student until the day Mila walked into my classroom. Now I'm a dirty old man whose forbidden wish list just keeps getting longer.

Clearing my throat, I wait for her to flip her paper over and pick her pencil up before turning away. Students know better than to look up at me directly, but their attention prickles at the back of my neck as I walk past.

My teaching assistant needs a lesson in schooling his expression because shock is written all over his face. He's smart enough to keep his questions or comments inside,

though. Not a syllable leaves his lips when I reach the front of the room.

“Watch the room.”

Chris nods as I tip my head toward the silent body of students.

No further explanation necessary—not that I’d give one anyway. I’m out of my element, even though I’m immersed in it.

I don’t dislike kids or babies. In truth, I’m pretty good with both. But I never felt the urge to have any of my own. Maybe because none of my relationships had the level of connection and depth to make me want the lifelong commitment of parenting together. Not even my short-lived marriage when I was younger. I sure as hell wouldn’t want to be a single parent.

With my back to the class, I look down at the bundle cradled in my arms. Not a newborn, but close. Can’t be more than a few months old. Meaning Mila probably gave birth late in October and started this semester with a newborn to care for. Possibly alone. If she had anyone in her corner for support, she wouldn’t have had to bring a baby to an exam.

A little crease forms between the baby’s fair eyebrows. Tiny pink lips pucker like a small rosebud, making soft smacking sounds. Dreaming of eating?

Smart girl that she is, Mila probably has a bottle in her bag. Asking would give me another justified reason to get close to her. And every person in this room would be watching. Collecting evidence of my unprofessional behavior. Hardass Harding breaking his own rules, disrupting his class’s midterm.

“Not now, little one,” I say quietly. Very gently, I rock him, continuing the motion after his mouth relaxes back to a soft line.

I didn’t stop to think this situation through before jumping in, but now that it’s happening, I want it to matter. It’s a tough exam and Mila’s going to need the full two hours. I’m the only

man who can give her what she needs—and that's exactly what I plan to do.



JERZEY

After two hours of walking, rocking, repositioning, and quietly shushing, Mila's baby is still asleep when my watch beeps the two-hour timer. Angling my head away so I'm not talking directly over the baby, I say, "You're going to have to take point *and* lead-hand position, Chris."

"On it." He takes a large step forward. His chest expands on an inhale, the mild-mannered teaching assistant's demeanor switching from beta to alpha, right in front of my eyes. "Time's up." His calm, clear voice cuts the silence without startling the baby awake. "Pencils down and turn your papers over. Remain seated until I've collected your exam, then you're free to go. Quietly. No talking until you're beyond these four walls."

With Chris gathering the exams, my attention should be on the class, making sure nobody's trying to squeeze out a few more seconds of pencil-on-paper time. For the first time since becoming a professor, I don't care about the rules. Not the protocols I set in this room and not the restrictions regarding professional conduct. My attention is on Mila, as it has been for nearly the entire two hours. And now that the exam is over, her focus is on me.

Seated about halfway back, she rises after Chris collects her paper. Without breaking our eye contact, she gathers her coat, bag, and the baby carrier, then makes her way to the front of the room, but stands off to one side until all the students exit.

"I'll lock these in your office," Chris says, sliding the stack of exam papers into a large manilla envelope and sealing it with the string tie.

"Thank you." I nod, tracking him in my peripheral until the door closes with a resounding click, leaving me alone with Mila and her baby, who is still asleep in my arms.

“I can never thank you enough,” she says, stepping in to relieve me of duty. “When my babysitter no-showed, I had to choose whether to skip the exam and take an automatic zero, or hope Ashton would sleep through enough of it to earn a few marks. Whatever penalty you apply to my grade, I accept it without complaint. I’m just so grateful. Your compassion and generosity today was...”

“Out of character?” I offer when she bites her bottom lip instead of completing the sentence.

The gasp that parts her rosy lips is as loud as her eyes are wide. “No, I would never say that.”

“But you’d think it, because it’s accurate.” The smile tugging at the edges of my mouth is another first for me. I’m not a dick to students, but I’m never personable.

Long, dark hair moves in waves that frame her face as she shakes her head. “I’ve always thought of you as a structured teacher with high but entirely reasonable expectations.”

“Hardass Harding, in other words.” I chuckle at the grimace that crosses her pretty face. “I’ve been teaching long enough to be aware of all the nicknames over the years. They don’t bother me.”

“Nor should they.” Tipping her chin up, she meets my gaze directly again. “You’re an excellent teacher and anyone who can’t handle your style in the classroom probably has no concept of how demanding the real world is.”

“Something you’re familiar with now,” I say, nodding at the baby in her arms.

Her soft, “Yes” is like a key unlocking something in my chest.

As much as I want to claim her, I also want to take care of her. I pull out my wallet, pluck a business card from within, and offer it to her from between two fingers. “My sister has a daycare service near campus. Fully accredited—you can check out reviews and her Better Business Bureau standing online.”

Mila’s eyes go wide again. “That’s very thoughtful, but I’m sure she’s capped out. Everyone is, there’s always a

waitlist. Especially for infants.”

“Anya will have a space for your son.” I motion for Mila to take the card. “She has staff and doesn’t run at max capacity. She’s always been focused on quality of care, not the fattest possible profit margin.”

“Then...” Red floods Mila’s cheeks. The smile she gives while accepting the card is clearly for show. “Thank you for your kindness. All of it.”

“You’re not going to call the daycare, are you?” I ask as she settles Ashton in the carrier.

The shift from human arms to a rigid seat wakes him. Within seconds, he goes from angelic and silent to red-faced, squirming, and vocally fussy.

“I have to go,” Mila says, stuffing her arms into her sleeves. “Thank you for today.” Handle of the baby carrier over her arm, she ducks her head and hurries from the room, leaving my question unanswered.

I should let it go. Let *her* go. I know right now that’s not going to happen. Professional consequences—and my soul—be damned.

CHAPTER
FOUR

$$1+2=\heartsuit$$

Saturday

JERZEY

What a shithole. The kind of place so cheaply constructed, it was already broken when it was brand new. I've driven by this six-story building five days a week for over a decade and never given it a look or a thought. A lot of off-campus student housing is like this—low end, constantly in disrepair. Students who can't afford much don't get much. That's how it goes.

Not a big deal for most college kids. Rundown apartments like this are temporary holdovers while they learn or party—often both—on their way to real adulthood.

Except, Mila Hawkins is already deep in the category of “real adulthood.” Twenty-one years old with a baby and she's living in this dump. Not good. It's not right. If I had my way, she won't be here past this afternoon. But that's getting way ahead of myself.

I could get suspended for being here. Maybe even fired. Hell, there's a chance she could call the police. None of those possibilities prevent my knuckles from connecting with her apartment door.

The walls and doors in this place are so thin, I hear her footsteps as she approaches from the other side. I hear when they stop and when she gasps in shock, probably while looking through the peephole.

For a few beats, I'm not sure she's going to answer the door. I maintain a casual, hands-in-pockets stance and calm, neutral expression, far enough back for her to fully assess me. Finally, the deadbolt *thunks* its permission and she opens the door.

“Professor Harding.” Despite the obvious shock present on her lovely face, her shoulders are straight, and her voice is clear and strong. She doesn't ask what the hell I'm doing here or how I got her address. She simply holds her ground.

“Do you have someone you can call or text to let them know I’m here?”

Even in the dingy corridor, the sheen of her dark hair is visible as she tilts her head. “Why would I do that?”

Pronounced thumping from the apartment across from hers nearly forces me to step forward, but I don’t want to do anything that might intimidate her. Not in this setting. Ignoring it, along with a definite bang against the door behind me, I clear my throat and attempt a friendly—but not too friendly—smile. “I’m going to ask you to invite me inside so we can have a private conversation. I thought you’d feel safer saying yes if you make that call first.”

“I trust you,” she says, stepping backward and extending one arm toward her apartment. “You’re welcome to come in.”

Is she this trusting with everyone? I sure as hell hope not, but that’s a conversation for another time. “Thank you.” I nod while slipping past her, the narrowness of the dimly lit hall forcing me near enough to catch a hint of her scent. It’s not perfume or artificial fragrance. Not anything specific I can assign a name to. More like... if warmth had a scent.

“I would’ve come to your office—or the dean’s—to discuss the consequences of my actions during the exam,” she says, following me to the room at the end of the short hall.

As in *the* room. The one and only, aside from what must be a bathroom off to the right.

The walls are bare and dull but clean. Sheet vinyl flooring that has seen better days covers the entire space. A worn-out, bare-bones kitchen is directly across from the door. In the opposite corner, there’s a folded-down futon tidily made with a faded comforter. Her son lies in the center, a pale-blue blanket draped over his curled, presumably sleeping form.

Halfway along the far wall, there’s a single hardback chair positioned at a small folding table. A stack of books and a laptop sits on top. A stroller, the infant seat she took to class, and a bucket of infant toys sit near the door. She doesn’t have a TV. Or a table, dresser, or lamp.

Her brown eyes are waiting when I look at her, and I can't help feeling like a creeper caught cataloguing her belongings. Which is exactly what I am.

"I apologize if this was a bad time to stop by." I keep my voice low and nod toward the baby.

"It's fine. He should sleep for a couple of hours now. I was feeding him when you knocked."

Another glance around the room reveals no empty baby bottles, causing my mind to conjure an image of Mila breastfeeding her son. Something that shouldn't be erotic, has never struck me that way before, but with her in the picture, it does. If she knew a fraction of the inappropriate stuff filling my head, she'd throw me out of here right now.

"You got things straightened out with your babysitter?" I ask, focusing on the reason for my visit. The official reason, anyway.

Mila crosses her arms over tits I should never think about, but can't get out of my mind. "Only in the sense that she never returned my calls. But don't worry, I won't disrupt your classroom again."

"I know you won't."

Doe eyes I could get lost in open wide. Her mouth gapes, then snaps shut, her chest expanding as she draws a deep breath. "Am I supposed to feel better because you came to my apartment to personally deliver the news that you're kicking me out of your class?"

"What? No. I'm not kicking you out. The opposite."

"So... you came here to tell me I'm welcome to bring my crying baby *to* class every day?" A hint of sarcasm tints her question. The unexpected sass suits her.

"Not that far in the opposite direction, no." My chuckle has her eyebrows rising. Fair enough. I've never even cracked a smile in front of a student. I've certainly never displayed any sense of humor around them. "I assumed you resolved your childcare issues because you didn't call Anya about getting your son into her daycare."

“Oh. No, I didn’t call her.”

“You haven’t had time?” I offer the out, though it could easily be the truth. As a full-time college student who’s also a single parent of an infant, I bet she rarely has a minute to herself.

“I don’t have the *money*, Professor Harding.”

“Jerzey. No need for formalities off campus.”

Her gaze narrows. “Since you brought that up... why are you here?”

“I thought you’d be more comfortable having a personal conversation in the privacy of your home.”

“That’s very considerate, but I’m confused why we’re having a personal conversation at all, to be honest.” Her arms fall to her sides as she shrugs. “I apologized for bringing my son to the exam. I was willing to leave and take a zero. I already told you how much I appreciate you holding my baby for two hours while I wrote. That was unbelievably kind and generous. But this? Coming to my apartment? It’s completely unexpected and...”

“Inappropriate. Unprofessional.”

A soft pink rises high on her cheeks. “Those words make it sound like you have some sort of ulterior motive that would be considered misconduct, and I’m sure that’s not the case.”

Agreeing would be a lie. Something I’m not willing to do, along with admitting the truth. Not yet, anyway. “You’re an excellent student. Not only in my class so far this term—I reviewed your academic record. You’re half a semester away from graduating and I don’t want some bumps in the road to prevent you from reaching the finish line. My sister can help with the childcare and I’ll take care of the fees. Until the end of the term if you’re moving after graduation, and until the end of the calendar year if you decide to stay in the area.”

“Why would you do any of that?” she asks, stepping closer. “You don’t even know me.”

But I want to. “At least check out the daycare before you turn me down.”

“I already did. Not in person, but I looked at the website after I got home from the exam. That’s how I know it’s out of my price range. *Way* out.”

“It’s not out of mine.” I slip my phone from my back pocket and tap the screen until a call to my sister is ringing in my ear. “Hey,” I say when Anya picks up. “Any chance you could give an after-hours tour to the young woman I told you about?”

“Of course,” Anya replies.

In front of me, Mila’s eyes nearly bug out of her face. Too polite to interrupt, she waves her hands and silently mouths the word *no*.

I shake my head in response. And I smile. The one I’ve been practicing in front of the mirror because smiling isn’t my go-to. This one is friendly but not lecherous. At least, I hope it is. “The baby is napping now. Mila expects him to sleep for a couple of hours.”

“And you know this how?” Anya asks, immediately sucking in a breath as the last word is spoken. “Oh my God, Jerzey. You’re with her now, aren’t you? Off campus, on a Saturday.”

“Yes.” It’s all the answer she’s getting. Especially while Mila is standing in front of me, intent on my every word and action. I nudge my sweater sleeve up to check my watch, calculating the baby’s wakeup time and adding another hour for Mila and Ashton to get ready. Numbers are my life, but I have no idea how long it takes to feed a baby. “How about three o’clock?”

On the other end of the call, Anya sighs. “That’s fine. But are you absolutely sure about this? When I said I hope you find someone to care about, this wasn’t what I had in mind.” When I don’t answer, she sighs again. “You can’t answer because she’s right there, is that it?”

“Sounds good, Anya. Thanks.”

“Deny it until you’re blue in the face, Jerzey, but I know ‘compassion’ isn’t the motivating factor here. This gesture doesn’t just cross a line, it bloody well *leaps* over it.”

She’s not wrong. And if my sister knew all the lines I want to cross with Mila, she’d never agree to taking her on as a client.

“Mila will see you at three.” I end the call before Anya can voice any more concern. “All set. I’ll leave you Anya’s number, in case three o’clock doesn’t work out for you and you need to reschedule.”

Mila’s eyes open wider. “You’re not going to be there?”

“I didn’t want to overstep.” I cough out a low laugh when she pointedly raises one eyebrow. “*Further* overstep. I realize I’m pushing and if I’ve made you uncomfortable—”

“You haven’t. I’m just... well, I’m on my own. Ashton’s dad isn’t in the picture, neither is my family, and I don’t have friends among my academic peers. I’m not used to this level of support. And coming from a professor... I’m not sure how to react.”

“I’m not here as your teacher.”

Her eyes open wider. “Oh.”

Shit. “*Now* I’ve made you uncomfortable.” Holding up one hand when her lips part, I prevent her from disagreeing. No polite assurances will make me feel less like a creepy old man. “Here,” I say, offering the business card I stashed in my pocket earlier. “Let me give you this and leave before I make things more awkward.”

Her gaze drops to the card I place in her hand, then back to my face when she turns it over and sees the two handwritten numbers—Anya’s and mine.

“That’s my personal number. Call or text me anytime, Mila. I mean that. And if Anya’s daycare doesn’t feel like the right fit, let me know where you’d rather go. I’ll cover the fees wherever.”

“I’m sure I won’t need to message you about that, but thank you,” she says, then throws herself at me before I have the chance to speak or retreat.

Logically, I know it’s a gratitude hug. That doesn’t stop my body from reacting. Instinct and desire kick in before I can use my brain. In a blink, my arms are around her and I’m pulling her in close enough to feel her breasts against my chest. Then, because apparently, I can behave *even more* inappropriately, I press my nose to her silky hair and inhale. Deeply.

She smells so damn *good*. Feels like she belongs in my arms. She doesn’t break the close contact. If anything, she seems to melt into it, mold to my body. Her arms are twined behind my neck, and every second her fingertips toy with my hair makes me harder. With the leggings and loose, lightweight flannel shirt she’s wearing, there’s no way she doesn’t feel my cock pressing against her abdomen. But she doesn’t let go. Doesn’t back out of the hug.

Crossing another line, I drag my knuckles down her spine and splay one palm across her back. Another few inches and I could mold my hand over her ass. Squeeze it. Based on her current body language, she might even let me.

Motion across the room catches my attention—the baby shifting in his sleep. The tiny, completely vulnerable human she’s fully responsible for. The only reason I get to be this close to Mila. Only a sleazy asshole would take advantage of this situation. I’m many things, but I refuse to fall into that category, no matter how much I want her.

Decency kicks in. Clearing my throat, I release her, letting my arms fall to my sides. The loss of her body against mine is like being forced out into the cold. All I want to do is grab her and tug her close again. Okay, not *all*, but it’d be a good place to start.

When she meets my gaze, her face is flushed pink. “That was out of line.”

The bottom falls out of my stomach, my mind reeling, searching for the best way to repair the mess I’ve caused.

“I had no right to hug you,” she says before I can form a reasonable, coherent sentence. “And to keep hugging you like...*that*.” The roses blooming on her cheeks deepen in color. “I’m sorry.”

“I’m not.” The words are out of my mouth before my brain can catch up. Shit. “There’s no harm in feeling or showing emotions, and it’s understandable you’d get swept up in a wave of gratitude. Don’t give it another thought.”

“Oh, sure. Right. Thanks for being so understanding,” she says, casting her gaze toward the linoleum.

Mistake averted. Self-preservation should be my focus, not her embarrassment or unhappiness. All I need to do is turn and walk away. Close the door behind me and be satisfied that with a phone call and my bank account, I made her life a bit easier for a while. But that’s never going to be enough to satisfy me where Mila is concerned.

That wasn’t just a hug of gratitude. Yes, my desires could be clouding my judgment, but I’ve been around long enough to know the difference between a platonic touch and one that’s more. Hers was more. I’m sure of it.

I step into her personal space, slide my fingers under her chin, and tip her face up until our eyes meet. “That was a coward’s answer I just gave. I enjoyed the hug. That’s why I’m not sorry. I haven’t had anyone in my life to share that kind of connection with for a long time.”

“You’re not married? No kids?”

“Married once, a long time ago, and to the wrong person. It didn’t last. No kids with her, and never had the opportunity to have them since because there hasn’t been anyone I cared about enough to make that commitment.”

“Do you—” The motion of her head when she shakes it forces my hand from her chin.

For the best. I shouldn’t have touched her to begin with. But let her shake off the question she didn’t finish? Not happening. “Do I what?”

Rather than answer, she shakes her head again.

If I want her to be forthcoming, I owe the same to her. Or am I twisting logic to suit my purposes, because what I really want is to throw caution and respectability to the wind and tell her how I truly feel? There's no mathematical equation to solve that question, but the probability is high. So are the odds I'm going to do it.

I push my hand through my hair—an action she tracks with her eyes. Is she thinking about how gray I am? The first silver threaded its way through my previously brown hair in my late-twenties and it's not something I ever gave a shit about. But I've never been head-over-balls for a woman half my age before.

“I don't have permission from the college to do any of this. If they find out I accessed your personal information to get your address so I could come to your apartment, I'll receive formal discipline, maybe suspension, possibly termination.”

“I won't say a word, I promise.”

“Don't make that promise yet. Not until you hear the rest,” I say. “My motives aren't pure and selfless. My thoughts and feelings about you aren't professional. So, whatever you were going to ask, don't hold back. I'll answer with complete honesty. Then, if you want to file a complaint about me, I won't dispute it. You'll still have the daycare covered. Nothing changes that.”

During my confession, her bottom lip fell, transforming her mouth into an O. For a moment, she stands there, unintentionally and unknowingly turning me on with her parted lips while silently blinking up at me.

My brain screams *dirty old man!* at me, jolting me back to some semblance of decency. “My apologies, Ms. Hawkins.” I give a brief nod, then turn and take a step toward the door.

“Wait,” she says, curling her hand around my arm.

Facing her again, my gaze drops to her hand, where it lingers on my forearm. Even through the wool sweater, her touch sends awareness blazing through me. So much so, I swallow hard, consciously holding myself at bay.

“My question was going to be, do you see me in a daughterly way?”

A self-condemnatory grunt pushes past my lips. “No.”

“As a protégé? Someone you want to mentor?”

“I would be happy to work with you in that manner, but it didn’t occur to me or factor into my decisions, no.”

“Are you acting out of pity for me?”

“No.”

“Then why? You said you’d answer honestly, so...why?”

“If I could tick yes on any of those boxes you offered, this would be a lot easier. I could be a good man. Do a kind thing, pat myself on the back, then go about my business. Except I wouldn’t be here in any of those cases. I’ve never viewed students as the kids I wish I’d had, or mentees, or charity cases. Students fall into two categories—minds to be molded or deadweight to be weeded out. Until you.”

“Why am I different? Is there something about me that’s your type?” she asks so quietly, it’s almost a whisper.

I draw a long breath, buckling in for the rest of my gritty admission. One that will likely cost me everything, including my balls, if she decides to give me a knee. I will have earned it.

“I don’t have ‘a type’ and I’ve never been drawn to younger women. Ever. Then you walked into my classroom and sucker punched me simply by existing. I’m forty-two. Old enough to be your father, *and* I’m your teacher. Ethically and morally, I know it’s wrong to be attracted to you, but you’re under my skin. Always in the front of my mind, even when you’re not in the front of my class. As if that wasn’t inappropriate enough, now I’m taking advantage of your bad luck to try to get closer to you. How’s that for brutal honesty?”

The smack across the face I deserve doesn’t happen. She just blinks up at me while processing my confession. “So... this is about sex? You’re hoping that by being my childcare sugar daddy, you’ll get to have sex with me?”

The crass description makes me cringe. “I don’t want and would never have sex with you because you feel obligated or indebted.”

“But you do want to have sex with me,” she says, though her soft expression and tone make it feel more like a question.

“What I want is irrelevant and not in any way a condition of helping you. If you file a complaint with the college and I’m out of a job on Monday morning, the daycare will still be paid for. If you never want to see me again or elect to take out a billboard with my picture, telling the world I’m a dirty old man, the daycare will still be paid for. Nothing you do—or don’t do—will change my commitment. You have my word on that.” My attempt to move away is thwarted by her fingers tightening around my arm.

“You promised me complete honesty, now I’ll make the same offer to you. Ask me how *I* feel.” Without breaking eye contact, her free hand catches my other forearm, then she gives both a firm squeeze. “Ask me what *I* want, Jerzey.”

CHAPTER
FIVE

$$1+2=\heartsuit$$

MILA

By some miracle, I'm keeping my shit together. Barely, but I'm doing it. Or maybe I'm not, because this isn't real, it's just another of my indulgent fantasies. This one isn't as down and dirty as they usually are, but the theme is on point.

In my daydreams, Professor Harding always forces his way into my life, promising to take good care of me. Though, in all the other scenarios, he's referring to *physically* taking care of me. There's no mention of daycare. Or ethics. Appropriateness.

Meaning this isn't another of my temporary lapses of attentiveness in class. It's not a mental sojourn from the endless grind that is my life. This is really happening. All of it. Including me calling him by his first name and telling him to ask me how I feel about him. What I want from him. *With* him.

Holy shit, who even *am* I right now?

Ashton's *putt-putt-waaa* from across the room reminds me exactly who I am—his mother. His everything. As he is mine.

The moment Ashton's cry breaks the air, everything is automatic. I drop what I'm doing, which in this case, is holding Jerzey's strong forearms and looking into his piercing, unreadable eyes. I don't apologize or explain. That's not part of the routine because there has never been anyone around to receive either thing. I'm alone, always. Except, right now, I'm not.

Jerzey is here. In my apartment. Watching me from the spot where we hugged, and he admitted to wanting me. For real. "What can I do to help?"

I toss a quick "Nothing" over my shoulder while lifting Ashton from the bed. "That came out snippier than I intended," I say, turning to face the man I still can't believe is here. "What I meant was, there's nothing you can do at this time, but I appreciate you asking."

“That’s totally what I heard when you said ‘nothing.’” Not for the first time today, he smiles.

Also, not for the first time today, the sight of his warm, charming smile gives me butterflies. They flutter around very low in my abdomen, stirring up needs I’m not used to having.

My baby couldn’t care less about Mommy’s newfound sex drive. Rubbing his back while I rock isn’t what he wants, and he lets me—and everyone else on the third floor—know it by launching into a full-blown wail.

Warmth floods my breasts as my milk lets down. “He’s hungry,” I tell Jerzey. “He fell asleep halfway through his lunch feeding. I usually wake him to...” I’m definitely not ready to use the phrase *give him the other boob* with Jerzey. “To finish his feeding. But you knocked on the door, so I let him sleep instead. Now I need to feed him again.”

I can see the moment when what I’m *not saying* clicks in Jerzey’s brain. His eyebrows rise above the dark frames of his glasses and color splashes his handsome face. “I’ll give you privacy.”

“Thank you,” I say as I cross the room to join him near the door. “I’m sorry we didn’t get to finish our conversation. I want to.”

“Then we will. When and where are your choice.” He reaches for me, hesitating briefly, then tracing the outline of my face with the pads of his fingers. “Until then, I’m a call or text away if you need or want anything. Either of you,” he says, giving Ashton’s face a similar gentle touch.

And just like that, I understand what women mean when they say their ovaries exploded.



Later that day

MILA

“Thank you,” I say, trying not to whack the tall, silver-blond woman in the knees with Ashton’s baby carrier as I walk through the door she’s holding open. “And thank you for meeting me on your day off. I felt so bad when Jerzey called and pressured you.”

Anya raises her eyebrows at me before locking the daycare’s door behind us. “You are on a first-name basis with my brother. But of course, you are, since he was with you on a Saturday afternoon.”

“Oh, today was the first time for that. He stopped by to see if I’d called you. He’s just being nice to me. Super nice, obviously, since he’s doing this for me.” I don’t owe this woman an explanation. It shouldn’t matter what she thinks. My rambling mouth and the fire heating my cheeks disagree.

Inside a large, bright room equipped with various beautiful learning and play areas, Anya stops and faces me. “I love my brother. He’s a good man. Always by the book, even as a child. Everything is yes or no. Right or wrong. Jerzey is a man of structure and rules. In his entire forty-two years, I’ve never known him to go against them.” She tips her head toward me. “Until you.”

“I didn’t ask for this. Or anything. If you think I coerced him or that I’m taking advantage of him—”

A husky laugh cuts me off. “No, my dear. I’m quite sure you did not. If you’re behind Jerzey’s impenetrable walls, it’s by his choice. My concern is that perhaps he didn’t invite you there, but rather, he took you hostage.”

“What do you mean?” Is she implying he’s dangerous somehow? We were alone in my apartment. Though the content of our conversation broke some professional boundaries, he didn’t try to force anything on me. The opposite, in fact.

“Jerzey is a brilliant, handsome, intimidating man who’s twice your age and holds a position of power. It would be easy for any woman to be overwhelmed by him. But in your case, you may feel pressure, too. No woman should ever feel cornered by a man.”

My heart has been in high gear since I opened my apartment door and found Jerzey on the other side. Now, it’s full-on racing. “Do you think he’s trying to manipulate and control me?”

Anya releases a long breath. “No. I honestly don’t. But Jerzey’s good intentions don’t change the fact that he’s currently an authority figure in your life. You may feel obligated to accept his offer—and his personal advances—for the sake of your academic success. *I* know Jerzey would never let his emotions factor into his position as your professor, but you have no basis for that assurance.”

“He told me that. Many times, actually. I haven’t had anyone in my corner since I decided to keep the baby. Now I have Jerzey *and* you, both offering so much kindness and... more. It’s all so much. So unexpected.” The room blurs as tears well in my eyes.

“Exactly why you should think things through before acting, where my brother is concerned,” she says, handing me a folded tissue from a plastic sleeve in her pocket. “Just because Jerzey has chosen you doesn’t mean you have to reciprocate. Tell him what you want—or don’t want.” Her expression softens and she smiles, lightly squeezing my shoulder. “And don’t let his offer to pay for your daycare fees affect your feelings or choices. Your little one has a place here, regardless. *I* will cover your fees, not him. It will be good karma for me and a write-off for the business. A win all around.”

“I appreciate that. All of it, truly.”

“Good. If you’re strong for yourself, you’ll never have to rely on others for happiness.” She gives me another gentle squeeze on the shoulder, then waves me along with her. “We have an in-house gymnastics program for our tiny tots, with a

certified instructor who comes in twice a week. Wait until you see the little gym studio. It's everyone's favorite."

"I can't wait," I say, following her. Only, it's not the gym or any other part of the facilities I'm excited about. It's everything that's going to happen *after* the tour.



Later that evening

MILA

After the thorough tour of Anya's incredible daycare, I completed the necessary paperwork that'll allow me to drop Ashton off without a hitch on his first day. With copies of all the contracts and waivers—and the payment schedule form that clearly states Anya's incorporated business will cover all fees—I headed out in the early darkness of a typical late-February day.

The daycare is close to my apartment, but it still took well over an hour to get home. A new dusting of snow required extra-cautious driving—winter tires have never been in my budget, unfortunately. Then the low-fuel light came on, so I detoured to the nearest gas station, where I remembered my refrigerator needed something more substantial than half a jar of tomato sauce and a carton of milk. Going to the grocery store with a hungry baby is always fun... said nobody, ever.

By the time I've fed Ashton, bathed and changed him, gotten him settled for bed, then grabbed a quick bite for myself, it's nearly eight o'clock. Too late to text Jerzey? Or too *soon*? Given the intensity of our conversation earlier, should I let some time pass before contacting him? Anya clearly thinks so. She has a point. I'm living proof that acting impulsively can have a massive impact on your entire future.

Decision made.

I open the messaging app on my phone and tap Jerzey's contact. Because, yes, I added it the first chance I had. Who in my place wouldn't?

Hi, it's Mila. Just wanted to let you know I had a great meeting with Anya today, and everything is arranged for Ashton to go there starting Monday. Thank you so much for making this happen.

Holding my breath, I hit Send. It's an innocent message. Nothing suggestive at all. Nothing that could be used against

either of us, if anyone happens to see the text. That I'm even thinking about that possibility should probably be red flag. But messaging Jerzey, taking this next step with him, doesn't *feel* wrong. Honestly, I don't care if it is.

My attention is glued to my phone, hoping to see little dots marching in a bubble on the opposite side of the screen. Instead, it lights up with an incoming call. From Jerzey.

Heart pounding, I answer with a breathier than intended, "Hi." I sound like a schoolgirl with a crush, which is accurate, but not how I want to come across to my sexy and sophisticated silver fox of a... boyfriend? Potential boyfriend? I need to get out of my head before I make a fool of myself.

"I'm glad you had a good meeting with Anya. I called her a while ago, but she wouldn't tell me anything. Confidentiality reasons. Just so you know, she won't share any information about you with me. Not without your consent."

Is that his way of pushing for me to give that consent? Or am I reading into it because of Anya's comments that I might feel pressured.

"Still there?" he asks, when I fail to reply.

"Yes, sorry. Just thinking. Or more accurately, overthinking."

"Understandable, either way. A lot happened today. Want to talk about anything, or would you prefer I let you go?"

"Would you? Not from the call. In the big picture. If I said I didn't want this to go anywhere, would you let me go back to just being your student? No further personal contact, no repercussions?"

"Yes." The answer comes without hesitation. Without pushing for more.

"Then, let's finish our conversation from earlier. Ask me what I want."

"What do you want?" His deep voice is rougher than usual. As if he's on edge. Uncertain.

Does he really not know? I literally threw myself at him this afternoon. Not a quick hug, either. I used the opportunity to appear grateful, then milked it for more. The moment he wrapped his arms around me, I melted into his embrace. I had my fingers in his hair at the back of his neck. Wasn't it obvious how I feel?

“I want you to be more than my professor, Jerzey. I've had a crush on you since the first week of class, and that's not normal for me. And before you ask if it's because of your age, it's not. Even before I joined the chaotic ranks of being a single mother, I was always so consumed by responsibilities, I rarely noticed men in a sexual or romantic way. But you... Let's just say, once I noticed you, I couldn't stop noticing you.”

The chuckle that fills my ear is deliciously deep. “I'm going to need your former babysitter's contact information so I can send her a thank you card for no-showing.”

“True. I'm not in the 'thank you card' camp, but I guess I should drop my grudge. We wouldn't be having this conversation if I hadn't been forced to take Ashton to the exam the other day.”

“We'd still have it, just down the road. I would've waited until you graduated, but there's no way I could've let you walk out of my life without trying to keep you in it.”

My heart gallops at the romanticness of his words, but the practicality of them hits squarely in my sensible brain. “On that subject, we should probably wait until I graduate before seeing each other off campus again. It's only a few months away. I'd never forgive myself if you got in trouble because of me.”

Hooting and hollering from multiple boisterous male voices in the hallway drowns out whatever Jerzey says in reply. Whatever's going on out there causes someone or something to slam against my door. The thud, rattle, and my accompanying shriek startles Ashton awake with a wail shrill enough to pierce unconditioned eardrums.

“What the hell is happening?” Jerzey’s voice booms over the cacophony surrounding me.

“Typical Saturday night.” The volume I have to use to be heard makes Ashton cry harder. “I have to go!” I stab the button to end the call and toss my phone aside. Lying so I’m curled around my baby, I push my shirt up, free my breast, and guide Ashton to the best comfort I can provide in these surroundings. “There you go, sweetie. Mommy’s here. Everything will be okay, I promise.” One day. Just maybe not today.

CHAPTER
SIX

$$1+2=\heartsuit$$

JERZEY

Thank God my house is nestled in an executive neighborhood near the campus. Snow tires, four-wheel drive, and ten minutes of aggressive driving after losing contact with Mila, I'm parked in front of her shitty apartment complex. For the last time, if I have any say about it. That's a conversation for later.

I slam the SUV's door and bolt for her building, shouldering through a throng of tenants on their way in and out.

"Watch it, asshole," a guy balancing a case of beer on his shoulder calls as I push past him with zero concern or manners.

"Hey, that's Hardass Harding," another one says from behind me when I break through the crowd and into the grungy lobby. "What the fuck's he doing here?"

"Professor's gonna give somebody special tutoring tonight," someone heckles as I stab the elevator button.

"Or someone's earning an A the *hard* way!" Raucous laughter follows the vulgar comment.

Hands clenched into fists at my sides, I ignore the fool who has a death wish, and watch the elevator light count down from three—Mila's floor—where it paused a hell of a lot longer than necessary. Too fucking many minutes later, the silver door slides open and eight large, drunk idiots pour out.

This group ignores me. They're too busy cursing and whooping to notice me.

The elevator floor is wet and sticky beneath my boots. I use my elbow on the keypad buttons and stand with my legs braced for any sudden jerking motions, because the last thing I want to do is touch the grimy brown paneled walls. Even on a non-party night, I doubt it's clean in here. It turns my stomach

picturing Mila and her baby using this elevator daily. And the thought of *her* being the subject of drunken taunting...

The anger roiling in my chest propels me from the elevator and down the hallway. Half a dozen people loiter around the open entrance of the apartment across from hers. Music and voices reverberate from within. A distinctly skunky scent wafts out of the doorway, and the sharp sound of breaking glass draws a round of amplified shouting and laughing.

Typical Saturday night. Mila's words ring in my ears. This is normal to her.

Not for long.

I knock lightly, not wanting to scare her baby any more than he already was when she hung up. No answer.

"No, man, she'll never hear that over the party. You gotta pound on it. Like this."

I catch the helpful oaf's fist before it reaches Mila's door. I'm not the biggest or strongest man around, but I still elicit a clenched-tooth grimace when I squeeze his hand. "Never pound on this door again. Ever. Understand?"

"Yeah. Yeah, I got it." He shakes out his hand after I release it. "I was just trying to help," he says, slinking into the open apartment.

The remaining gawkers follow him inside, making a show of slamming the door in my face.

Works for me.

The closed door muffles the party noise enough for my next careful knocking to yield an answer.

"Jerzey," Mila says, holding the door open with her hip and waving me inside. "What are you doing here?"

"Getting you and Ashton away from the *typical Saturday night* happening across the hall." I reach for the baby cradled in her arms, stopping short and meeting her gaze. "I'll hold him while you pack."

“*Pack?*” Her eyes open wide enough to see white nearly all the way around her pretty dark-brown irises. “What do you mean, *pack?*”

“Exactly what it sounds like. Pack everything you both need, as much of it as you can fit in whatever bags you have. I’m taking you home.”

“Home.” For a single-consonant word, she manages to draw it out. As if it’s some new concept she’s trying to wrap her head around. “As in, to your place?”

“Yes,” I say. Soon, it’ll be our place. The minute she walks through the door, if I have my way. “It’s a big house with lots of bedrooms and bathrooms. You can probably avoid me entirely if you choose to.”

“I wouldn’t choose to. But staying at your house is the complete opposite of waiting until I graduate to start seeing each other off campus.”

No point in telling her I didn’t intend to agree with that plan. I drop one hand to my side and push the other through my hair. “I won’t leave you and Ashton here after the shit I heard and saw tonight.”

Her spine visibly stiffens. “We barely know each other and only discovered a few hours ago that we’re mutually interested, and now you’re demanding I pack my things and go to your house? I know how crappy my existence must look to someone in your position, but try to see it through my lens. If I give up what I have to follow you blindly and you change your mind—”

“I won’t. And if *you* do, I’ll help you get a better apartment. Even if you don’t want to be with me, I can’t live with myself if you and Ashton are in a place like this.”

“Anya warned me about you.”

Now, it’s my spine that goes rigid. My sister doesn’t pull punches. About anything. And I know she doesn’t approve of my feelings for a student who’s half my age. “What did she say?”

“That you never let anyone behind your impenetrable walls. That I should evaluate whether you’ve invited me there, or taken me hostage.”

Hell of a warning, Anya. “And after I commanded you to pack and come home with me, you’ve decided I’m trying to take you hostage.”

“I’ve decided it’s a bit of both.” Her expression softens as she moves close enough that the arms cradling her son connect with my chest. “And that I’m okay with it, even though it’s overwhelming.”

“Does that mean you’ll pack your stuff, even if it’s so I can get you a decent hotel room for now?”

“It means I’ll pack an overnight bag and let you take us to your house for tonight.”

Drunk people in the corridor bump the door, startling her closer to me. Instinctively, I wrap my arms around her. Around them both. “Let’s get you out of here.”

“Okay.” When she smiles up at me, there’s so much warmth, it’s as if she’s channeling sunshine. “I’m honestly excited to have one night where Ashton’s crying is the only sound that wakes me. Do you still want to hold him while I get our stuff packed?”

“Yes, but first, this...” I thread both hands through her hair and cup the back of her head, then lean in and seal my lips to hers. Kissing her for the first time while the baby is between us isn’t how I imagined it’d happen, all those times I stroked my cock while picturing this moment. The kiss isn’t instantly blistering hot and urgent. But the heat is there. Simmering, building with each press and release, each mingled breath.

Her scent winds through my senses. Like earlier, it’s not a fragrance. Just a heady mixture of warmth, comfort, and passion. She smells like home. My home.

Unable to resist, I stroke into her mouth, teasing her tongue with mine. The same way I’ll use it between her legs when I make her come for the first time. And the hundredth.

By the time we break apart to catch our breath, my cock is thick and throbbing behind my zipper. I want more of her lips. I want every part of her.

“That was probably tame to you, but I’ve never been kissed like that,” she says, blinking at me with wide-open, glassy eyes.

“There’s nothing tame in how I feel about you.”

“But you never even looked at me in class.”

“Because there’s nothing tame in how I feel about you,” I say, chuckling as I drag the pad of my thumb across her soft lower lip. “Stealing glances was all I could do. Anything else would’ve made it impossible to keep my distance.”

“Are you going to keep your distance when we’re in your house?”

“I’m going to respect you and let you set the pace. Whatever happens will be your choice. No pressure. No rush.”

“You promise?” she asks, slaying me with her beautiful brown eyes, so full of trust.

“Always, sweetheart.” After a step back, I carefully transfer the baby to my arms. “I’ve got him.” I nod toward the single room they’ve been living in for too long. It’s time to take them home.



JERZEY

Getting them out of that shithole and here, where they belong, was no simple task. When we wheeled the stroller into the corridor, the partiers got out of our way quick enough. They then had to make way again so we could return the stroller to her apartment. In the relatively short amount of time since my arrival, people had made both elevators unusable. Someone had broken the overhead light in one and the second was covered in vomit. As in, *covered*. Floor and walls.

I could've carried the stroller down the three flights of concrete stairs, but I was happy to agree when Mila suggested leaving the stroller behind for now.

Our next stop was the nearest open-until-midnight big-box department store because Mila didn't own a baby monitor. Not a problem when you live in a single room. Here, she has all the space she wants, and if she decides to be in a separate room from her sleeping infant, she needs to know he's okay.

An hour after she took Ashton into the guest room to feed him and get him to sleep, I'm sitting on the living room couch with a glass of whiskey in hand and my legs stretched out in front of a roaring fire. Much-needed decompressing.

Today was a lot. This morning, Mila was still just a student in my class and my secret obsession. Now, things are out in the open between us. The woman I've craved for months is upstairs, in my home. If I had my way, her stuff would be in the master already. Unpacked, permanently stowed away in our shared room. But I promised to take things at her speed and I meant it. I just need to turn down my intensity before I scare her away. Because, despite my promise to let her go if she chooses, that may be the one thing I'm not able to do for her.

She's been mine for a day. We've shared one kiss. By societal standards, way too soon to make big declarations or

commitments. But I'm ready to. I don't need more time or more sex acts. I'm sure. I'm ready. There's no logic or formula for what I'm feeling. I just know.

I tip the tumbler to my lips and take a long swallow of Jameson, releasing an audible hiss as the smooth liquid rolls its perfect burn down my throat.

“Does that sound mean you like it or hate it?”

I shift to look over my shoulder at the source of the question, my mouth simultaneously going dry *and* watering at the sight of her. “Love it. But not everyone does. Whiskey tends to be an acquired taste. Ever had it?”

Her damp hair moves in waves when she shakes her head. “Aside from the one time I'm fairly sure aliens commandeered my body, I didn't drink much before getting pregnant.”

I'd like to commandeer her body right now. Her baggy, faded t-shirt stops high on her thighs and she's not wearing pants. My brain is practically short-circuiting just from looking at her. It's a miracle I was able to form full words to answer her question.

“Baby's asleep?” I ask, motioning at the portable receiver portion of the monitor she holds.

She nods while pulling her lower lip between her teeth. Another innocent gesture that shouldn't turn me on. Tell that to my dick.

“His little tummy is nice and full. With the wonderful, comfy bed and peaceful quiet, he should sleep for six hours.”

Dirty old man that I am, my gaze drops to her tits at the mention of feeding her baby. I shouldn't get hard—*harder*—thinking about Mila breastfeeding. But I do. I get hard as fucking steel. I uncross my legs, spreading them to make room for my cock as I drop my bare feet to the carpeted floor.

She sets the monitor on the coffee table, then hovers between it and the couch, swaying just enough to cause the hem of her t-shirt to shift back and forth across the extreme upper portion of her legs. Is she wearing panties underneath?

She must be. There's no reason she wouldn't be. Though, the same could be said about pants.

My grip on the whiskey glass tightens and my other fingers flex and release with the urge to reach forward and touch her. Stroking off in the shower half an hour ago didn't even take the edge off. Pretty sure nothing will except burying myself inside her.

“Mind if I sit?”

“You never have to ask permission. For anything. I know I should ease up and give you time to adjust, but I can't, because I know what I want. You. Here, with me. Permanently. So, when I say make yourself at home, I mean it. If it's mine, it's yours. Yours and Ashton's. I want you both here.”

“I love the way you talk to me,” she says, moving closer. “And the way you're so sure about wanting me.”

“Sweetheart, you have no idea how sure I am.”

Instead of settling beside me on the couch, she straddles my hips. “Tell me.”

I groan at the press of her pussy against my lap. What little filter or control I have with her disappears as her scent envelops me. “I'd put a ring on your finger and another baby in your belly right now if you let me. That's how sure I am.”

“You can't do either of those things tonight,” she whispers while rocking back and forth. “You don't have a ring and I probably can't get pregnant right now because of breastfeeding.”

Whether she intends it or not, all I hear in those words is *yes*.

“Do you want me to give you those things, Mila?” I cup her hips and pull her tighter to me, palming her soft ass and meeting her grinding motion with firm thrusts. “My ring on your finger? My cock filling you up, every day and night, making your beautiful body ripe and round with another baby?”

“I... Oh... *Jerzey*.” A soft moan slips through her lips and into my ear. “I think I’m going to—I think I might...”

“Let it happen, baby. Ride me until you come.”

Her breath hitches, then she bears down, rubbing herself off against the throbbing, steel-hard bulge in my jeans. Head thrown back, she cries out—the sexiest combination of moaning, breathing, and giddiness I’ve heard in my entire fucking life—before collapsing onto my shoulder.

“Oh my God,” she whispers, giggling softly. “That’s never happened to me before. I’ve never, you know...*that*.”

“Tell me.” I slide my hands under her t-shirt, not even attempting to hold back my groan when my palms connect with the skin I’ve been fantasizing about touching since she walked into my classroom. “I want to hear you say the words.”

“I’ve never come when I’m with someone.”

Possessive pride roars inside me. “Never?”

Face buried against my neck, she shakes her head. “I don’t do hookups, I’ve never had a serious boyfriend, and I’ve only had sex three times, the last of which—when I got pregnant—I don’t even remember.”

Jesus. She’s practically a virgin. Far too fresh and innocent to be with a man my age. A man who wants to simultaneously worship and defile her.

I skim my fingers up her back, reveling in the feminine hum of pleasure she makes. “You didn’t answer my question before.”

Another giggle warms my neck. “I got distracted.”

“You want to answer it now, or should I distract you again?” I slide my hands forward, filling my palms with the lower curves of her breasts. Warm, firm, and full, they’re perfect.

She gasps as my thumbs stroke back and forth over her nipples. “Distract me.”

I give up contact only long enough to peel the t-shirt over her head. “Fuck, Mila.” I release a low whistling breath as I take her in. “You’re so damn beautiful and sweet. What are you doing here with an old man like me?”

“Feeling freer, safer, and more cherished than ever in my life,” she says, removing my shirt. “And falling for you.” She traces the lines of my pecs and the trail of silver and brown hair that runs down the middle of my abs and into my jeans. Pink rises on her cheeks as her eyes lock with mine. “Falling pretty fast and hard, I think.”

“Keep falling, sweetheart,” I say, cupping her nape and drawing her down. “I’m right here to catch you. Always.” I breathe the words against her mouth, then seal them with a long, deep kiss.

A hint of mint greets my tongue first, then it’s all Mila. She tastes as good as she smells, like warmth and comfort. Like home.

Her arms twine behind my head and her fingers weave through my hair, sending sparks racing from my scalp to my cock. Pressed tight against me, she’s pure heat. It radiates from every part of her as rides my lap, rhythmically chasing her pleasure.

For a split-second, she tenses, her breath hitching mid-kiss. Then her moan vibrates through me as she grinds on me, hard and fast, while she comes.

“So beautiful.” I cup her chin, then her tits, as she pushes back from my chest. I lick my lips while strumming her peaked nipples. So rosy and hard. “Can I touch you this way? Because of the breastfeeding, I need to know if something doesn’t feel good for you.”

“They’re sensitive, but your hands feel good.”

“What about my mouth?” I lean forward, trace the edge of one dusky-pink areola with my tongue, then cover the full nipple with my lips and suck it into my mouth.

“*Oh...*” Arching to press her breast against my mouth raises her core from my lap, and I take advantage of the gap by

sliding my hand between her legs.

I tug her panties aside, growling against the tit in my mouth as I sink a single finger into her silky heat. So wet. So tight. So mine.

I wedge my other hand between our bodies and get my pants open. Take my cock out. Swap it for the finger in her pussy, then part her folds with the tip and push inside a little.

She whimpers, her muscles tensing against the intrusion.

I've only had sex three times.

Freer, safer, and more cherished than ever in my life.

Falling for you.

She deserves better than me claiming her like this.

I release her nipple with a wet pop and meet her wide-eyed gaze. Lips puffy and glistening from our hungry kissing, pupils blown wide, she's so fucking vulnerable looking, it almost hurts. *Almost.*

"Tell me to stop," I grit out, hanging on to the last sliver of control.

The firelight's glow bounces on her dark hair as she shakes her head. "Don't stop." Her eyes pinch closed as I push past her body's defenses, filling her with every last inch of my cock.

Fire licks at the base of my shaft. Buried to the balls in her vise-like pussy, it takes everything I have not to fucking explode. Between our joined bodies, I press two fingers against her clit, rolling it between them until her body responds by rocking into my touch. "Just like the other times. Ride me, sweetheart."

Impaled on my cock, she plants her hands on my chest and leans forward. A soft moan passes over her parted lips as she rolls her hips, grinding her clit on my fingers.

I hold still, letting her set the pressure and pace. Even when her breathing quickens and her movements get short and jerky, I hold fucking still.

“*Oh... I... you...*” Her moan fills my head. The sexiest fucking sound in the world. Then she’s pressing harder, rocking faster. “*Jerzey...*”

My control snaps as she tips over the edge, squeezing my cock so fucking tight, my eyes roll back in my head. “Good girl. Use me, baby. Take what you need. Use that tight pussy to milk me fucking dry.” I thrust upward, meeting her grinding hips.

She cries out as I draw her nipple into my mouth again, sucking hard as I unload deep inside her body. Panting, she molds herself to my chest with her arms tucked tightly around me.

There’s no going back now. She’s mine. “Sit up, sweetheart,” I say, gently easing her off of my chest. My gut tightens when she grimaces while my cock slips out of her body. “I was too rough.” I’m on my feet, scooping her up, into my arms, before she can answer. “I should’ve made love to you gently the first time.”

“I’m okay, I promise.” She wraps her arms around my neck, snuggling in while I grab the baby monitor and head to the master suite. “Besides, I might not have come three times if you’d made love to me gently. And I *really* liked that”

“Three times is just the warm-up, baby girl.”

Her soft laugh is warm on my skin. When I don’t join in, she pulls back enough to look into my eyes. “You were serious?”

“One hundred percent.” In the bedroom, I lay her out on the mattress, wiggle the panties down her legs and toss them aside, then shoulder her thighs apart and settle on my stomach between them.

“What are you doing?”

“Seeing how many orgasms it’ll take before you forget how to count,” I say, then seal my mouth over her pussy.

CHAPTER
SEVEN

$$1+2=\heartsuit$$

Sunday morning

MILA

The digital clock beside Jerzey's king-size bed reads 5:05 when I open my eyes. The green light is still glowing on the baby monitor. Ashton hasn't made a peep, but my body knows it's past his usual time to wake up.

My breasts are full and heavy, already leaking from the tips, and my milk hasn't even let down yet. I grab a couple of tissues from the box on the nightstand and hold them over my nipples as I quietly slide away from Jerzey's sleeping form.

I didn't get the good night's sleep I mentioned before we left my apartment. After making me come with his tongue—twice—Jerzey rolled me onto my side and spooned in behind me. Then made me come with his fingers while he slid his cock along my folds without entering me. I could have passed out from orgasmic bliss then, but he wasn't finished.

He rolled onto his back and commanded me to sit on his face. Something I already knew from being in his classroom—when Jerzey Harding gives directions, you follow them. So I did. And came for the seventh time. *Seventh.*

Once I was basically boneless from so many orgasms, he settled between my legs and made love to me gently, managing to pull two more from my wrung-out body before he came deep inside me.

I should probably be worried about that. The last doctor I saw told me most women who breastfeed don't get their cycle back until their baby's diet is supplemented with formula or cereal. For purely economic reasons, I went the exclusive route. I haven't had a period yet. The odds I'll get pregnant are low. And if I do...

I'd put a ring on your finger and another baby in your belly right now if you let me.

Did he mean it, or were they just words he said so I'd open my legs?

No, he wouldn't do that. First of all, because he wouldn't need to. Jerzey may be intimidating, but he's also jaw-droppingly handsome and sinfully sexy. He could have his pick of women to fuck. He picked me.

And second, if all he wanted was sex for *his* satisfaction, he wouldn't have cared if I came even once, let alone *eight times*.

So, naïve as it may be, yes, I believe he meant the words he said. All of them. And I meant the ones I said to him about falling hard and fast. I can't be in love with him already. Logically, I know this. But tell that to my heart.

I tiptoe from the master bedroom, increasing speed once I'm in the hallway. All the living areas have soft, plush carpeting. The kind that swallows your toes as you walk. It, and everything else in the massive house, is high-end and probably cost a fortune.

If it's mine, it's yours. Yours and Ashton's. I want you both here.

How is it even possible for him to feel this way about me? How long can it really last?

The guest room door barely makes a *snick* when I open it. From across the room, I can see Ashton's body shifting beneath the blanket I tucked around him last night.

"Mommy's here," I whisper, sliding onto the bed beside him. He's been an easy feeder since birth, but nursing him while we're both lying down is the most convenient, especially since we shared my futon bed. Night feedings are less exhausting when all I have to do is roll over and put a boob in his mouth, then switch sides and fall asleep while he nurses. Curling my body around his, I guide his gently smacking mouth to my breast.

Because he slept longer than usual, I'm full nearly to bursting, and the milk lets down in a rush. The tissue I'm holding on my upper breast immediately becomes soaked and useless. In front of me, Ashton chokes on the too-fast flow and pops off the nipple, sputtering and softly crying.

I curse under my breath and pull his blanket over both breasts until enough of the eager-to-exit milk has sprayed out to slow the flow. “So much for *that* blanket.” I pluck it off, then bring him on to latch again. “All better now,” I coo. “Sorry, sweetie.”

I let the oxytocin do its relaxing thing. Eyes closed, I press a kiss to the top of his head, smiling as his tiny hand gently brushes over my skin. It’d be so easy to drift off, but I have to wait until he’s on the second breast, or he’ll wake Jerzey by crying when the first breast is done. Next time, I’ll remember to turn off the baby monitor before I sneak out.

Next time. I told him I’d stay for one night, now I’m thinking of more mornings like this. Assuming there’ll be more. That in the light of day, after having his way with me, Jerzey will still want more.

My eyes pop open with the onslaught of second-guessing-everything thoughts—and land on Jerzey.

He smiles at me from where he’s leaning on the doorframe, shirtless, hands casually in the pockets of a pair of gray lounge pants. “Morning, beautiful.”

Very few people have seen adult me naked. I can count them on one hand. Aside from the lactation nurse in the hospital, nobody has ever watched me breastfeed my baby, yet, I don’t feel the urge to cover up. Just like last night, the way Jerzey looks at me strips away my shyness. And the expression on his face now, as his heated gaze locks onto my breasts... Not only do I *not* reach for a blanket, I skate my hand over my breast, cupping it as if offering it up.

“What does it feel like?” he asks, stepping into the room.

“When the baby’s nursing?” My cheeks heat as he stands at the edge of the bed behind me, giving him a bird’s-eye view of every naked inch of me. I have a view, too, though. Of his cock, thick and tall inside the loose pants.

He’s not turned off by what he sees. He’s aroused. And making no attempt to hide it.

“I’m sure not all women or babies have the same experience, but to me, it’s like a gentle tugging when he’s suckling.”

“Different than when I sucked your nipples last night?”

Sparks ripple through me at the memory. “Yes, that was a different good sensation.”

“So, it feels good while you’re feeding the baby?”

“It does to me. The body releases hormones while nursing, and I find it pleasurable. In a relaxing way,” I add quickly. I shouldn’t be getting turned-on right now, but the hum between my legs is undeniable. It takes all my willpower not to reach over and curl my fingers around Jerzey’s cock.

His tongue slides over his bottom lip. “There wasn’t any milk last night.”

“No, there wasn’t,” I say, sounding a little too much like a phone-sex operator. “Something has to stimulate the milk to let down. It’s usually the sound of the baby crying, or when the breasts are really full and ready to be emptied, like mine this morning, because he slept longer than usual. Once the milk lets down, it starts flowing out, whether the baby is on the nipple or not.”

“I can see that.”

The stream-like spraying that choked Ashton and soaked his blanket has slowed, but my full breast is still leaking, and there’s a pearly drop sitting on the hard peak.

“Do you—” I snap my mouth closed.

“Ask me,” he says, his voice low and rough with desire.

“Do you want to taste it?”

The rumble in his chest shoots straight to my core. “Fuck, yes.”

“Wait,” I say, gently popping the baby from my breast. Careful not to disturb his semi-sleeping state, I slip from the bed and set the baby bumpers around him. Then I turn to the man with the hungry eyes, take his hand, and lead him back to

the bed we shared. Lying on my back, I cup my breasts in offering. “Now.”

His mouth seals over the hard peak with a moan. The flat of his tongue presses the underside of my nipple, pushing on it as he sucks. Different from last night.

Familiar tingling warmth floods my breast, and an unwelcome thought flares in my mind—I shouldn’t be doing this.

He growls when I try wiggling away, his gaze loaded with heat and warning. Then his hand is between my legs. His fingers stroking into me easily because I’m so wet.

I shouldn’t be turned-on, but it all feels *so* good. “God, that,” I say as he presses the mount of his palm against my clit. “Harder.” My body wants what it wants. I open wider for him to fuck me with his fingers. Arch my hips higher to get more pressure on my clit. Then everything is white-hot. Connected. My breast, my clit. My heart. My hands on his head, holding him in place as I come, hard and fast.

“Mila.” Jerzey’s breath raises goose bumps on my sensitive skin. Then he’s between my legs, cradling my face as his thick cock slides deep inside me. “My beautiful, sexy Mila.” Holding himself above me, he pins me with his gaze, rhythmically fucking any lingering shame out of me as he pushes me into another orgasm. One that rolls through me in languorous ebbing and flowing waves.

His body tenses as he thrusts into me one final time, coming while he’s buried deep inside me. The last tremors are still rippling through his taut muscles when my tears break loose.

“I’m sorry,” I say, turning my face as far from view as possible. “I don’t know what’s wrong with me.”

“Nothing, baby. There’s not one single thing wrong with you.” He rolls off and to his side, pulling me into his arms, crushed tight to his chest and tucked under his chin. “*Sssh...*” he says, pressing his lips to my head. “Talk to me. Let me help.”

“I... it’s just...” A hiccupping sob wracks my body.

“Breathe, baby.”

I take a deep breath, letting it out slowly as I try to get control of my ricocheting thoughts and feelings. “Yesterday morning, I was a single mom trying to make it through college and do right by her baby so we could have a good and happy life. Now I’m shackled up with my math professor, having unprotected sex and doing all these sex things that I didn’t even know *were* sex things, wondering if I’m the worst mother in the world for making all these crazy, impulsive choices which will probably come back to bite me in the ass.”

“Sweetheart, look at me.” Cupping my face, he shifts us so our eyes meet. “The only thing that’s going to bite your sexy ass is me, and only if you want me to, though now that I’m thinking about it, I really hope you want me to.”

A half-sob, half-snort bubbles out. “That’s not helping.”

“It made you laugh, so I disagree.” He’s an intense man, which makes the warm smile on his face that much more calming. He watches and waits until my breathing evens out, then kisses me softly. “As for the rest, you’re a great student and an incredible mother. Your level of commitment and love... nothing’s going to change those things. I’d like to think living here will make your life easier and happier. I’m sure as hell going to do everything in my power to make it that way.”

“Why?” I whisper. “Why me?”

“Because my heart told me you’re the one, the first time I saw you.”

“But your heart was wrong before, when you got married.” A residual sob pushes up from my chest. “What if it’s wrong again?”

“That wasn’t my heart’s fault, sweetheart, it was my head’s. Sienna and I were good on paper. A sensible, passionless equation with an obvious beginning and end.”

“What does that make us?” I ask.

“Unexpected addition.”

“I like that,” I say, running my fingertips over the salt-and-pepper stubble covering his strong jaw. I smile at him as warmth spreads through my chest. This time, it has nothing to do with biology, and everything to do with math.

CHAPTER EIGHT

$$1+2=\heartsuit$$

One and a half weeks later

JERZEY

Mila was nervous about returning to class last week, but it worked out fine. I treated her the way I always had, barely sparing her a glance, rarely calling on her even though her hand goes up for every damn question. Nobody would guess that she's now parking her little beater car in my heated garage. Or that she's heating up my bed—our bed—with her sexy fucking body.

The exam issue was easy to handle—I had my teaching assistant mark them. Yes, I double-checked them all afterward, but that could never be considered a conflict, even if the truth about my relationship with Mila surfaced.

Even having found our groove on campus, I was bouncing off the walls as much as the students by the final class on Friday. Spring break has never been a big deal to me. I don't travel. Don't socialize. Generally, I didn't give a shit about having time off because my life revolved around my career. Until Mila.

And until Ashton. It didn't faze me when I learned Mila had a baby. It didn't change how much I wanted to be with her. I knew I'd be a good set of helping hands when she needed them. But I didn't expect to fall for the kid as easily as I'd fallen for his mother.

"You worked your magic. You can put him back in the stroller," Mila says, smiling at me as we walk through the ghost town of a mall. That's why we're chancing it, being out in public together. During spring break, the majority of students and faculty head for destinations with better weather than our city's current deep-freeze.

"I like carrying him. I think he likes it, too."

Her face lights up even brighter. "He loves it when you hold him."

There's that L-word again. We've both been sliding it in a lot. Inserting in places that don't feel like pressure. Where it means something, but doesn't have to mean too much. I'm ready for it to mean everything. Yet, for the first time in my life, I'm afraid to be direct.

Things are great. Pretty damn close to perfect. I don't want to spook her by moving too fast—said the man who tugged her panties aside and fucked her raw on the first night. That ballsy crossing of the line worked out. Telling her I love her will, too. Just need to find the right moment. One she'll always remember, that she'll tell our kids and grandkids about.

It'll be this week. We have five more full days together. Lots of potential perfect moments.

I change angles so she can see Ashton's face over my shoulder. "Is he asleep up there?"

"Oh, Jerzey." She stops in her tracks, clapping a hand over her mouth before breaking into a giggling fit. "You have spit up all the way down your back. Here, let me take him."

"What's a little vomit between best buddies?"

She pauses in the middle of making the pass off with a level of finesse that'd have anyone believing we'd done it hundreds of times. "Best buddies? That's very sweet."

"It's the truth."

Mila turns away quickly, but not before I see her smile falter. She worries about Ashton more than anything. All the normal motherly stuff like health and developmental milestones, but about his emotional heart, too. About it getting broken. By me.

I shrug my coat off and stuff it into the bottom of the stroller. When I glance up, she's red-nosed and glassy-eyed, staring in at the baby, clearly trying to regain her composure. I'm pushing up to a stand when a guy about my size and her age walks out of a nearby store, and stops in his tracks when he spots Mila.

"Hey, it's you," he says, stepping closer.

Confusion clouds her expression and she shakes her head. “Sorry, I think you have me confused for someone else.”

“No, definitely not. Kinda lost track of your name, but I never forget a pretty face.”

I’m ready to step in and break up his incorrect and unwanted trip down memory lane when he says, “Especially when the owner of the pretty face can pound tequila on par with the frat brothers, and do, you know, other things.”

Every drop of color drains from Mila’s cheeks. Her lips open and close, open and close. Her skin might as well be transparent because I can see wheels turning, the gears clicking into place.

Then frat boy notices the stroller she’s holding. Looks inside, then back to Mila. His lips and fingers move. Counting. “Holy shit. Is that—is he—” He blows out a long breath while scrubbing one hand down his face. “Am I the father?”

I give Mila three silent blinks. Then I step in. “I’m the father.”

“Oh, fuck, sorry, man. Just ignore me. I had her confused with someone else. Happens a lot, you know what I mean?”

“No, I don’t,” I say, wrapping my arms around her and pressing my lips to her temple.

“Of course, of course.” The guy backs away as fast as socially acceptable, tossing an awkward wave in our direction before he turns and practically bolts for the nearest exit.

“If you want me to go after him for any reason—”

“I don’t.” The tears she was trying to contain break the precarious dam she built, rolling down her face in rivers too fast for me to keep up with by swiping the pads of my thumbs over her cheeks.

“Come here,” I say, turning her and pulling her into my arms with her face pressed against my shirt. “He’s sex guy number three, the one you can’t remember?” At her nod, I have to fight back the urge to chase the little prick down and beat the shit out of him for taking a woman that drunk to bed.

Pummeling him won't change anything. The truth is, I wouldn't want it to.

"He's Ashton's father," she whispers.

"No, he's not. A father is a man who loves his children. Who's around to teach, guide, and care for them, for their entire lives." Cupping her face, I tilt it up and look into her eyes. "I'm Ashton's father. I love him. I missed the first four months but I'm not going to miss another day. I'm always going to be here for him. For him, his brothers and sisters, and his mother. I love you, Mila."

"I love you, too," she says, wrapping her arms around me the way she did the first time. The way she'll be doing for the rest of her life, because I'm never letting her go.

"Not quite as romantic as I wanted that moment to be, but now that it's out of the way, I hope you won't get tired of hearing me say it."

"Never." Her eyes go wide as I dip down to kiss her pretty lips. "Someone might see, and it could get back to the dean."

"I'm taking care of that when class is back in session. I don't want to sneak around, hold back, or lie. I want the world to know I'm the luckiest man alive because you love me."

"You could lose your job."

"It's just a job. I'll get another one if they fire me for choosing love. As long as I have you and our son, I have everything I need."

EPILOGUE

$$4 + 1 = \heartsuit$$

July, three years later

MILA

Jerzey's head turns at the sound of my heels clicking on the kitchen floor. "You look beautiful. As always," he says, his gaze running up and down my body, making heat pool low in my abdomen.

My body has already forgotten the three orgasms Jerzey gave me before my morning shower. It wants more. The only thing preventing me from giving in to the buzzy feeling is the time.

Jerzey is *very* efficient with his fingers and tongue. If I walked over to where he's leaning on the counter, looking like every woman's hottest silver-fox fantasy, and asked him to make me come in thirty seconds or less, he could do it. He'd *love* to do it. But one orgasm would lead to at least two more, because Jerzey refuses to break the "three, minimum" rule. Then I'd be a mess of sweat, tangled hair, and dripping cum. Another shower would be required before going to the office. And I've already been late once this week, for exactly that reason.

Tamping down my insatiable appetite for him, I give him as innocent a kiss as possible, giggling as I swat his wandering hands from the journey beneath my pencil skirt.

"Thank you," I say, accepting the travel mug of coffee and zipped-up lunch bag he hands me. My husband takes such good care of me. In the bedroom. The kitchen. In every aspect of our lives. "What's on the schedule for today?"

Everything is detailed on our large, shared calendar in the pantry. I already know his plans for Ashton and Rowan, but I love listening to Jerzey in "daddy mode," so I always ask.

"Since the weatherman got it right and the weather is perfect, we're going to enjoy the splash pad this afternoon. This morning, we have 10:30 gymnastics at the daycare. Ashton's favorite. Not sure how much of the class Rowan will

have patience to sit through, but I'll give her extra cuddles if it's a fussy day."

"You're such a good daddy."

"Say that when we're alone later." His gray-blue eyes twinkle with heat, and the smile he gives me nearly causes my panties to melt. "After gymnastics, we'll be home for lunch, then naps—including mine, if you want to come home on your break," he adds, giving me a sexy wink.

"If I came home for lunch, I might never go back."

"Then you better stay at the office," he says, coming up behind me to wrap me in his strong, warm arms. "And I'll have dinner ready when you get home."

"Just because you took an extended sabbatical to be with the kids doesn't mean you have to do everything around the house. Making my lunch every day, cleaning, cooking all the meals. We can share the load."

"It's a pleasure, not a load, sweetheart. I love having this time with our babies. I love taking care of my family. I love watching my beautiful, intelligent wife grow and thrive in her career."

"Thank you," I whisper, fighting back happy tears.

"Thank *you*." He turns me so we're face-to-face, cupping my chin in one strong yet gentle hand. "For giving me everything I wanted, then infinitely more. I love you, Mila."

"I love you, too. So much." The tears break free. Controlling my emotions with Jerzey has always been next to impossible, but there are times when it's even harder than normal.

"Hey." His voice is gentle. So is his touch as he wipes away the moisture with his thumbs. "Why the tears, baby?"

"Hormones."

His eyebrows draw together. Being mathematically minded, not to mention very in tune with everything about me, he's probably calculating where I'm at in my monthly cycle.

“Not PMS hormones. Pregnancy hormones.”

His eyes open wide, his gaze dropping to my body, then meeting my eyes again. “You’re pregnant?”

I pull my bottom lip between my teeth and give a little nod.

“I thought you wanted to wait, get a couple more years of seniority in at the office before taking another maternity leave.”

“It’s just a job. I’ll get another one if they don’t like me choosing love and family.” I mimic the words he said to me the day he claimed Ashton as his son. The first time he told me he loves us, loves me. “I just... I woke up one day and realized I didn’t want to wait for something I know will bring us so much joy. Are you upset I didn’t tell you, that I made the decision without you?”

He answers with a long, deep kiss. The kind that buckles my knees and makes my heart overflow.

“I guess you’re not upset,” I say, breathless and more in love with him than ever.

“I want everything you do, sweetheart. You’re my heart. You and our family. Always. Forever.”

“And you’re mine.” I throw my arms around his neck and melt against him. “Make me late for work,” I whisper, rubbing my breasts against his chest.

And he does, for the second time this week.



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Fall isn't only about changing leaves and saying goodbye to summer, it's also all about going back to school. Pack up and head back to the dorms because class is in session and love is in the air. Who will find their happily ever after this time—the nerd, the jock, or maybe the professor?

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A small-town girl with some big-city experience, Karla resides in Southwestern Ontario with her husband and two teenagers. She studied fashion design in college and spent 20+ years working in that industry before succumbing to the writing muse. When she's not writing the sexy stories that swirl around in her head, you can find her playing online Scrabble, or cuddled up with a book and her adorable pets.

Karla loves hearing from readers! Connect with her online, or send her an email: karla@karladoyle.com.

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