



a very

**FRIENDLY**  
*Valentine's Day*

Kayley Loring

# A VERY FRIENDLY VALENTINE'S DAY

---

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

KAYLEY LORING

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

Text Copyright © 2021 by Kayley Loring

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without written permission from the author, except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events, and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or actual persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

COVER DESIGN: Kari March Designs

COVER PHOTO: © miguelanxo

<https://www.instagram.com/miguelanxoph/>

COVER MODEL: Sergio Carvajal

DEVELOPMENTAL EDITING: Jennifer Mirabelli

COPY EDITING: Jenny Rarden

PROOFREADING: Once Upon a Typo

FUNNY SEXY SWEET ROMANCE

♥ *Kayley* ♥  
LORING

KAYLEY LORING

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

# CONTENTS

Half page title  
Spotify Playlist

Prologue

\*December 29th\*

\*December 30th\*

The Voicemail

1. Birdie
2. Eddie
3. Birdie
4. Eddie

Chapter 5

6. Guidelines For Shared Bedroom On Train
7. Eddie
8. Birdie
9. Eddie
10. Birdie
11. Eddie

Chapter 12

13. Birdie
14. Eddie
15. Birdie
16. Eddie
17. Birdie

Chapter 18

19. Eddie
20. Birdie

Chapter 21

22. Eddie
23. Birdie
24. Eddie
25. Eddie
26. Birdie
27. Eddie

28. \* The One with the Valentines \*

Chapter 29

30. Rita

[EPILOGUE ONE – Eddie](#)

[EPILOGUE TWO - Piper](#)

[more to come](#)

[The One With All The Acknowledgments](#)

[Keep in touch with Kayley](#)

[Also by Kayley Loring](#)

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

a very  
FRIENDLY  
*Valentine's Day*

Kayley Loring



# SPOTIFY PLAYLIST

[Playlist for A Very Friendly Valentine's Day](#)

[OceanofPDF.com](https://www.oceanofpdf.com)

# PROLOGUE

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

**\*DECEMBER 29TH\***

**EDDIE: Hey. In Ohio. My brother's bachelor party has officially begun. There's a really good chance I'll black out and then wake up in Michigan at some point in the next 24 hours. So I just wanted to say thanks for being a good friend and I apologize in advance if I accidentally send you a picture of my ass or something.**

**BIRDIE: Yer welcome and thanks! I promise not to post your ass pic on Twitter again. <upside-down face emoji> Here's some friendly advice, though... Hold the camera farther away from your butt this time. Also, maybe don't drink too much.**

**EDDIE: LOL. Sure. Lemme just tell my cousins from Boston and Ireland that I'm NOT gonna drink too much tonight. They'll love that. How's your day going, buddy?**

**BIRDIE: I'm working on my New Year's resolutions and binge-watching Sherlock for the fourth time. So, it's a rager, and needless to say, I'm highly aroused.**

**EDDIE: Thought you had a date with Sir Isaac I Can't Eat Gluten.**

**BIRDIE: Edward. It's not funny if he's actually allergic to gluten.**

**EDDIE: First of all, yes, it is. Secondly, it's really ducking clever because his name is Isaac, he's a physicist AND he's allergic to gluten. And because Gluten rhymes with Newton. In case you didn't get that.**

**BIRDIE: I got it. Congratulations, you have been awarded the Nobel Prize for being a clever asshole. And I decided to cancel the date. Let's just say the physicist and I had no chemistry.**

**EDDIE: He's a bad kisser, isn't he?**

**BIRDIE: I don't know how you would know that since you've never even**

seen him, and I would never imply such a thing.

**EDDIE:** Elementary, my dear dork-dater. His name is Isaac, he's a physicist and he took you to the Holocaust Museum for your first date.

**BIRDIE:** Because I had mentioned to him that I'd never been! He was being thoughtful.

**EDDIE:** <face with raised eyebrow emoji>

**BIRDIE:** Fine, he was a bad kisser. Shut up. Why are you texting me instead of bachelor partying right now?

**EDDIE:** I'm in a party limo with a bunch of dudes that I'm related to.

**BIRDIE:** Why aren't you drunk texting your quote unquote Instagram girlfriend then?

**EDDIE:** First of all, I'm not drunk yet. Secondly, what kind of nerd types out the words quote unquote in a text instead of just using ""? <nerd face emoji>

**BIRDIE:** What kind of bonehead has an "Instagram girlfriend" that he's never even met? Asking for a very judgmental and concerned friend.

**EDDIE:** The kind who's learned his lesson about dating costars.

**BIRDIE:** Yeah. You learned that lesson what? Seven times? Are those really your only options? Costars and models? Are you not ready to move on to pop stars or perhaps TikTok stars with a minimum of 40 million followers? <face with rolling eyes emoji>

**EDDIE:** Would you care to discuss my other options, Birdie...? Because last time I checked, not EVERY woman is interested in unbearably good-looking, surprisingly smart and talented, totally hilarious, unequivocally nice actor dudes.

**EDDIE:** Hello? Paging Professor Nerdington.

**EDDIE:** Crickets.

**BIRDIE:** So, you aren't drunk, but you've had two beers?

**EDDIE:** Starting my third Guinness now. How'd you know?

**BIRDIE:** Because you always get like this after two pints of dark ale.

**EDDIE:** Get like what? Awesome?

**BIRDIE:** Sure. Let's go with that.

**EDDIE:** Anyway, I'm not texting Alana because she's in St. Barts with her friends, remember? Or the Bahamas. Somewhere in the Caribbean. That's why she isn't coming to the wedding with me.

**BIRDIE:** Right. THAT'S why.

**EDDIE:** What exactly are you implying?

**BIRDIE:** Nothing. Your dedication to a genetically perfect twenty-three-year-old woman with a tiny waist and huge tits who slid into your DMs that you've never met in person is admirable.

**EDDIE:** I'm detecting sarcasm. Also, her tits aren't that huge. And I haven't met her YET. And she has a big heart.

**BIRDIE:** Yes, a 34 C, I'd say. Anyway. I hope you don't black out and I hope you don't end up in Michigan. Unless you want to. Then I hope you're wearing the appropriate winter apparel, so you don't catch a cold.

**EDDIE:** Awww. She cares.

**BIRDIE:** Seriously, though. Stay out of trouble. If you get hit by a bus or something, I will kill you.

**EDDIE:** <kissing face emoji>



**EDDIE:** You around?

**EDDIE:** Ho

**EDDIE:** How

**EDDIE:** Who got two thumbs is wasted and cunt text for shot rut now?

**EDDIE:** Thus goy.

**EDDIE:** Can eee call yo?

**EDDIE:** I? Yo. You.

**EDDIE:** Duck.

**EDDIE:** I rally wush yo were here.

**\*DECEMBER 30TH\***

**EDDIE: Good morning. Just reading my texts to you from last night. I think I meant to text Alana.**

**EDDIE: I mean, I did mean to. Sorry about that.**

**BIRDIE: So, you didn't mean what you said in that voicemail either, then...?**

**EDDIE: Um. What?**

**BIRDIE: Because I really liked what you said...**

**EDDIE: Oh. Cool.**

**BIRDIE: I feel the same way...**

**EDDIE: Oh. Good.**

**BIRDIE: <laughing face emoji> I'm just kidding. You never called. There's no voicemail.**

**EDDIE: Yeah. I just checked my outgoing calls and apparently, I did call you. What did I say?**

**BIRDIE: Nothing! It was just a butt dial. I think I heard a very spirited rendition of a Meat Loaf song in the background, but you didn't actually say anything in the message. Don't worry about it. How are you? Are you in Michigan? Please tell me you aren't in a hospital.**

**EDDIE: Nope. All good. I mean, I'll be hungover until February, but we all survived. Actually, I gotta check in with Alana and then get to the church for the rehearsal. Take care. I'll text you tomorrow probably, okay?**

**BIRDIE: Sure. Whatever. Don't forget to rehydrate.**

**EDDIE: You too, buddy.**

**BIRDIE: <thumbs-up emoji>**

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

## THE VOICEMAIL

***December 29th, 7:16 p.m.***

“Fuck, I wish you’d answered. I can’t remember what time it is in LA. Is it ten there already...? You in bed...? You better not be out with the guy who can’t kiss you right... Okay. You’re not answering. Maybe parts of me was hoping you wouldn’t answer so I could just hang up. A parts of me, I mean. A *part*...of me. Okay, maybe a few parts of me wanted to leave a message, whooooo knows.

*(muffled)* You guys! Shut up! No! You know what—Meat Loaf is a fucking awesome actor, but I hate this fucking song, shut up!

Anyway, I just wanted to say... I don’t know. Being back home... Seeing Brady all in love and ready to settle down with Hannah. And Declan’s so... He’s so fucking head over heels for this woman—I mean, *Declan*—you know? I see how he is and how Maddie’s changed him already, and it’s...and it just makes me... I should have asked you to come with me, Bird. To the wedding. Not as a date, but just... Or maybe as a date, I don’t know. Not as a big deal, just...  
Fuck it, I just need to say it—I love you, Birdie. As a friend, you know? I mean, you’re such a good friend, and it’s weird to say it because I’m a guy and you’re a girl. But I feel it, all the time. And I just want you to know that I appreesinate you.



*Appreeeesheeeate.* You always never treat me like I'm just some pretty boy, and that's good. I feel like I can be the best me when I'm with you because that's what you see. Y'know? You always, always make me feel good, and I love you. All right? There. Just that. I. Love. You.

I mean, I don't know what it means. And I don't want you to say anything back. I mean, you could maybe say how hot I am, just once, that would be nice... But I just wanna tell you how I feel about *you* for once. Instead of telling you about, y'know...whatever's going on in my life, and...other girls.

I just want you to know that *I* know that you're the best girl.

I've always known it.

And now Nolan's coming at me with a bottle of whiskey. Shit, I gotta go.

It's Eddie. By the way."

---

BIRDIE

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

## NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS



1. *Publish at least three articles in reputable library sciences and art history journals over the course of the year.*

*And one on Bustle, just for fun. I'll keep submitting my article on clever lines for picking up historians until they finally accept it because "I'm writing a book on the most important dates in American history—ours will be the final chapter." deserves an audience.*

2. *Host a party at my apartment.*

*Not a hypothetical dinner party with three famous guests of my choosing, alive or dead. An actual party. With a bunch of (hopefully not too annoying) people my own age, contemporary music played at a reasonable volume and so-called fun times. Wherein, I will not lock myself in my bedroom or sneak out and drive around until everyone has left. And I will not spend the entire party in a corner texting with Eddie. Nor will I pretend to get a call from Mom and then announce to everyone that my Great Aunt Mindy has died. Again.*

3. *Find some new sucker with a penis to ensnare into a meaningless relationship before Valentine's Day.*

*Yes, it's a somewhat ridiculous holiday that originated from the church's attempt at Christianizing a fairly disgusting Roman pagan fertility festival (sacrificial goats and dogs, etc). Yes, it has been exploited and horrendously*

*commercialized beyond all recognition since its heyday in the Victorian era —by greeting card companies and chocolate manufacturers alike. But it's a month and a half away, and I have a feeling that by then, Eddie will have met Alana or ended things with her, and I'll need a cock to cockblock myself with, either way. So to speak.*

*4. Exercise. Not more, but better. Okay, not better, but not reluctantly.*

*5. Go to New York, finally, on my own. Maybe see if I can meet Eddie's brother for lunch or something.*

*6. Delete Eddie's voicemail message.*

*Or at least stop listening to it 5000 times a day since it obviously doesn't really mean anything. Even though it's the best voicemail anyone has ever left me. But it didn't mean anything. At all. I just need to stop listening.*

*7. Come up with at least one more flibbity flobbity resolution that isn't somehow in response to an actor with veiny arms who has a flippin' flappin' stunning Instagram girlfriend he's never even met.*

---

EDDIE

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

## JANUARY GOALS



1. *Finish reading Infinite Jest by David Foster Wallace before the end of the month.*

*I know Birdie gave it to me as a joke because she thought I'd hate it, but she's really going to hate that I like it and that I'm gonna finish it. Eventually.*

2. *Work up to twenty pull-ups with a weighted vest. Add one more hour of intermittent fasting the week before the shirtless scene. Do an extra fifteen minutes of cardio per day to work off Nonna's Christmas Eve dinner. Throw in about thirty side-jackknives and hanging-leg raises, too—the ladies deserve it. It's been a few episodes since they got to see The Cannavale Six. I wonder how long Ralph Fiennes can hold a plank for—hack.*

3. *Remind agent to put me up for parts where I don't have to take my shirt off during the show's hiatus because I really want a fucking pizza.*

4. *Meet Alana in person.*

*Make this work. This has to work, or else I've wasted almost a month and a half of my life and I'm just some idiot who wanted to bang a hot model who slid into his DMs. And I'm not that guy. I'm the idiot who's been fucking his hand for over a month because he likes being monogamous—and honestly,*

*it's a lot easier to have an out of town girlfriend who doesn't know about Birdie. Not having to deal with a girl who's jealous of Birdie is a big plus. I just can't tell Birdie that, so she has no idea how good Alana's been for our relationship. Our friendship, I mean.*

*5. Go to Birdie's party and make sure she doesn't hook up with yet another nerd who doesn't know how to kiss her.*

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

---

BIRDIE

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)



## THE ONE WITH THE AWKWARD BROMENT



Oh my God, it's after eleven p.m. When are those animals going to go home? Things were starting to quiet down about half an hour ago. I was feeling optimistic that the party was drawing to a close, but then Eddie turned on *Hamilton* and instigated a contest to see who could do the best Thomas Jefferson impression. Now people are having fun again, dammit.

Still, I'm grateful that he flew down from Vancouver for this. He got here early, set up a Spotify playlist for me on my old phone, adjusted the lighting in my apartment and did a liquor run when he saw that all I had was wine. I mean, it was really great wine and there was plenty of it. It's not like I'm a cheap hostess. I just don't want people to have *too* good a time or to stay too long.

I, myself, have enjoyed exactly one and a half glasses of red wine tonight and I'm feeling fine and ready for bed.

But I can cross "Host a party" off my list now, and it's still only January. I crushed it! I didn't leave my apartment to drive around. I didn't spend the whole night texting with Eddie because he was here. So far, my fictional Great Aunt Mindy is still alive and kicking. And while I may currently be alone in my bedroom, it's not because I'm hiding—it's because I have to jot down these ideas for a new musical before I forget them.

When you live in LA, you never know when you might run into Lin-Manuel Miranda, and I need to be prepared to pitch my Lucretia Mott musical to him. If anyone can make a Nineteenth-Century feminist abolitionist Quaker woman's story both interesting and crowd-pleasing, it's him. My total lack of understanding about music or lyrics will be offset by my passion for bringing American feminist history to the mainstream in a fun

way. As long as he can make it fun. Or maybe Eddie can help me work on making my pitch entertaining.

There's a cautious knock at my door, and I don't even tense up because I can tell just from the knock that it's Eddie.

"Come in."

The door opens and his appallingly handsome head pokes through, peering around. His lips curl into a grin when he finds me sitting cross-legged on my bed, on top of about twenty coats.

"Come in and shut the door!"

He closes the door behind himself. "You're in here alone?" It's half statement, half question. He sounds so relieved, I could cry.

"On the contrary." I hold up my notebook. "I'm in here with my thoughts and one of the greatest women in American history. Are people having fun out there? It's a good party, right? Do you think they'll go home soon?"

"Bird..." He rubs his forehead, like I'm giving him a headache. "Why did you force yourself to throw a party if you don't actually want people to have fun in your home?"

"I totally wanted people to have fun here. I just don't see why they need to stay for more than two hours. Isn't there an after party they can all go to now? Or, I don't know...maybe someone could..." I smile at him, batting my eyelashes.

He crosses his arms in front of his chest. His sweater is thin and tight, and he looks like Captain America. It's so annoying. "I am not going to pull the fire alarm."

"Fine," I huff. "Be that way."

He takes a seat at the edge of the bed, about a foot away from me. "What are you working on?" he asks, shaking his head.

"When you put on *Hamilton*, I had an idea for a hip-hop musical about Lucretia Mott!"

"Oh yeah?" He lies down on top of the coats, raising his arms above his head to touch the wall behind him. This causes the bottom of his tight sweater to rise up, exposing the pelvic area above his jeans. There are a couple of notable and surprisingly attractive protruding veins on his lower abdominal area—the common iliac arteries, if memory serves. And the upper portion of his groomed sagittal hair growth below the naval, otherwise known as his happy trail, is visible. And it's a very happy trail indeed.

"There a part in it for me?" he asks. He is languid, and his deep voice is

somehow even huskier than usual.

He's nursed two cans of Guinness over the course of a few hours since he's driving tonight. Still, it has taken the edge off, and he is just a tad flirtatious with me. It never used to unnerve me when he gets like this because *he's a flirt*.

Eddie Cannavale flirts with women. That's just what he does. He likes to make women feel beautiful and he's good at it.

I could see that he was making a special effort to *not* be flirtatious with me when we became friends in college—in a good way—and that actually made me feel special. He's like a brother to me. I mean, I don't have an actual brother, so I don't know exactly how brothers treat their sisters. But it has always comforted me to think of Eddie as "like a brother to me." Lately, though, whenever he lowers his voice that tiny bit, whenever he alludes to our relationship in some way...it makes me a little uncomfortable. It may just be that I can sense a little more tension because he hasn't actually put his P in a V for about a month and a half, I think, since he's trying to be faithful to Alana... Which is like saying he's trying to be faithful to a phone app basically, but whatever.

I can feel him staring at me as I study his impossibly tanned and taut skin.

I slowly meet his heavy-lidded gaze and clear my throat as I open my notebook. "Of course. You could play Charles C. Burleigh. He was an abolitionist lecturer and close friend of Lucretia Mott's."

"Close friend, huh? And what is this future Tony-winning musical going to be called?"

I raise my pen in the air. "It's Gotta be Mott!"

"Hot to Trot with Mott," he offers.

"Like it or Mott, Here I Come."

"I'd Rather Mott, Thanks."

"Nice to Meet Ya, You Can Call Me Lucretia!"

"Too Mott to Handle."

"You have no idea who Lucretia Mott was, do you?"

"She was one of the witches on *Vampire Diaries*, right?" he deadpans. He is currently the star of another CW show and always pretends to only know anything about teen pop culture just to annoy me. I toss my pen and notebook at him, and he laughs. "She was an equal rights chick."

And now I'm the one who's relieved. "Yeah. She was an equal rights chick." He hands me back my notebook, and I reach for the pen that landed

on his chest. He grabs my wrist before I pick it up.

“You’re not seriously thinking about this though, right?”

I carefully pull my arm away from him and snatch the pen. “I’m serious about everything—you know that. I mean, I know it’s a little outside my area of expertise in art history... Oh my God, you’re right! I should write a hip-hop musical about Mary Cassatt!”

“Bird. You’re not writing a hip-hop musical about anyone. You’re hiding. In your bedroom. At your own party. It’s sad.”

“You’re just saying that because you don’t think there’s a good part in this for you—but there is! Mary Cassatt became great friends with Edgar Degas! You could play one of the great impressionist painters.” My heart is racing now. “There could be a dance number with rapping ballerinas! Oh my God, this is brilliant.” I scribble in my notebook. “Why aren’t you excited?”

“Just friends again, huh?”

“Yes! Just friends. He was a great supporter of hers.”

“You’re still avoiding the party.”

“So are you.”

“Baby, I *am* the party.” He bolts upright, his face suddenly so close to mine, I catch my breath. “I flew down here for this and you’ve been avoiding me all night.”

“No, I haven’t.” *I have. I totally have.* He flew from Ohio straight to Vancouver for work after his brother Brady’s wedding, so this is the first time I’ve seen him since The Voicemail. I’ve tried, I’ve tried, I’ve tried to forget about it. I try, I try, I try to look away from his pouty lips. But they’re so flippin’ flappin’ big and soft and so flingin’ flingin’ *there*. An island of dusty rose-colored flesh in the midst of all those golden planes and angles and dark stubble. It’s almost inconceivable that those lips have never once met mine in the six years we’ve known each other. “I was attempting to circulate and socialize with other people. That’s kind of the point of having a party, is it not?”

“For most people, sure. But you’re being weird.”

“I’m always weird.”

He laughs, just a little. A quiet little appreciative laugh, the kind that I’ve always thought was reserved just for me. “Yeah. You are.” He stares at my mouth, in a very *un-friend-ly* way, and I think all of my internal organs just started doing the Macarena. “Birdie...” he whispers.

*Nuhhh!* is the involuntary noise I make in response.

“I didn’t just butt dial you when I was in Ohio, did I?”

It’s only after I swallow hard that I realize how much I’ve been salivating.  
“Hmmm?”

“I called and left you a message. I blacked out, but I keep getting these flashes of memories. I don’t know what I actually said. I just remember how I felt when I called you...”

I shake my head, or at least I think I do. Denial is my instinct here. Denial is the oxygen that keeps this planet of male-female friendship inhabitable. Denial is the gravity that keeps us from crashing into each other and then floating off into separate atmospheres indefinitely.

“Tell me.” He speaks so softly I can’t quite tell if it’s a demand or a question.

There’s music and laughter and chatter outside my bedroom door, but inside there are just two people who are holding their breaths and waiting for the other to do something to change the world. I’m not ready for the world to change. Kissing Eddie was not on my list of New Year’s resolutions and it never has been. But if he just tilted his head one inch in either direction, leaned in a few inches toward me, I have this terrible feeling I would be here waiting for him as if it’s what I’d been waiting for all along.

I’m aware of his whole body stiffening, everything except his jaw, as his lips part the tiniest bit. He rests one hand on my thigh and slowly reaches around my waist with the other...and then he pulls the phone out of my back pocket. Laughing, he leans back, holding my phone and guarding his face with his forearm as I pummel his bicep with my fists.

“You turd! Give it to me!”

He lies back again, rolling onto his stomach as he attempts to type in a code on the lock screen. “You saved my message, didn’t you?”

“Eddie.”

“I want to hear it.”

“It’s not on there anymore!”

“Liar. You wouldn’t care if I had your phone if it wasn’t.”

“What makes you think you’re the only one leaving me messages I don’t want you to hear?” I try to sound coy, but I’m not the actor here.

I reach around his back, trying to grab the phone from him. We’re both laughing, even though I’m really, really mad at him. He suddenly flips around to face me, and now I’m lying on top of him. My torso is flat against his. We’re both breathing harder than we should right now. He has this

playful glint in his honey brown eyes. I can see almost all of his teeth as he smiles at me, and those damn dimples make me forget about trying to get that phone from him. I've never been on top of him before. I'm just mesmerized by his features from this angle, from this close.

We've hugged each other a million times since we met, and every single time I'm as alarmed by the smooth, hard topography of him as I am by the gentle way in which he holds me. But we aren't giving each other a friendly hug right now. And I'm slowly becoming aware of a part of him that is getting a little bit harder than usual against my thigh. His expression is now so serious, I almost want to ask him if he's okay.

But I also don't want to know the answer because I'm not okay with this. I push myself up, palms against his chest—I can feel his hard nipples through the thin sweater, and I realize his hands are on my waist. He's let go of my phone and he's holding me tighter. Maybe he's helping to push me away. But he glances down at my cleavage. His jaw tightens and his nostrils flare. He makes a quiet guttural sound and it's the sexiest thing I've ever heard.

I am fully aware, all of a sudden, that it's up to me right now. The future of our relationship is in my hands. His eyes flick back up to meet mine, and without a word, he's telling me that he would kiss me if I wanted him to. That it would be okay—that we would be okay—and all I'd have to do is lower myself down a little...

"Oh, my Lord! Are y'all finally bonin' in here?" The music and chatter from outside the door get louder for about two seconds before my friend Layla walks in and shuts it again. "Because I've had a very longstanding bet with Trevor that y'all finally *do it* before you turn twenty-seven, and I could really use the money for a new pair of boots." She attempts to strut, but mostly stumbles, toward my bed and collapses on top of it, right next to us. "I think I've had enough to drink," she states, staring up at the ceiling. "And I can't decide who to go home with tonight."

Eddie's eyes snap shut as he exhales, his hands dropping away from me. I sit up and gingerly move off of him without disturbing his, um, *moderately firm appendage*. And then I quickly get up to take a seat on the other side of Layla so I can focus on her very important problem right now. It's very possible that Eddie wants to dropkick her for cockblocking us, but I could just kiss her.

Because I wasn't ready to kiss Eddie.

Because I need time to think.

Because this might be a real thing that might really happen, and I don't want to ruin a six-year friendship just because of a moment.

Layla is from Texas, and we were all in the same American Novel class at UCLA. The accent that she mostly has lost since moving to LA always seems to find its way back when she's drinking. And like most of our friends from college, she has never understood how Eddie and I can be *just* friends. Fortunately, she is so delightfully self-involved, we haven't had to explain it to her.

"What are your options?" I ask her while I straighten myself up. "The guy with the beanie?"

"Been there done that with Beanie Guy. However, yes, he is an option. Edward—what's the deal with your scruffy actor friend?"

I try to glance over at Eddie without moving my head. He slowly stands, adjusting his belt and shifting around. "Logan? He's a good guy, he's single, but I don't think he's your type."

"He's not. I think he's into Birdie," she says in a sing-song voice. "He was asking me about her."

Once again, I try not to make eye contact with Eddie while still getting a sense of his reaction to this news. "Oh. Hah! I doubt it. We were only talking for about fifteen minutes. He just wanted to know what an archivist does."

Eddie runs his fingers through his hair. Vigorously. "I think he might have gonorrhea. I'd stay away from him. Just to be safe. Nice guy, though."

"Guess I won't invite him to my party, then. Are you guys comin'?"

"You haven't invited me to anything," I tell her.

"Right. I just decided to have a V-Day party. On Valentine's Day. For singles—y'know? So we can all have somethin' to look forward to, even though we're all probably gonna die alone."

"I'll be in New York," I say at the same time that Eddie says it. And then we both say, "*What?!*"

"You're going to New York? Since when?"

"I just bought my tickets yesterday. I forgot to tell you. Why are *you* going—I thought Alana was maybe coming out here for Valentine's Day."

"She booked some big gig, so she needs to stay in town for it. I found out I'm not in the episode we're shooting that week, so I've got time off."

"Alana, the model?" Layla asks, looking back and forth between Eddie and me. "That's still a thing?"

Now I'm looking straight at Eddie, but he won't look at me. Because

what the frack was he doing almost kissing me if he's going to see Alana in New York for Valentine's Day? "Yeah. It's a thing," he mumbles.

It's. A. Thing.

Which means that thing that almost happened on the bed just now was not a thing. Either that, or it means Eddie isn't as good a guy as I thought he was. And I refuse to believe that.

Therefore, the almost thing on the bed just now was not a thing.

Resolved!

"Well, gosh!" Layla sits up and pats me on the thigh. "Now *you* can meet Alana too! That'll be fun, hey?"

Eddie shakes his head and goes to open the door. "Fucking awesome chatting with you as always, Layla." He starts to walk out, giving me a quick over-the-shoulder glance as he does. "We need to talk about New York," he says like he's scolding me. Like I'm in trouble for not telling him I planned a trip to New York.

I do not respond because if he can make plans to go to New York without telling me, then my travel plans are none of his business.

But my nipples are basically saluting him and trying to follow him out of the room.

*Shut up, nipples. That's enough out of you.*

And then he leaves the door open and I watch him go over to talk to his friend Logan.

Layla gets up to check herself in the mirror and fluff up her hair. "Well. *That* was one hell of an awkward moment I walked into."

"No, it wasn't. I mean, you certainly made it awkward, but it wasn't a *moment-moment*. He's still like a brother to me. It was an awkward *broment*."

"Babe. If he's a brother to you, then I'm callin' social services on your ass. I'm tellin' you, girl." She applies lip gloss and then smacks her lips together before continuing. "Y'all need to either hit it or quit it. I swear I have no idea how you've gone this long without bumpin' nasties, but guys and girls do not attach themselves to each other like y'all have unless there's a serious attraction. He's had a froner for you ever since you met."

"What's a froner?"

"A friend boner. Boner for a friend. And you can still possibly get away with a little 'get it out of your system' sex after a six-year froner. But a seven-year froner will either lead to a bitter friend breakup or marriage. Pick



your poison.” She adjusts her boobs in her bra and then spins around to face me. “It’s showtime.”

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

---

EDDIE

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

## THE ONE WITH THE BROGUEMANCE FAIL



Here are all the reasons I have come to believe that Birdie Beckett has zero interest in me as a potential boyfriend: One—she only dates nerds. She literally told me her ideal man is Harold Ramis in *Ghostbusters*. Two—I have never once caught her eye-fucking me and she has never once commented on my looks except to joke about it. And *everyone*, I mean every girl I've ever met since I was sixteen, eye-fucks me and comments on my looks. Three—she's an archivist for The Getty, from a wealthy LA family, with degrees in art history and library sciences. I'm a guy from a middle-class family in Ohio with a BFA in Theatre who gets paid to play teenagers on TV.

Here's why I've always thought it's a bad idea to put the moves on her: she's the most down-to-earth and reliable friend I've had since I moved out here. With all the different people I work with on TV and movie sets, there's an intense kind of bond until the wrap party, and then we all go our separate ways. Actors live the life of a vagabond, but Birdie's my home in LA. She's the only person not related to me who's treated me the same whether I was an acting student or the star of a TV show or one of a million actors in LA who was constantly auditioning for parts. I don't want to screw that up. And historically, I have found that no matter how hard I try, my romantic relationships always get screwed up eventually. That right there is the only reason I need.

Am I attracted to her? Yes, I am. But I can be attracted to someone and know that we aren't right for each other—I think Kim Basinger is hot as shit even in her sixties, but I wouldn't date her. Probably. Well, never say never.

Here's why I'm starting to wonder if it would be a smart idea for Birdie and me to hook up and get the sex thing out of our systems: Reasons one and

two—I have now seen her nipples up close and personal, and I really fucking liked what I saw and I can't stop thinking about them. Three—I don't need any more reasons. But I liked the way it felt having her on top of me, and I liked having my hands on her and I know for a fact that she would have kissed me if Layla hadn't walked in on us. And it would have been hot. Four—she deserves to be fucked right by someone who knows how to make her feel good and she deserves to be fucked right by someone who cares about her. There's exactly one person on earth who fits the bill, and that's me. Five—we're still in our mid-twenties. This is still an acceptable time in our lives to make the mistake of having hot sex and then getting back on track as friends. Probably. Or maybe we get married because we want to justify the mistake—not the worst outcome in the world. We can make it work. Six—still thinking about her beautiful perky tits.

Fuck, I feel guilty. I feel guilty as her friend. I feel guilty as a Catholic man of honor whose ma, sister and nonna would punch in the balls if they knew what I was thinking right now. *And oh fuck right*—I feel guilty because I'm supposed to be Alana's boyfriend and I'm finally going to meet her in New York in a few weeks.

I've put my buddy Logan into an Uber along with some redhead that I wing manned—okay *strong-armed*—him into going home with so he'd stay away from Birdie. They were the last to leave, even though eleven is really early for a party to be over. But I could tell she was getting anxious, so I turned off the music, turned on all the lights and put on CNN. Boom. Instant party killer.

Now I'm pacing around outside her building before going back in to help her clean up. She's been avoiding me even more since the bedroom incident and I don't want to leave things hanging. And I also want to see her tits again—but I'm *not* going to. Unless she decides to flash me again—then it can't be helped.

My phone vibrates in my back pocket—three times in a row—and I know before pulling it out of my pocket that it's Alana. She always sends multiple short texts in a row. It's sort of a signature thing she does that I used to get really excited about—because three texts from a hot model with two million followers on Instagram is better than one.

But now I'm just wondering why she can't write "*Hey! How are you? You busy?*" in one message.

But shit—I forgot to send her a *good night* text. For the first time since

we started texting. I also forgot to check if she posted anything on The Gram. If I don't like and comment on her photos, people will think we've broken up. But *she* won't think that—she's cool. Not cool like Birdie, but she's really low maintenance for a model. Which is why I like her.

**ME: Hey babe! I was just busy thinking about you ;) You're still up? I've been hanging out with a few old friends in LA.**

**ALANA: Just getting into bed, actually.**

**ALANA: Looooong day!**

**ALANA: I forgot you're in LA this weekend.**

**ALANA: Thought you might want to FaceTime...**

Okay. The dot dot dot is intriguing...  
But I can't.

**ME: Oh man, I'd love to. But I'm in the middle of helping my buddy with something.**

**ALANA: Oh.**

**ALANA: Okay no problem!**

**ALANA: I just wanted to show you this new thing I got to keep.**

**ALANA: From the photo shoot today.**

Seconds later, she sends me a selfie. She's holding up her long brown hair with one hand, her massive puffy lips are pouting, and she's wearing—*hello!*—a flimsy little crop top and boy shorts.

*Fuuuuck me.* That's hot. She's hot.

But no.

Nope.

She'll still be hot tomorrow night and I need to deal with Birdie now

before shit gets weird.

Also, it's not like Alana's going to have FaceTime sex with me. She's not that kind of girl. She's the kind of girl who sends enticing pics just to get me going—but she's not going to get naked, so we can fuck our hands, separate-but-together. I know this because I've asked. Every few weeks. And she's declined every time. And I respect that.

Unless tonight's the night she changes her mind?

But no.

Nope.

I'm here for Birdie.

**ME: Fuuuuuck babe. So hot. You're killing me. But I really have to help my buddy with this thing. Rain check for tomorrow night?**

**ALANA: Sure.**

**ALANA: I need to get up early for work anyway.**

**ALANA: Kiki and Foo Foo can't wait to meet you! xoxo**

And then, she sends a photo of the two foster dogs who are sleeping on her bed. Which is cute. She fosters dogs. She's a big animal rights activist. And I like that. But I'm here for Birdie.

And I *more than* like everything about Birdie.

I think I'm confused.

And I don't like being confused.

I need to pull it together because Birdie is my friend and Alana is my girlfriend. That's how it is. I'm not some fifteen-year-old guy who has to jerk it to every girl he sees. I'm a man. A rational twenty-six-year-old man. Who is going to think about his friend's tits the entire time he walks back up to his friend's apartment and then never think about them again—until he gets home later.

I need to be the captain of this Friend Ship. That's my goal. I need to steer us back in the right direction and all will be right in the world again. As Birdie has pointed out to me many times—I have Resting Flirt Face. So, I just need to *not* flirt with my face. Or my abs. Or my butt.

I knock on her front door before using my spare key. That's how close we are—we have spare keys to each other's places. She waters my plants when I'm out of town and she felt weird about having my spare key if I didn't have one of hers. That's how much she trusts me. And how do I repay her? By obsessing about her delicate petal pink nipples.

I scan the living room and spot her in the kitchen.

Shit, she took her cardigan off.

Now she's only wearing a strappy top thing.

Now there's one less layer of clothing between me and her boobs.

She took it off because she wants me to make a move.

But she also took out her contacts and put her glasses on.

Mixed messages.

But also hot.

“How *you* doin’?”

Shit. I Joey'd her. From twenty feet away. Knee-jerk reaction. I am definitely flirting with my face too.

She rolls her eyes at me, but she's grinning. And blushing. And pouring herself another glass of wine.

Which is interesting.

“I am well. Thought I'd lost you. You want to help me finish off this wine? There's only a little left in this bottle.”

“I really shouldn't.” I lift my sweater up and pat my rock-hard belly. Which counts as ab-flirting. Shit. “Got a couple of shirtless scenes coming up. I shouldn't have had the Guinness.”

“Awww, come on,” she chides, pouring out about two mouthfuls of red wine into a coffee mug. “Your abs called while you were out. They want a pizza. And wine.”

“Oh yeah?” I join her in the kitchen and pick up that mug. “Your brain called while I was out. It wants an orgasm. Or twenty.”

She nearly chokes on her wine and I swear to God I didn't even think that comment through before I said it.

That was my bad.

“You okay?” I reach over to rub her back, but she steps away from me.

Her eyes are watering, but when she finally regains her composure, she is frowning at me. “I happen to be all good on the orgasm front, thanks.”

*And now I'm just thinking about all the things I'd do to the front of her to give her an orgasm. Or twenty.*

“Happy to hear it.” I raise my mug. I think it’s about time my friend meets the O’Sullivan side of Eddie Cannavale... “May your giving hand never fail you, Birdie Beckett,” I offer as a toast in my finest Irish brogue.

She blinks once and then I am met with a blank stare.

That may have been too brief of a toast, so I try again. “May your troubles be less and your blessings be more. And nothing but happiness come through your front door.” I polish off my wine.

Crickets.

More blank stare.

*Total broguemance fail.*

Serves me right. I will have to try harder, re the friend thing. Or possibly try harder at seducing her. But I can’t do both at the same time... *Can I?*

She takes a deep breath before asking, "Question. Did you, by any chance, see my nipples earlier?"

If I hadn’t already swallowed the wine, I would have done an awesome spit-take. "Yes. Yes, I did."

"Okay." She puts her mug of wine down on the counter, combs her fingers through her long, wavy, dark blonde hair and then twists it up into some kind of knot on top of her head. Which is really annoying because now her long, slender neck is exposed, and so are her collarbones and the top of her cleavage and I really like her bare arms too. She sighs and then crosses her arms in front of her chest. "I just want you to know that it was an accident. Revealing them. I forgot that I wasn't wearing a bra."

"Understood."

"But I mean..." She shrugs and then takes a sip of wine before continuing. "It happened. I think we should just acknowledge that we had a brief, nipple-y, mildly boner-y moment and move past it. So we can get back to being friends. Right?"

"Agreed. I hereby acknowledge the aforementioned mild boner and nipple slip and I would also like to acknowledge that both of your nipples looked great."

She snort-laughs and covers her mouth with one hand and it’s so fucking cute. "Shut up."

"No, I'm really proud of you. As a friend. They're top-notch."

"Okay, moving on!"

I clink mugs with her, even though mine is empty. "To being friends with absolutely no benefits."



She pauses, contemplating me for a brief but very telling moment and then nods definitively. “Exactly.” She takes a huge gulp of wine and then pours the rest of it into the sink.

I try very hard not to take in the entire length of the backside of her slender frame and I should have tried a lot harder not to emit a wistful sigh like a total fucking pussy. “So...New York.”

“Yes...New York. Flying to the Big Apple to meet your Instagirlfriend for Valentine’s Day, huh? Baller move.”

I bend down and nudge her leg so I can open the cupboard beneath the sink. “I need a paper bag for the recyclables.”

“Just use the bin,” she says before discovering that the recycling bin under her sink is already full.

“I’ve been putting empties in the bin all night. That’s why this place isn’t a mess right now.”

“I didn’t even realize that... Thank you.” She steps aside to let me grab a carefully folded paper bag.

“Thank *you*. And yes. It is a baller move.” I start picking up empty beer bottles and cans. “Why are *you* going?”

“Well, you know, I’ve always wanted to go to New York. And it’s so weird that I haven’t yet. But I decided that *this* is the year. And then I saw that there’s a TEDx conference there in February. I will have finished the projects I’m working on by then, and we aren’t expecting a new collection until the end of the month, so it’s a good time for me to take a little vacation. And of course, I’ll be going to the main library and as many art museums as possible.”

I am dying to laugh at this, but she seems so excited. “So you’re going to New York in the middle of February—when the weather is super shitty, by the way—to attend a TED Talk and go to the New York Public Library and a bunch of art museums?” Okay, I’m being kind of a dick, but at least I’m not laughing at her.

“It’s a TEDx, not a TED conference. And *you’re* flying all the way across the country to bone someone. What’s your point?”

“No point. Moving on. More importantly—*you’re* actually flying across the country? That’s huge.” Birdie has claimed to be afraid of flying ever since I met her. That’s why she’s never traveled very far. That’s why she hugs me tight every single time she says goodbye to me before I travel. She continues to load the dishwasher and her silence tells me all I need to know. “Come on.

Seriously? Tell me you're not taking the train to New York."

"I'm taking the train to New York. Already booked my tickets."

"Bird. Cancel them. Get a refund. You can fly there with me. I'll come down from Vancouver. That way, if the plane goes down, we go down together."

"Hell no." She wipes her hands on her jeans and turns to face me. "If your plane goes down, I need to be alive to read your eulogy at the funeral. Someone who isn't related to you needs to get up there and wax rhapsodic about something other than your abs and butt."

"True. Just make sure someone *does* pay tribute to my abs and butt, though."

Now she's pouting. I've made two women pout in one night—I'm on a roll. "Don't joke about your plane going down. It's not funny."

"It's also not going to happen. Come on. You can't avoid flying forever."

"Well, I didn't put 'stop avoiding flying' on my list of New Year's resolutions, so... Maybe next year. I'm looking forward to the train ride. I'll get tons of reading done, and this way, I'll get to see the whole country without having to drive. Trains are romantic. I'm really excited, actually."

I like that little mischievous smirk on her face, but I do not have a good feeling about it. "And you're planning to go by yourself?"

"Yes. But I'm sure I'll meet people. There are lounges, you know. And they sell alcohol on the train."

I do not like the sound of that.

"Oh yeah? Sounds like fun. It also sounds like a great way to meet a serial killer. How long's the trip?"

"Ohhh, you know..." She waves her hand dismissively. "Sixty-nine hours and twenty-three minutes."

I do some very quick math in my head. "So, almost three full days."

"Hey, good for you!" She's not being condescending. She's actually happy for me because I was able to divide sixty-nine by twenty-four in my head. "I leave on the evening of the ninth and arrive at Penn Station the evening of the twelfth. I just have to change trains in Chicago."

"Three days just to get to New York. And how long would you stay in New York?"

"Three days."

"Uh-huh. So three days to get there, three days there and three days back? You're taking a nine-day vacation and only spending three of those days in

New York City?”

“Yes, Eddie, that is my itinerary. I already have everything planned out, and the journey there and back will be half the fun.”

“You’re going to a Ted Talk and a library and some museums—half of *no* fun is less than no fun. I can do *that* math in my head too.”

“You know what?” Her eyes are getting watery again, like when she was choking on the wine. “I don’t know why you care so much about what I’ll be doing. You’ll be busy banging your hot Instagirlfriend. What I do and how I do it is none of your business.” She dabs at the corners of her eyes with her fingertips. “I’ll finish tidying up tomorrow. You can go.” Her voice is trembling.

“Whoa. What just happened?”

She covers her face with her hands. “I’m tired from talking to people all night. I just want to be alone, okay? Thanks for coming.”

I drop the bag of recyclables, take four long strides toward her and wrap my arms around her. “Hey. I’m sorry I was being a dick.” I kiss the top of her head until I feel her rigid body relax and her arms around my waist. That loose bun thing is all up in my face. Her hair smells like a freshly opened can of 7-Up after having hot sex in a flower shop—not that I’m thinking about sex right now. “I want you to have the best time. I just don’t like the idea of you traveling alone like that.”

“You don’t have to worry about me,” she mumbles.

“I’m not going to worry about you.” I take a deep breath and finally tell her what I knew was true as soon as she said she was taking the train. Even though it means I’ll have to cancel my flights and spend a lot less time with Alana. Even though things might get complicated. Even though I can’t think of anything dumber or more boring than spending three days on a train, when we could go the same distance by plane in five hours. “I’m gonna go with you, Birdie. On the train. Whether you like it or not. That’s all there is to it.”

She doesn’t say anything. She just hugs me even tighter. Maybe it won’t be so terrible. Maybe it really is the journey that matters. Maybe it doesn’t matter how long it takes to get there, as long as we get there together.

## CHAPTER FIVE

---

**EDDIE:** Cancel your dinky little roomette on Amtrak. I'm booking us two of the big bedroom suites.

**BIRDIE:** I'll cancel it AFTER you've booked the other sleeper rooms. And reimburse you.

**EDDIE:** Don't worry about it. Just cancel your tickets. I got this. Round trip. I'm on the Amtrak website right now.

**BIRDIE:** You don't have to leave NYC when I do! You'll hardly be able to spend any time with Alana!

**EDDIE:** It's fine. She'll be fine with it. Cancel your tickets.

**BIRDIE:** You aren't going to stop texting me until I've canceled them, are you?

**EDDIE:** Damn right I'm not. Just do it. You can thank me later.



**EDDIE:** Um. Did you cancel your tickets?

**BIRDIE:** Yes, Edward. I canceled them.

**EDDIE:** Okay, because it turns out they only had one Family Bedroom from LA to Chicago. But the good news is I booked it for us. It's the biggest room they had. The bad news is I booked it for us. And it's the only sleeper room they have left now.

**EDDIE:** There's supposedly tons of seating areas by day. Up to four bunk beds at night. Access to a private bathroom and shower in the car. I mean, if it's big enough for a family of four, there will be plenty of

room for two of us.

**EDDIE:** In related news, there was also only one room from Chicago to New York. A little smaller than the family bedroom, but it has an in-room restroom and shower.

**EDDIE:** And I'll book a hotel room in Chicago. Near the station. There's a six-hour layover, and we can just use the room to shower. Because I'm guessing you aren't going to want to shower on the train.

**EDDIE:** You don't have to reimburse me. Big Daddy's got you covered. Yer welcome.

**EDDIE:** Hands up if you're excited! <man raising hand emoji>

**EDDIE:** Hello?

**BIRDIE:** I am so mad at you right now.

**BIRDIE:** I really appreciate the sentiment. And that is a great idea to book a hotel room in Chicago. But I'm less than happy at the moment.

**EDDIE:** Fair enough. Really looking forward to this!

**BIRDIE:** <swearing face emoji>

**EDDIE:** <grimacing face emoji>

**BIRDIE:** <raised middle finger emoji>

**EDDIE:** <thumbs-up emoji>

**BIRDIE:** Seriously, stop texting me! I'm really mad at you.

**EDDIE:** Fair enough. <face blowing a kiss emoji>

**BIRDIE:** <neutral face emoji>

**EDDIE:** You love me.

**EDDIE:** Have a great day.

**EDDIE:** I promise not to take my shirt off when you're around.

**EDDIE:** I can't make any promises about my pants, though.

**EDDIE:** Tell your nipples to behave themselves.

**BIRDIE:** Edward!!!

**EDDIE:** Okay okay relax! I'm done!



**BIRDIE:** I've compiled a list of ground rules re shared train bedroom. Check your email, please read carefully and refer to it again on the ninth of February. Thank you.

**EDDIE:** <nerd face emoji> Received. I have some notes.

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

## GUIDELINES FOR SHARED BEDROOM ON TRAIN

1. Both inhabitants shall remain fully clothed at all times (top and bottom) when in shared bedroom.

*\* Please note under said guidelines, male inhabitant's cropped Avengers tank top and Speedos are allowable, thx*

2. There will be no flirtation of any kind between inhabitants, i.e. using expressions of a verbal, textual, corporal, facial nature, etc.

*\* Flirtation expressed in a spiritual/psychic nature is fair game, then. Good to know.*

3. There shall be no mention of either inhabitants' nipples or reference to unfortunate one-time-only nipple slip/froner incident.

*\* Male inhabitant objects to use of the term "froner." Recommends adopting use of "amicable tumescence" or "friendly cock rocket" instead.*

*Amicescence or frock rocket for short. Also, please note that it was a semi.*

*\* Male inhabitant agrees that this shall be the very last time either inhabitant mentions or reminisces about aforementioned one-time-only nipple slip/semi-amicescent incident.*

*\* Male inhabitant would like to point out that any and all future nipple slip/semi-frock rocket incidents shall be mentioned and reminisced about ad infinitum.*

4. There shall be no phone conversations with either inhabitants' love interests or potential love interests within the confines of the bedroom, unless said bedroom is only occupied by one inhabitant at the time.

*\* Male inhabitant demands more information regarding female inhabitant's love interests and potential love interests.*

5. Needless to say, there will be no engaging in physical self-love activities in the presence of the other inhabitant—even if it seems like the other one might be fast asleep and unable to notice.

*\* What is the policy regarding physical self-loathing activities of a sexual nature?*

6. There shall be no consumption of foods of a smelly nature while in the bedroom, i.e. hard-boiled eggs, Parmesan cheese, garlic-infused anything, tuna, salmon, paleo turkey pepperoni, paleo meat sticks of any kind.

*\* Well that just hurts.*

7. Alcoholic beverages shall be consumed responsibly and at a reasonable rate.

*\* Constantly.*

8. Needless to say, there will be no sharing of beds. One inhabitant per bed at all times. This includes the sharing of beds with any other passengers.

*\* ;)*



---

EDDIE

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

## THE ONE WITH TWO ANNOYING CANNAVALE CALLS



I've got about an hour before they call me to set for the first shirtless scene of the day and all I want to do is stick my head in a bowl of spaghetti Bolognese. Instead, I'm in my trailer, doing push-ups and lateral raises, taking careful bites of peanut butter rice cakes and sipping red wine—for glycogen reasons. It's a fucking slow-motion no-dialogue scene, so all I have to do is look like an angsty, dreamy, shredded quarterback.

I'm not saying my talents are being wasted on a CW high school drama—because *End Zone* is a good show—and looking angsty and dreamy and shredded are three of my many talents. But I did rock the house as Stanley Kowalski in *A Streetcar Named Desire* at UCLA. And I only had to take my shirt off once. Okay, so I was wearing a very tight, ripped tank top the rest of the time—but I also yelled out “Hey, STELLAAAAA!” with more lovesick anguish than Marlon Brando, according to one reviewer who may or may not have been obsessed with me. Plus, I used to do Shakespeare monologues for auditions and never took my shirt off at all for those. So yeah, it would be nice if the writers would let me flex my *acting* muscles a little more than my actual muscles occasionally.

I should probably insist on doing a respectable stage play during the show's hiatus, but my agents are always pushing to get me on a movie. And yet, I'll never get a decent movie role unless casting directors see me doing something interesting, with more depth. It's the hot actor's conundrum and I get a headache just thinking about it.

So, I will take my mind off of it by calling my older brother Declan. He won't answer while he's at work, but I still haven't told him about my New York trip. I'm sure he'll be pleased to know that I'm finally meeting Alana in

person. Or possibly be a total dick about it—I never know with him.

To my surprise, he picks up on the second ring. “What?”

“Hey—your ma know you answer your phone like that?”

“Your ma know you’re bothering your very important lawyer brother at the office?”

“I called your personal phone.”

“I’m busy.”

“Then send me to voicemail.”

“Will you just tell me why you’re calling, or I’m hanging up.”

“Jesus. I’ll be in New York for a few days, middle of February.”

“Oh, good!”

“Can we have lunch or something?”

“Yeah. I’ll reschedule whatever I’ve got going on. As long as you aren’t talking about Valentine’s Day. But I’m sure Maddie would love to see you.”

“And you *know* I’d be happy to see *her*.”

“Watch it.”

“And obviously, I’m not talking about Valentine’s Day. Trust me—I’ve got plans for that day that do not involve any family members. You can meet my girlfriend.”

“Who, Birdie?”

“Why are you so obsessed with Birdie?”

“The girl you’re always talking about, you mean?”

“I talk about her because she’s one of my best friends. Haven’t you ever had any female friends? Don’t bother answering that—I forgot who I was talking to. It’s not a thing. Trust me. Anyway, that’s not who I’m talking about right now. I’m talking about Alana.”

“Right. The one you haven’t met yet.”

“Can we *not* have this discussion again?”

“Explain to me how Alana qualifies as a girlfriend.”

“She’s just my girl, you know? I never said it was serious yet. We check in on each other every day and always like and comment on each other’s posts. It’s fun and it’s not complicated—I can literally hear you shaking your head and rolling your eyes, asshole.”

“Yes, *I’m* the asshole. Not the douchebag who thinks the mutual liking of each other’s social media posts counts as a relationship.”

“Says the asshole who lied to his entire family about dating his assistant.”

“Hey—that wasn’t a lie. It just wasn’t true yet.”

“Same here, exactly.” I barely even believe what I’m saying, but I am committed to winning every argument about this subject—especially with Declan.

“Fine. We’re both fucked up and lucky any woman will have us.”

“Agreed.”

“Nolan might be in town too if you want to see him.”

“Our *cousin* Nolan?”

“What other Nolan would I be talking about?”

“I know like five guys named Nolan. Why isn’t he back in Ireland?”

“I guess he met someone and decided to stick around for a while. We saw him last week. He’s a changed man.”

I feel my scalp getting hot and prickly, and my whole body tenses up. I check myself in the mirror—my arms are super veiny right now. *Nice*. “Fucking Nolan Cassidy cannot get married before I do. That guy’s an animal.”

“Didn’t realize it was a competition, but obviously, I will be getting married before either of you do. Where are you staying?”

“With Alana.”

“You sure?”

“Of course, I’m sure. That’s the whole point of the trip.”

“Because the hotels in Manhattan are always booked up for Valentine’s Day. And I mean *all* of them. Brooklyn too.”

“That won’t be an issue for me. And Birdie already has a room booked, so...”

“Wait. Your friend Birdie is coming too?”

“Yeah. She’ll be in town for something else, but I’m taking the train there with her. Don’t ask.”

“Uh-huh. Anyway. If, for whatever reason, you need a place to stay—I know a few guys who will probably let you crash on their couch.”

“I know a few guys too, fucker. Thanks, bro.”

“No problem, brah. Oh, I was supposed to ask you...”

“Yes?”

“You know how Maddie has a niece named Piper?”

“She hot?”

“She’s thirteen.”

“Right.” If we were in the same room, he would have smacked me up the side of the head at least twice by now. “Let me guess. She wants a signed

headshot.”

“I think she’d prefer a signed *buttshot*, but yeah. She’ll take what she can get.”

“Done. Text me her address. I’ll have my publicist send her something. I’ll send one to Maddie too, so she doesn’t feel left out.”

“Not necessary. Maddie joins me in gazing lovingly at the framed headshot I keep by my bed whenever she sleeps over.”

“See you in a couple of weeks, asshole.”

“Bye, Snookums.”

I toss my phone onto the sofa, and now I just feel out of sorts. Now I really want a giant bowl of pasta. And a steak. And fries. And for some reason, I want to call Birdie. But I won’t. She’s busy at work, probably wearing her little white cotton gloves while carefully placing some piece of ancient art into a fancy labeled box and then indexing it. She’s probably *not* wearing the sexy librarian outfit that she’s always wearing when I imagine her at work. I don’t have any specific reason to call her. I just want to. Because she’s a friend. People call their friends. That’s how friendships work, *Declan*.

But seriously, if Nolan settles down before I do, that is not okay.

I send Alana a quick kissy face emoji and then drop to the floor to do twenty crunches.

And I know my ma is calling me before I’ve done fifteen. I know because Darth Vader’s theme is playing on my phone. I programmed that in as her ringtone as a joke to piss her off when I was visiting for Christmas. She did not find it nearly as hilarious as my sister and I did. I also know that in the middle of Declan’s workday, he hung up with me and immediately called our mother to tell her that I’m going to New York to meet Alana for the first time. What. A. Dick.

I do another five crunches before answering—because I’m disciplined. And also, because I don’t want to talk to my mother right now. But if she leaves a message, then I’ll have to call her back at some point today, and she will just give me more shit for every hour she has to wait to hear from me.

I suck in a deep breath, gird my loins, and answer. “Hey, Ma. I’m just getting ready to shoot a scene. What’s up?”

“Edward Sullivan Cannavale.”

“Starting right in with all three names, huh?”

“I give you life, I give you three good names, and what do you give me?”

Lies.”

Wow. Mary Margaret O’Sullivan Cannavale is bringing her Irish mammy A-game today. “I never lied to you—what did Dec tell you?”

“Oh, just that you don’t even *have* a girlfriend.”

“Yeah, I do. I just haven’t met her in person yet. This is how things are done now—people get to know each other online first. What’s the big deal? Dec was pretending to date Maddie when they were there for Christmas.”

“That’s different! It’s real now. They’re engaged. And you sound hungry. Have you eaten yet today?”

“Yes, I’ve eaten! Some. And it’ll be real for Alana and me too, soon.”

“Right. When you come out to see your Instagram girlfriend and brother in New York, while conveniently bypassing Cleveland and the rest of your immediate family. Mr. Bigshot Hollywood Actor.” I can hear her smiling, but that doesn’t make me feel any less guilty—as if it were even possible for me to swing by Cleveland to see her.

*Well-played, Ma. Well-played.*

“It’s fine. I just made every costume you ever needed for every play you ever did in school by hand and helped you learn your lines for everything until you left me for Los Angeles. Not to worry. I’ve got no time to see you anyway. I’m busy over here making the world go around for your father, all day, every day. And what’s this about you taking the train with your little Birdie friend and then ditching her for the other girl on Valentine’s Day?”

“That is not how I would describe what’s going to happen. At all.”

“What’s wrong with Birdie? You’ve known her since college—you two could be married with three kids by now.”

“Hitting it pretty hard today, Ma.”

“Well. Neither of us is getting any younger, and I need more grandkids.”

“Half the guys in LA don’t get married until they’re, like, forty.”

“Half the guys in LA aren’t my son. My baby boy. I need to know there’s a good woman out there looking after you. How’s a model in New York supposed to take care of you, huh?”

“Ma. I don’t need to be taken care of.”

“Don’t act all tough with me—you think *I* don’t know what you need? Your mother?”

I can’t win this argument. I can make one and a half million viewers believe anything I say when I’m in character every week, but I will never convince my mother that she doesn’t know what I need, because I will

always be the baby of the family. And what I *need* right now is to end this call.

“You’re right. You are right. Listen, I have to—”

“Well, if you aren’t gonna marry poor Birdie, then you’d better keep your hands off of her on the train. You hear me?”

“Course, I will. The whole reason I’m taking the train with her is so I can make sure she’s safe.”

“Uh-huh. Safe from other guys who want to put their grubby hands on her.”

“Safe from psychopaths who travel by rail. But yes, also that.”

“Uh-huh. Hang on.” She moves the phone away from her mouth but doesn’t cover the receiver when she yells at my dad. Every time. “It’s in the bottom drawer! To the left of the sink! The bottom one! How can I be more specific than that?! No, don’t touch it—I’ll get it! Honey, let me call you back after I get something for your father.”

“I gotta do a scene. I’m at work.”

“Fine. We will discuss this later. Do good work. I love you to pieces.”

“Love you.”

I hang up, somewhat more confused than I was before I’d answered. I do not like being confused. I really don’t like what my ma and Dec were saying about Alana. And I definitely don’t like what she was saying about Birdie.

*They’re* the ones who are confused.

I can absolutely keep my hands off of Birdie when we’re bunking together. I haven’t consumed any water this morning, just so I’ll look extra cut for the ladies. That is dedication. I know how to give the ladies what they want. If Birdie doesn’t want my hands on her, my hands will not be on her.

It’s all about being disciplined.

It’s all about will power.

If anyone’s got discipline and will power, it’s me.

But if they serve spaghetti Bolognese on the train, then I’m eating all of it.

---

BIRDIE

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)



## THE ONE WITH JUST THE TIP



It is impossible to pack everything I need into one carry-on bag for a nine-day cross-country winter vacation, wherein six of those days will be spent on a train with Eddie Cannavale, and three of them will be spent on my own in New York City. I know this because I spent five hours selecting outfits with footwear and four hours trying to get them into a rolling suitcase along with my own bedding (because thanks but no thanks, Amtrak!). An hour into it, I did what any self-respecting adult woman would do—I started drinking merlot and burst into tears every time I couldn't get the stupid thing to zip up.

Finally, I decided that it was ridiculous to pack shapeless sweatshirts, bulky sweaters and my baggiest sweatpants to wear on the train with Eddie. My intention had been to wear clothes that signaled that I was not trying to appear attractive to him—simply because we would be in such close quarters for three-day stretches. But by the second glass of merlot, I'd realized how silly that was. Because Eddie is still Eddie. And I'm still me. Whether we're in the same American Lit class or in different cities or in a nine-and-a-half-foot-long room together, we're still the same two people who've been very good, totally platonic friends for six years. Despite the one-time nipple-y semi-frock rocket incident that I accidentally thought about five or more times while pleasuring myself.

No matter what Layla said, we can continue to be strictly platonic friends for the rest of our lives.

And we will.

So, I packed my pretty clothes in case there's anyone worth flirting with on the train. Because it's almost Valentine's Day, and I still haven't met a worthy male companion for temporary distraction purposes. This was the

only New Year's resolution with a deadline. I always make my deadlines. Even if I have to make out with a homeless person in New York on the thirteenth, I will find an intelligent homeless man who wears glasses, and I will meet that deadline.

It's seventy degrees in LA, and I'm wearing a massive winter coat as we make our way down the narrow corridor toward the back of the car. Our dedicated sleeping car attendant, Nancy, has just shown us the private restrooms and shower, which are reserved for passengers on this car only. She informed us that we must take the stairs to the upper level in order to go between cars to reach the lounge and dining cars, and she's now escorting us to the family bedroom.

Eddie is a few feet behind me, wearing a paper-thin thermal jacket and his 'Don't Look at Me I'm a Celebrity' baseball cap and sunglasses even though it's almost dinner time. And guess what?! Everyone has been looking at him. He is infuriatingly calm, and I bet it took him less than fifteen minutes to pack his bag. It's probably full of chest-defining thin sweaters, presents for Alana and extra-large Calvin Klein condoms that come in celebrity swag bags.

I regret not adding "There shall be no wearing of fragrance on the train" to my list of guidelines because he smells like beach sex in a snowstorm. It's very pleasant and appealing and I hate it. I hate that it makes me want to snort the skin on his neck and get us both naked so I can roll around on him like a baby seal. I take back what I said earlier. He's a terrible friend.

I'm dealing with it by asking Nancy a series of inane questions and making Harry Potter references so she won't leave me and my nostrils alone with him. Nancy looks and sounds like Kathy Bates, and I would trust her with my life.

"What time do we arrive at Hogwarts, Nancy, do you know?"

"Ahhh, if only I had a Galleon for every time someone made that joke."

"How long have you been working the rails?"

"Well, I've been a railroader ever since my son left for college, so about eleven years now."

"Wow. You must really enjoy it."

"I like it just fine. You on your way to Chicago for Valentine's Day?"

"New York. Yes," Eddie answers.

"Now, isn't that a treat. How long have you two been together, if you don't mind my asking?"

“Oh, we aren’t together. At all. We’ve been friends for six years. He’s going to New York to meet his girlfriend, and I’m going for better reasons. Other reasons. We just weren’t able to book another room. Well, I had a roomette booked, but he insisted I cancel my ticket. So, we have to share a bed. *Room. A bedroom.* That’s the only reason we’re sharing one. As friends. Just friends.”

Nancy glances back at me with a knowing half-grin before sliding open the door to our family bedroom. “I like the sound of that.”

I’m not sure which part of that she likes the sound of, but I’m a little too busy staring at the room and all the *no* space in it to ask her. This is a bedroom for a family of dwarves.

“Welcome to the Friend Zone,” Nancy deadpans with a wink. “It probably looks a little cozier than you were expecting. Everyone says so. But I think you’ll find it’s more than enough room for two people—as long as you don’t hate each other.” She winks again.

*Okay. That’s enough with the winking, Nancy.*

She gestures for me to enter. I do, and Eddie immediately walks in and drops his leather duffel bag and messenger bag onto one of the blue sofas.

“This is great,” he declares, turning to face the wall and stretching his arms out. Because he can’t face me and stretch his arms out at the same time. It’s not wide enough. “Plenty of room. Right, Bird?”

Honestly, I don’t know how a family of four humans is supposed to fit in here, because there’s barely enough room for two nipple-y boner-y adults to co-exist without bumping nipples and boners. But I guess as long as we remain totally unattractive to each other, that won’t be an issue.

“It’s great!” I say. “Four beds—wow!”

“This sofa here will fold out into a ‘double bed,’ but it’s more like a single and a half. Room enough for two though, if necessary.” She smacks her lips together. “And in here’s your closet.” Eddie steps aside so she can open up the narrow closet. “Both tables under the windows fold out, like so...” She folds out the small table beneath one of the windows. “Menu for your complimentary meals is right here. Complimentary bottles of water. Alcohol must be paid for, but it is encouraged.” She winks again, this time at Eddie. “I’ll be back this evening to turn down the beds for ya. And this here’s how you get my attention if you need anything.” She shows us the call button. “We have flexible dining now, so you do not need to make a reservation for the dining car. Meals will be served starting in half an hour.

Any questions?”

I open my mouth to ask a question, but Eddie beats me to it.

“Birdie wants to know when the old lady with the candy cart will be coming by.”

“The Trolley Witch!” I correct him.

Nancy does a bang-up imitation of the old British lady from the Hogwarts Express. “Anything off the cart, dears?”

I squeal with glee, clapping and jumping up and down. Before I’m done applauding her, she has disappeared and shut the door. Now I’m alone in a shoebox with Eddie. Now the room feels even smaller. And it already smells like snowy beach sex in here.

And I’m already thinking about snow.

And the beach.

And sex.

“Should I have tipped her?” Eddie asks as he removes his baseball cap to comb his fingers through his hair. He’s removed his sunglasses, so it’s the first time I’ve seen his eyes today, since he and his driver came to pick me up at my apartment. They’re hazel, and I swear his irises are a different color every time I see him. Right now they’re more green, almost blue. Probably because of all the blue upholstery in here. “Hello?”

“Huh?”

“Nancy. Should I have tipped the lady just now?”

“We tip her at the end of the journey.” I remove my coat and go to hang it in the closet, but it would take up all the space in there.

“Go ahead,” Eddie says. “I don’t need to hang anything up.”

“That had better not be the only coat you brought.”

“It’s warm enough for now. I’ll just buy a heavier coat in New York if I need to. Give it to a homeless guy when I leave.”

“Wow. Baller.”

“I am. And *I’ll* be tipping the attendant, by the way.”

I unzip my weekender bag and pull out the container of Clorox disinfecting wet wipes. “No way! Unless you let me pay for half of the hotel room in Chicago.” I insisted on paying for my train tickets, of course. He does earn a lot more money than I do, but I have a trust fund. I’ve always tried not to rely on it, but I can’t let him pay for me when he’s going out of his way to accompany me on this trip.

“Nope. That one’s on me.”

“Then I’ll pay for Nancy. I insist. Just the tip.”

Eddie bursts out laughing. I turn around to see what he’s laughing at and then realize what I just said.

“That’s what she said,” we both say at the same time.

And then I get to work, disinfecting all of the metal and plastic surfaces.

Eddie gets comfortable on the longer of the two sofa seats and looks at his phone. “I forgot to ask her for the Wi-Fi password.”

“Oh, there’s no Wi-Fi on this train.”

“What?” he snaps. “You’re joking, right?”

“No. This is an older train. The one we’ll take between Chicago and New York is supposed to have free Wi-Fi though.” I wipe down the bunk bed’s metal edge above where Eddie is sitting and reach up to wipe the handle that’s on the bottom of the raised bed. Eddie doesn’t move. He’s too busy scrubbing his face and questioning all of his recent life choices to be polite. I step around him and say, “Cell phone service will be pretty spotty too, supposedly.”

“Of course it will,” he mutters.

I place the used wipes in the slot for the trash disposal under a small counter. “But don’t worry!” I take four steps back to my weekender bag and pull out my printout of our route. “Look—we’ll be stopping at thirty stations between here and Chicago! I’ve marked the places where we can get off to stretch our legs and make phone calls and check emails.” I take a seat next to him and point out the train stations that I’ve marked with little smiling stick figures that are holding phones.

His shoulders are shaking. He’s laughing so hard he isn’t making any noise.

“Fine, don’t look at my map.” I start to stand up, but he puts his hands on my hips and pulls me back down beside him.

I really wish he hadn’t put his warm hands on my hips.

And I really wish he didn’t *still* have his warm hands on my hips.

And I really, really wish he wasn’t giving my hips a little squeeze before slowly moving his hands away.

It doesn’t mean anything. That’s just Eddie being Eddie. He’s a flirt robot, on autopilot.

“I love that you did this,” he manages to say, controlling his laughter. “This is great... You’re great.” He looks up at me, smiling.

It’s a friendly smile.

Until it isn't.

His gaze travels from the loose strands of my hair, which is up in a messy bun, to my mouth, to my neck, and back up to my mouth again.

There must still be wine in my bloodstream because everything feels warm and slow and good.

He looks so serious all of a sudden.

"Oh, shit." He suddenly grabs his messenger bag and pulls out his enormous iPad. "I should download a bunch of movies while I still can."

I finally remember to breathe. I remember that I'm sober. I remember who I am and who *he* is, before standing up and telling him, "I actually downloaded a few."

"Yeah? PBS documentaries about trains?"

"Nooooo." I get up to unpack my bedding and the playing cards and the first aid kit.

"Well, that just means *I* have to download a documentary about trains now."

"Okay, I lied. I downloaded one documentary about the history of trains. But it looks fun!"

"I knew it."

I smile to myself. He does know me well. I unpack two extension cords and then see the strip of condoms at the bottom of the bag, next to my hairdryer. I must have tossed those in when I was on my third glass of merlot last night. I zip up the bag and place it behind me when I sit down. *Bad weekender bag. You stay in the corner until you've figured out whose penis those condoms are for.*

We did priority boarding, so the train hasn't left the station yet. I pull my Kindle out from my handbag, to double-check that I've downloaded all of the books I plan to read over the next few days. I glance over at Eddie, who looks so confused as he tries to decide which movies to download. All of a sudden, I'm flooded with love for the guy.

In my heart, I mean.

Not in my panties.

But suddenly, this room feels even smaller. Maybe if he had a few less abs and bicep muscles, I could spread out a little more. Maybe if I hadn't felt quite such a large and firm appendage against me at my party, I could get a little more comfortable in here.

"I think I'll go grab us a table in the dining car."

“I’ll come with you,” he says without looking up from his iPad.

“No, no. You do your thing. I’ll take my Kindle. Take your time. You should probably give Alana a call while you can. Let her know about the Wi-Fi and cell phone coverage situation.”

He looks up at me, surprised. I’ve surprised myself too. I don’t usually give him actual advice regarding Alana. “Yeah. Okay. I’ll see you in a bit.”

I make my way up the narrow staircase to the upper level of the sleeper car and then head in the direction that Nancy had told us to go, toward the dining car. I take in deep breaths, inhaling the not-sexy aroma from the part of the train that Eddie isn’t currently inhabiting. It doesn’t smell great, but at least it doesn’t make me feel confused or horny.

There’s a middle-aged woman with a blunt, jet-black bob and bright red lipstick pacing around, talking on her phone. I can tell before I even hear what she’s saying that she’s a Hollywood person. A Hollywood person who doesn’t like to fly. I respect that. She steps aside to let me pass, but I slow down when I hear her talking about why she’s going to New York. “I need to check out some shows for that indie drama I’m casting for. It shoots in LA in June, but the director wants someone fresh and surprising. Someone hot, with acting chops. So basically someone who doesn’t exist...”

I wonder if Eddie knows this person.

I wonder if she knows who Eddie is.

I wonder if she knows he’s got the acting chops.

I wonder if I can go five minutes without thinking about Eddie...

---

EDDIE

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)



## THE ONE WITH FROMEO



I don't have a fucking clue which movies I should download. It shouldn't be a big deal. It's not a big deal. I just don't want to watch anything that'll make me horny while I'm sleeping in the same room as Birdie. Although it's very possible that a toothpaste commercial would make me horny right now because—I'm horny. I'm pretty sure it's because I'm on my way to see Alana. I'm one thousand percent certain it's because I haven't fucked a woman in over two months. But it might be because Birdie's blue eyes seem especially shiny today. And her hair seems especially soft and wavy. And she must have gotten a new kind of lip balm that makes her mouth look even more kissable than usual. She seems so nervous, it's really adorable. And she's making it impossible for me to ignore her nipples because they're locked and loaded, and two layers of clothing can't hide that.

But it's mostly because I haven't fucked a woman in over two months.

I think.

I just need to focus on my goals for the month.

1. Meet Alana in person.
2. Stay faithful to Alana.
3. Keep Birdie out of trouble.
4. Don't create trouble for Birdie, or for me.
5. Finish reading *Infinite Jest*. I can't believe I didn't finish it last month.

I hate not achieving my goals. Even when they're over a thousand pages long.

I need to download something. Fuck it. I'm downloading as many episodes of *Sherlock* as I can. I've only seen the series once. God only knows how many times Birdie's seen it, but at least I know she'll want to watch it.

And yeah, I also know she claims it makes her horny because she's a nerd who thinks Benedict Cumberbatch is hot. At least I know *I* won't get horny. I'm more of a Hiddlestoner.

While the show's downloading, I text Alana to ask if she can talk. She was disappointed that I'll be spending a little less time in New York than originally planned, but she didn't get all moody or anything. Which I liked. And she didn't ask a lot of questions about who I was taking the train with. Which I really liked.

**ALANA: Hey babe! <heart eyes emoji>**

**ALANA: I'm at dinner with friends.**

**ALANA: It's kind of loud in here and it's too cold to go outside to talk.**

**ALANA: You on the train?**

**ME: Yeah. Boarded. We haven't left the station yet. Just wanted to tell you I found out there's no Wi-Fi on this train and cell phone coverage might be spotty for the next few days.**

**ME: So if I don't respond to a text or call, that's why.**

**ALANA: Oh.**

**ALANA: Right.**

**ALANA: Sure.**

**ALANA: Whatever.**

**ME: I'm not making that up. There's really no Wi-Fi on the train and we're going to be passing through parts of the country that don't have good cell phone coverage.**

**ALANA: Got it.**

**ALANA: K.**

**ME: Babe. You sure you can't talk? I'd kind of like you to hear my voice right now so you know I'm not lying.**

**ALANA: Yeah, whatever.**

**ALANA: <face blowing a kiss emoji>**

**ME: <face blowing a kiss emoji>**

Fuck you, face blowing a kiss emoji.

I don't have a fucking clue what that conversation was all about. Does she actually think I'm lying to her? *Now*, all of a sudden, she doesn't trust me? Now that I'm on my way to meet her? For Valentine's Day?

That is not ideal.

I can't just leave it like that.

I can't text her again. Not after a passive-aggressive *face blowing a kiss emoji*. If I call her, she won't answer. I know she won't. If I don't call her, and I don't text her, she'll just get even madder. I'll look more and more like a dick. And I am not a dick.

I have to ask myself what I always ask myself in these situations...

*What would Declan do?*

I know exactly what my brother would do.

He'd ask me what the fuck I'm doing trying to work things out with a model I haven't even met in person when Birdie is in the dining car, waiting for me.

*Fuck you, Declan.*

But if he wanted to make sure a woman knew that he could be trusted—he would call her. Whether she answered or not. Just to prove that he wasn't a lying asshole.

But Declan's too old to realize he can just text her a voice memo. So, I record one. "Hey, babe," I say in my most reliable boyfriend voice. "Just wanted to hear your voice in the outgoing message and I wanted you to hear my voice when I tell you that I really can't wait to see you. And I can't wait to talk to you. And I can't wait to do all kinds of things to you. If you want to text or call me while I'm traveling, please do. I want you to. But I had to let you know that I might not be able to respond right away. Not because I don't want to. Because it might be technically impossible for a while. I will check in on you whenever I can, okay? Have a great night. Talk to you soon."

*Send.*

Boom.

And that's how you do it.

There's a tall, skinny guy with glasses pacing around the narrow hallway of the upper-level sleeping car, talking on the phone. He's wearing a cashmere scarf knotted around his neck like a French chick. "Well, it's not a fear of flying now though, is it, Bernard? It's a preference for not dropping out of the

sky and crashing to the ground in a massive metal death trap.”

British.

Pretty cool accent, very posh.

British glasses guy steps aside and rolls his eyes at me as I pass—as if I’d understand his plight of having to explain to people why he’s taking the train instead of flying.

“Cheers, mate,” I say to him, nodding. Because that’s what you say to British guys who wear scarves like French chicks.

“Indeed,” he says, and I can’t tell if he’s talking to Bernard or me. “Right. Sod right off, then.”

*Well, sod you too, sodhead.*

British glasses guy can kiss my great American ass. So sorry we won the Revolutionary War and stole your hottest women. Pip pip cheerio, then.

The dining car is about half-full. I spot Birdie sitting at a table across the aisle from a lady with short black hair and bright red lipstick. She looks like Mrs. White from the *Clue* movie. Birdie’s reading her Kindle and absentmindedly twirling loose strands of hair around her fingers. I love that she goes places by herself and just sits and reads. She used to do that on campus, and I’d sometimes watch her from afar—not in a creepy way. I was studying her. As an actor. We were actually assigned to watch people when they weren’t aware and self-conscious. In acting class. As an exercise. I’m dedicated to my craft.

I take a seat at the table, across from her and wait for her to notice me. She gets so lost in her books when she’s reading. Such a little nerd.

It isn’t until I pour myself a glass of red wine from the bottle in front of her that she turns off her Kindle, covers it and puts it aside. “Hi.” Her eyes are wide, and she’s grinning at me like she has something she’s dying to tell me.

“Hey. What’s up?”

“Nothing! They don’t have the whiskey or the beer that you like, but they do have Dewar’s Scotch. I figured red wine was a safe bet. I’m guessing you’ll order the steak.” She raises her glass. “Drink up.”

“Yes, ma’am and you are correct.”

She’s still grinning at me.

“What?”

“Nothing. Did you call Alana?”

“I told her about the Wi-Fi situation. What’s going on with you? Are you

reading a dirty book or something?”

“I was actually reading Britannica’s entry on Valentine’s Day,” she says. Because of course she was. She slides her glasses up the bridge of her nose. “Did you know that it replaced an ancient Roman fertility festival called Lupercalia? They would sacrifice these poor goats and dogs, and then the men would strip hides from the sacrificial animals and run through the streets of the town, slapping women with them, because they believed that would make the women fertile.”

“Sounds about right. I’m sure some of those guys were Cannavales.”

She rolls her eyes at me. “And the pope replaced it with St. Valentine’s Day near the end of the 5th century.”

“Pope Gelasius, right?”

She throws me a stunned look. “Yes. Pope Gelasius I. How did you know that?”

“I Googled this shit when I was bored in my trailer last week.”

“Oh.” She frowns. “So you could impress Alana with Valentine’s Day trivia?”

“No. So I could keep up with *you*, nerd.” I raise my glass to her again and then polish off what’s in it.

She blinks a few times, a little stunned, and then she shakes it off. “Anyway. I was reading through *Romeo and Juliet* earlier.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah... What was...?” She pauses and huffs, annoyed that she’s been interrupted by an announcement from the conductor on the speaker.

“Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls. Welcome aboard the Southwest Chief, otherwise known as The Love Train, this week. My name is Gavin, and I am your conductor for this journey. Total travel time from Los Angeles Union Station to our final destination of Chicago Union Station will be approximately forty-two hours and fifty minutes—give or take twelve hours. We’ll be making thirty-one scheduled stops between here and there, and you’ll be hearing from me along the way. Weather conditions overnight are favorable, so sit back, relax, enjoy the views and our many amenities—which do not, unfortunately, include Wi-Fi. Whether you’re traveling solo, with friends, lovers, or family, we promise to get you to your destination in one piece but not necessarily on time. On behalf of Amtrak and all of the attendants on board, we hope you have a very safe, comfortable and friendly ride...unless, of course, it’s finally time to take that next step. If you

know what I mean...”

*Well, that wasn't a long or awkward announcement at all. Thanks, Gavin.*

Something tells me Nancy and Gavin have been gossiping, but maybe I'm reading into things a little too much.

Something tells me Birdie is too, because she's blushing and can't meet my gaze.

She pours me the rest of the wine from the bottle, encourages me to drink more, and then looks around the dining car.

It's about three-quarters full now. I hope we don't have to share our table with anyone. Especially not that sodding Brit.

Now that the announcement is finally over, she continues. “Um. You used to do a couple of the Romeo monologues in college, didn't you?”

“Aye, I did doth. 't thrilled the ladies and dampened their undergarments.”

“Do you still remember them?”

“The monologues? Pssh. You don't forget a thing like that.”

She grins at me again. “Can I hear it?”

“Which one? I did two of them.”

“The most famous one.”

“The balcony monologue?” I wrinkle my nose. “Nah. Too long.”

She glares at me. “Edward.” She's so mad, it's hilarious.

“What? I did those monologues when I was seventeen, eighteen. I'm way too manly now.”

“Why don't you let me be the judge of that?”

“I'm on vacation—I'm not some dancing Shakespearean monkey.”

“Just do it. Do a shorter one, just do it!”

“I'm enjoying a beverage—get outta here.”

“Oh my God. Fine! Never mind.” She frowns, crossing her arms in front of her chest and looking out the window. “You blew it, Cannavale.”

“Story of my life. Learning to live with it.” I take one more gulp of wine and then a sip of water.

“Hey...” I wait for her to turn her pouty face my way again before continuing.

“What lady is that, which doth  
enrich the hand

Of yonder knight?”

I stand up so I can project and pace around. Because moving trains are really fucking loud, and Romeo is an energetic young fucker who can't stay still. I take a few steps away and play it like I'm watching Birdie from afar. The way I did back in college. But not creepy.

*Get ready to swoon, little Bird.*

“O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!  
It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night  
Like a rich jewel in an Ethiope's ear;  
Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear!  
So shows a snowy dove trooping with crows,  
As yonder lady o'er her fellows shows.  
The measure done, I'll watch her place of stand,  
And, touching hers, make blessed my rude hand.  
Did my heart love till now? forswear it, sight!  
For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night.”

She has never looked at me like that before—with such blatant admiration. And she's blushing. And radiant. And I've got an audience of about twenty people now. And it feels good. Fuck it—I'm going all in.

“But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks?  
It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.  
Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,  
Who is already sick and pale with grief,  
That thou her maid art far more fair than she:  
Be not her maid, since she is envious;

Her vestal livery is but sick and green  
And none but fools do wear it; cast it off.  
It is my lady, O, it is my love!  
O, that she knew she were!  
She speaks yet she says nothing: what of that?  
Her eye discourses; I will answer it.  
I am too bold, 'tis not to me she speaks:  
Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven,  
Having some business, do entreat her eyes  
To twinkle in their spheres till they return.  
What if her eyes were there, they in her head?  
The brightness of her cheek would shame those stars,  
As daylight doth a lamp; her eyes in heaven  
Would through the airy region stream so bright  
That birds would sing and think it were not night.  
See, how she leans her cheek upon her hand!  
O, that I were a glove upon that hand,  
That I might touch that cheek!”

After a silent moment, the dining room breaks out in applause, and I realize I'm down on one knee by Birdie's side. Her eyes are watery. Her lower lip is quivering.

Boom.

And that's how you do *that*.

I stand and bow to my audience—house left, house right, center. I do a little flourish for the girl who's holding up her camera. Then I sit back down in front of Birdie, who hasn't taken her eyes off me. Her face is flushed, her eyes are wide and she is so beautiful right now.

I'm feeling all the things right now.

I'm feeling so much love for her right now.

But it's just the writing.

*Fuck you, Billy Shakespeare. Don't fuck with my friendship.*

“Hi—excuse me—hi.” It takes me a second to realize the lady with the black hair and red lipstick is standing by our table, and I only realize it



because Birdie is looking up at her.

“Hey.”

“You’re Eddie Cannavale, right?” She holds out a business card. “I’m Debra Silver.”

Shit. I know that name. She’s one of the big casting directors. “Yeah, hi.” I hold out my hand to shake hers. “Nice to meet you. This is my friend Birdie.”

“Hey.” She nods at Birdie and doesn’t even smile at me once. “That was quite a little performance just now. I didn’t know you did Shakespeare.”

“Oh well, you know. Only on special occasions. Like dinner.” *Nailed it.*

She doesn’t even pretend to find me charming. “Uh-huh.” The phone in her hand vibrates. “Okay, I have to take this, but who’s your agent?”

“Rita Baskin.”

“Cool.”

That’s it.

That’s all she says before answering her phone, picking up her handbag, and walking out of the dining room.

“What the fuck just happened?”

I look over at Birdie, who is smiling from ear to ear. “She’s a casting director, isn’t she?”

“Yeah. Big-time. She’s practically a legend. Did you know who she was? Is that why you got me to do that?”

She shrugs. “I just wanted a little theater with my dinner.”

Well, shit. I never thought of Birdie as a sneaky girl, but I like it. I never would have done that if I knew there was a casting director in here and she knows it.

“Dinner’s on me,” I tell her.

“It’s included with the train fare.”

“Drinks are on me.”

“Deal,” she says. “Just don’t let me get too tipsy.”

“No deal. There was no mention of a limit to alcohol consumption in your guidelines. You said, ‘responsibly and at a reasonable rate.’ We’re both being very responsible, and if anything, we’re drinking a little too slowly.”

“I would like to amend my guidelines to include a few things.”

“Too late, milady. That train has left the station.” When a waiter comes by, I order another bottle of wine with dinner. “So...what’s the verdict? I’m too manly for Romeo now, aren’t I?”

She blushes. The lady doth blush just enough, methinks. “Just manly enough,” she whispers, looking away.

Maybe it’s motion sickness.

Maybe it’s the wine.

Maybe it’s the friendly Romeo performance—the Fromeo monologues.

But she looks a little flustered. And I’m feeling a little confused and dizzy too. And I don’t hate it.

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)



---

BIRDIE

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

THE ONE WITH THE SNORGASM



**LAYLA:** Have y'all boarded the Love Train yet? Hope you've been doing your Kegel exercises. Better get that pelvic floor ready for some hot sexy frorgasms. Those are orgasms given to you by a friend.

<winking face emoji>

**ME:** Please stop.

**LAYLA:** I will not. I'm doing MY Kegels right now.

**ME:** I'm sure your pelvic floor is very well conditioned. But you have to stop talking about Eddie and me like that. It's not a thing.

**LAYLA:** But vacation sex is a thing. And trains are sexy. That's why Alfred Hitchcock used a train entering a tunnel as a symbol for banging.

**ME:** That's really all you remember from the movie night I hosted, isn't it?

**LAYLA:** Stop trying to change the subject. You feel different now that you're on that train, don't you?

**ME:** Oh no! Only one bar of coverage! No Wi-Fi! Gotta go! Love ya bye!

**LAYLA:** <train emoji> <donut emoji> <fireworks emoji>

I lock my phone and plug the charger into the one wall outlet in our room, next to Eddie's charging phone. Our phones are now touching, but I've been trying really hard to keep my body away from Eddie's. Because ever since those Romeo monologues, all I want to do is hug him. And if I hug him tonight, all I'll want is for his love train to enter my tunnel. Because I've

consumed two and a half glasses of red wine and I'm feeling all kinds of warm and woozy.

But it's just the wine.

Or maybe I should take a Dramamine.

I'm sure it's just the Shakespeare.

And the fact that Eddie is a really, really good actor.

He's never asked me to run lines with him for his upcoming scenes if there's a love scene, so I've never experienced that side of his acting in person before. Not up close, anyway. Certainly not directed at me.

No wonder he was always dating his costars. I get it now. I get why the actresses who play his love interest always fall for him. Even when the writing isn't exactly brilliant, I'm sure it's a pretty heady experience, being looked at by Eddie Cannavale like that. Like you're his Juliet.

We took our sweet time finishing up in the dining car and then spent an hour or so playing cards in the lounge car before coming back to the room. It's so sweet that he'd carried a pack of playing cards with him in his pocket. He knew I wouldn't want to go back to the room to be alone with him right away.

A number of girls and moms approached him for autographs and handed me their phones, asking me to take pictures of them with him. This happens nearly every time we're out together in LA. He always takes his time chatting with his fans. It's sweet. He's just a nice guy—which is why I can't read into anything whenever he says or does anything particularly sweet to me. It's just who he is.

But we're back in the room together now. Nancy has already done the turndown service for the beds. I've finally convinced Eddie to let me sleep on the top bunk, since the bottom one is wider and he needs more room for all six of his abs. I told him to bring his own bedding and I'm so proud of him for actually listening to me. Now that I'm back from washing up and changing down the hall, I'm going to put my sheets on the top bunk.

I step onto the ladder, wearing only thick socks on my feet, carrying the bedding. I place the bedding on the mattress and remove the top sheet and blanket, so I can cover the existing sheets and pillowcases with my own. Eddie is sitting on the edge of the lower bunk, in gray sweatpants and a black T-shirt. He's reading *Infinite Jest*, and once again, his concentration face is endearing to me.

"Looks like you've made a lot of progress," I tell him. He's about

halfway through already.

“I’m going to finish it this month,” he mutters.

“It took me three months to read it, you know.”

“I’m *going* to finish it this month.”

“Are you enjoying it?”

“Yes. I think I like Dave Eggers’ writing more, though.”

I giggle. “I do too, actually.”

“Then why didn’t you just give me a Dave Eggers book?”

I can’t stop giggling now because I’m finally realizing how ridiculous it was to give him a thousand-and-seventy-nine-page novel as a gag gift. When I’m struggling to tuck the fitted sheet in, the unexpected jolt and horn of a passing freight train startle me, and I lose my balance. My foot slips. Unable to grab on to anything, I feel myself falling backward in slow motion.

Almost as soon as I’ve realized I’m falling and swearing like a marine, I find myself cradled in Eddie’s arms. I emit a squeaky kitten-like sound, my own arms wrapped around his neck, holding tight as if my life depends on it.

“I got you,” he whispers.

He has superhero reflexes, and I do feel a bit like Lois Lane right now.

But Lois Lane wasn’t friends with Superman, and Superman wasn’t on his way to see his Instagram girlfriend when he caught her midair.

I squeeze my eyes shut, clear my throat and say, “I’m fine. Thank you.”

“Why are you closing your eyes?” I can hear him smiling. He is amused by me.

“I feel dizzy.” I don’t tell him it’s because of the snowy beach sex fragrance or the way it feels to have his arms around me like this or being this close to his face.

“You need a Dramamine.” He lets me down slowly and I step away from him a little too quickly. He grabs on to my arms to steady me.

I’m a mess.

I slowly open my eyes, keeping them downturned.

“You okay?”

“Yes.”

He loosens his grip a little before letting go.

“I’m fine. Thank you.”

“I’ll finish making the bed for you.”

Before I can complete the sentence “I’ll do it,” he’s up on the ladder and finishing the job for me.

And I need to stop staring at his butt in those sweatpants.

I'm doing it. Stopping staring at his butt. Right now.

I get the Dramamine from my bag. Hopefully this will make me feel more normal. Less unsteady.

"You want to watch *Sherlock* with me?" he asks as he clutches the pillow to his chest and pulls up my pillowcase.

Great. Now my pillow's going to smell like snowy beach sex.

"Absolutely not," I say. *That is just what I need right now. A Cumberbitchboner and a lady froner.*

He laughs. "Okay. What do you want to watch, then?"

"I think I'll just close my eyes and listen to music tonight, actually. Is that okay with you? I'm kind of tired."

"Sure. I mean, it's almost your bedtime, so..."

It's not even nine thirty, but I do like to be in bed by ten.

He smooths out the top sheet and blankets before hopping down off the ladder. "Your bed awaits," he says.

"Thank you."

"You take a Dramamine?"

"Yes. I'm sure it will help." I grab my iPad and earbuds and get settled in the top bunk under the covers. "You should wear something with long sleeves," I tell him. "These blankets aren't very warm."

He waves dismissively. "Not worried. I'm hot blooded."

"Okay. You've got your noise-canceling headphones, right?"

"Always."

"Okay. You aren't going to be bored, are you?"

"Not if you keep asking me awesome questions all night," he says, grinning. He lies down on his bed, and I look down at our phones.

I guess it's okay to leave mine down there overnight. It needs to keep charging. "Don't look at my phone."

"Why would I look at your phone?"

Good. He's forgotten about the voicemail.

"No reason."

"Oh. The voicemail."

Shit. He remembers.

"You still haven't erased it, huh?"

I don't answer.

"I'm not going to hack into your phone," he grumbles, sounding a little



insulted.

“I know. I trust you.”

“I would hope so.”

“Hey.” I lean over the edge a bit so I can see him. He has one arm curled behind his head, and his bicep is all flexed and magnificent.

I wait for him to glance up at me before saying, “Thank you for coming with me. On the train. For getting this room. I really do appreciate it.”

“You’re welcome.”

I nod and lie back with my head on the pillow. “You were really good,” I say to the ceiling right above me. Because I can’t look at him when I say this. “The monologues. That was so romantic. It was so good to see you perform like that again. You’re really talented.”

“Thank you. Thanks for getting me to do that. I mean, it was weird. But thank you.”

I’m not going to tell him about the part that lady’s casting, in case he doesn’t get called in for it. But I have a good feeling about it. “I’m gonna put my earbuds in now, okay? Good night.”

“Hang on. When do we have to get up tomorrow?”

“Whenever. Do you want me to wake you?”

“Not really. I’ve had such early call times lately. It’d be nice to sleep in if I can.”

“Okay. Well, I’ll get breakfast when I’m up and let you know where I am.”

“Kay. G’night.”

I turn off the wall light by my bed, put my earbuds in and turn on my classical relaxation playlist.

The rhythmic rocking of the train is surprisingly soothing and also very surprisingly...arousing. I realize I’ve absentmindedly been doing Kegel exercises as I lie here listening to a Chopin cello sonata—which you’d think would be the opposite of provocative. But you’d be wrong.

I’m feeling all fluttery in my belly and tense and wet between my legs and what the flickering flackering clickety clacketing hell man?! My breasts are swollen and my nipples are pointing right up at the ceiling. I suppose it doesn’t help that I can’t stop massaging them.

I can’t do this.

I’m the one who came up with the rule about us not pleasuring ourselves while we’re in the same room together.

But oh God, the flutters. The tension. I carefully slide my hand down into my panties. It's so slippery and silky smooth down there.

This requiem I'm listening to now is so seductive.

And if I don't release a little tension tonight, I mean, what's it going to be like tomorrow?

My clitoris already feels like an alien egg pod, ready to burst.

I pull my earbuds out and quietly, slowly, peer over the edge of the bed. Eddie is lying down there with his wireless Bose headphones on and he's staring at the iPad that's propped up on his chest. Both arms are crossed behind his head, both biceps flexing.

I slowly slide back toward the wall, push my iPad aside and turn onto my stomach. If I barely move... If I bury my face into the Eddie-scented pillow... Surely, I can just relieve a little tension without him knowing.

I mean, that show is riveting. And he has noise-canceling headphones on. And I'll barely have to move around at all at this point.

I'll just try to make it sound like I'm snoring if I make a noise.

If he happens to hear me, he'll think I'm asleep.

I slide my hand down between my legs, rubbing flat against my clit with as much pressure as possible. All the blood in my body and all eight thousand nerve endings are rushing up to the surface to thank me already. And I can't help that I'm being rocked by the motion of the train. I can't help that I can still feel Eddie's arms around me. I can't help that when I close my eyes, I see the way he stared into them when we were in the dining car. When he was kneeling on the floor beside me. When he was Romeo, and I was a silent, stunned Juliet, unable to do anything but watch and admire him.

My heart is already racing. My breaths are already coming fast and heavy as I inhale the intoxicating scent of fresh laundry, cocoa butter, sea salt, musk, and something cold, wet and metallic. He's right, he is hot blooded. His skin is always warm to the touch. It's why it always feels like I'm melting into him when he's hugging me. I'm not all that curvy, but I feel so soft against the firm curves of his muscles.

"I got you," he'd said. And he had. He'd caught me. As if he'd been there waiting for me to fall all along.

I slide two fingers inside myself, grind my pelvis into the mattress, rock my hips.

*The measure done, I'll watch her place of stand,  
And, touching hers, make blessed my rude hand.*

I make a fist with one hand, gripping the thin mattress, and release a loud sigh into the pillow as my body contracts and releases. I shudder and then remember to make a snorting sound—so it sounds like a snore. I go completely still for a minute because I hear Eddie moving beneath me.

Oh God, oh God, please don't hear me.

“Eddie?” I whisper.

More movement as he shifts around, but he doesn't reply.

I make another slightly piggy snoring sound and then move my hand vigorously because I need to get this over with and I need to stop thinking about the man in the bed below me.

Sherlock.

I need to think of Sherlock. That brain. Those wide-set crystal blue eyes. That wavy brown hair. That slender torso. That accent.

The way Eddie looked at me tonight.

His big ol' semi-erection against my thigh and his big warm hands on my waist when I was lying on top of him, accidentally flashing him.

The way he looked at me in that moment.

And if Layla hadn't burst into my room...

If I had just lowered myself down to him, lips parted, if our mouths had touched and our tongues had touched.

If his hands had squeezed my hips and I had rocked my hips just a little.

I wouldn't have had to say a word.

He would have taken it from there.

He would have massaged and squeezed and maybe even scratched and spanked a little.

His hands would have disappeared under my camisole and found my breasts, and he would have flipped me onto my back so he could uncover them and kiss them all over.

And I would have just stretched out and offered myself up to him.

He would have made me come with his mouth and his tongue and his hands and maybe his fingernails and teeth even. He'd be gentle. He'd know exactly what to do to make me feel good.

And it would. It would have felt so good.

I would have whispered to him *fuck me, Eddie, just do it. Do it fast before anyone comes in.* And he would do it fast and hard, and we would have covered each other's mouths and screamed into each other's hands while staring into each other's eyes and it would have been so, so hot.

“Oh, God!” I whisper into the pillow as a wave of orgasm hits me.

I remember to snort, and then as I feel that tumbling, falling again in my abdomen and a violent shudder, my muffled cry is surely too quiet for Eddie to hear, but oh God, I can't contain it.

And I can't snort.

It's physically impossible to snort in the middle of an orgasm, it turns out.

It's mentally impossible to think about anyone other than Eddie while I'm touching myself now, it seems.

But I can still tell myself that it's just a physical thing. It's just hormones. It's just my confused body reacting to things that don't mean anything other than—we're two friends who haven't had sex with anyone in a while and we just happen to be in close proximity to each other right now. For a short period of time.

I shudder and jolt again, and then I pull my hand away. Both hands clutch the pillow as I breath into it, trying to catch my breath, trying to slow my heart rate, trying to forget that Eddie is just a few feet below me. Reminding myself that when he said he'd never seen true beauty until this night, they weren't *his* words. They weren't *his* feelings. It was just a performance. Something I'd asked for. Something he used to do for auditions.

He loves me as a friend.

I love him as a friend.

Sometimes friends have orgasms while they're touching themselves and thinking about their friends.

It's just the wine.

It's just the built-up tension.

It's just the rocking of the train.

It's just friendship.

And that's more than enough.

It has to be.

Because I don't think I could handle any more from Eddie Cannavale—body, mind, or soul.

That's why I have guidelines in place.

That's why I have New Year's resolutions to focus on.

That's why he's traveling with me to New York, to spend Valentine's Day with a woman who isn't me.

And it's fine.

Because it has to be.

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)



---

EDDIE

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

THE ONE WITH LORD SNOTTINGTON MCFARTNUGGET OF  
FUCKYOUSHIRE



When I was thirteen, I stole my ma's DVD of *When Harry Met Sally* and watched it on Declan's laptop in my room. Not the whole movie—just the part where Meg Ryan fakes an orgasm in the middle of lunch at a deli. I thought it was so hot. I don't think I even realized that Billy Crystal was in the scene. I had no intention of ever watching the rest of the movie. I just watched that part, over and over, because I'd heard Aiden and Brady talking about it once.

And then, when I was fifteen, I watched that movie with a girl at her house after school. Most of the time, all I was thinking about was whether or not I should try to touch that girl's boob *during* the movie or if I should wait until it was over. But when that deli scene came on, all I could think about was—how did that actor not have a boner while he watched Meg Ryan fake orgasms two feet away from him all day? And then when my first girlfriend made me watch that movie with her when we were seventeen, I thought—yeah, Harry is right. Men and women can't be friends. Because the sex part always gets in the way.

But then, when I met Birdie, I convinced myself that Harry was wrong.

Well, not when I'd first met Birdie. When I first met her, I thought she was the hottest nerd I'd ever seen. I'd imagined getting a fistful of that long, dark blonde wavy hair and tugging on it, just enough to make her gasp. I'd imagined her mouth on my cock, and I'd imagined all the crazy dirty things she'd say to me when I made her come for the first time in her life. Because I just had a hunch that no guy had ever given her an orgasm before—still do.

But after a while, I realized men and women *can* be friends if that's what



they both want. The sex part does get in the way. But that doesn't mean they can't be friends.

I'd like to believe that you can stay friends with anyone for as long as you want to. Even when you're lying in a bunk bed right below your best female friend. Even when she is clearly giving herself a very real orgasm or three, and you're quietly palming yourself because what the fuck else are you supposed to do when Birdie Beckett is four feet over you, moaning into a pillow?

And snorting.

Somehow that didn't make it any less hot.

I'm glad I brought extra sheets. I'm really glad she seemed to have fallen asleep right after she came, because I came so hard, I had to groan into the crook of my arm, and I swear I made the train rock even harder for a few seconds. *And fuck you, Catholic guilt—I'm still being faithful to Alana.*

I can hear a couple of young kids squealing outside the bedroom door. Sunlight's streaming in through the gap between the blue curtains. I can sense that I'm alone in here. Birdie let me sleep in like I'd asked her to. I get up, open the curtains—looks like we're in Arizona—and find a note in Birdie's unmistakable, perfect cursive handwriting:

***Morning, sleepyhead.***

***I'm off to have breakfast in the dining car.***

***Take it easy.***

***If you aren't there by the time I'm done, I'll head over to the lounge car.***

***xx Birdie***

I love how she signed it—as if anyone else would be leaving me a note like this in our private room. I love how she writes “take it easy,” like some sixty-year-old aunt. I wonder if her hand still smells like her pussy... *Whoa.*

No, I don't.

Not in the cold light of day.

Not when I have to check in with Alana.

I do find text notifications from Alana when I unplug my phone. But I also have a voice message from my agent's office, and I've got three signal bars, so I call them back immediately.

Her assistant Eric answers. "Rita Baskin's office."

"Hey man, it's Eddie. What's up?"

"Oh, hey man. I hear you're on a train."

"Yep. Headed to New York." *Don't small talk me now, man. I might lose my signal.*

"To meet the IG chick?"

"You got that right."

"Niiiiice. Hang on, let me get Rita for you."

I've had the same agent since I was at UCLA. I signed with her because she was kind of hot, but she sounded exactly like Joey's agent on *Friends*, and I thought that was hilarious. When you're eighteen, that's a good enough reason to hire someone. But she's actually good at what she does, and she's taken me with her every time she's moved to a bigger agency. Now that we're at one of the biggest ones, I hear from the junior agents on my team more. So, if she's calling me, it should be actual news. Not someone telling me they're talking to someone about me doing a guest spot on *Pretty Little Liars* or some horseshit. Not that that show's horseshit. But I don't need another guest spot. I need a fucking grownup role in something that my family can't make fun of, for a change.

"Cannavale, you there?" My agent might be the only woman left in LA who smokes a pack a day. She coughs into the phone.

"Rita. Lovely to hear your voice."

"Oh, fuck off. I'm made of phlegm. What's this I hear about you takin' a train to my hometown? You afraid of flyin' all of a sudden?"

"I'm with a friend who doesn't like to fly. What's up? I'm afraid I'll lose my signal."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah, I'm gettin' to it hotshot. I got a call from Debra Silver. Said she's on a train with you, and she saw you do a couple of Romeo monologues? I was like, shut your face that's not even funny. But then Eric got a Google alert for you, and it turns out someone recorded some of it and posted it online. Eric—you send him that link yet? Eric? *Eric?!?*"

Eric gets on the line. "Sending now."

"Okay. So, Debra Silver called you?"

“Right. So, Debra Silver’s casting a drama that shoots in LA starting June fourteenth. Everyone wants in on this one. Very prestigious but very hush-hush. I tried to put you up for it when she was in our offices last month, but she didn’t even want you to record an audition for her. *Now* she wants you to read for her when she’s back in town in a couple of weeks. If it goes well, you go straight in to meet with the director. Pretty exciting, am I right?”

This is the opposite of a guest spot on *Pretty Little Liars*.

“Am I an amazing agent or what?” I can’t tell if she’s making a joke or not, but I would not put it past her to take credit for this.

“Yeah. I don’t know what I’d do without you.”

“You wanna know about the project, or you wanna wait until I send you the pages?”

“Yeah, don’t tell me.” One thing I love about Rita is she knows I get nervous about a part that I really want, so we decided years ago it’s better if I don’t know all the details until I absolutely have to. “That’s really cool. Should I talk to her if I see her on the train again or...?”

“No. Don’t talk to her. Just leave her with the good impression you gave her yesterday. And definitely don’t bother trying to flirt with her. Her wife is hot and even younger than you are, I think.”

“Got it.”

“Okay, I got another call. Gotta bounce, love ya, bye.”

She hangs up before I can say goodbye, which is fine, because I never know what to say when she throws that Hollywood *love ya, bye* shit at me.

I’ve got that feeling in my stomach. Like something big is happening. I don’t want to get my hopes up, but all I can really think about is how none of this would have happened—whatever is happening—if it weren’t for Birdie. If she hadn’t decided to go to New York now too. If she hadn’t insisted on taking the train. If she hadn’t gotten me to bust out my Romeo in the dining car out of the blue.

I can’t change my clothes and get to the dining car to join her fast enough. But first, I strip the bed of last night’s sheets and shove them into my duffel bag, so Nancy doesn’t have to deal with them. I can’t wait to tell Birdie about the call.

When I get to the dining car, it’s only about a quarter full, but I don’t see Birdie right away...until I spot her at a table with some guy whose back is to me. He’s dressed in black and wearing a scarf. And Birdie is sitting across from him, beaming at him, hanging on his every word. And he keeps

reaching out to touch her fucking hand that's resting on the table as he talks.

*I don't sodding think so, mate.*

I stand next to the table, taking up as much space as possible.

Guy doesn't even realize anyone else is on the train, I bet.

"So, I turned to Sir Salman Rushdie, rolled up my sleeves, and I said, 'Each and every Harry Potter book is exactly as long as it needs to be—would you like to take this outside and settle this once and for all?'"

"You didn't!" Birdie exclaims. As if he'd just told her he's won the Nobel Prize for literature.

"I'm afraid I did."

"What did he say?!"

"Oh, hello," Scarf Fellow mutters when he looks up at me.

"Sup."

Birdie taps my arm, and I go over to take the seat next to her, resting my arm on the back of her chair—because it's comfortable to do so. "Eddie, you'll never guess who this is!"

*The guy who's about to leave us alone so I can talk to you...*

*The guy who looks like the guy from The Princess Bride if that guy had lactose intolerance and a stick up his ass.*

"This is Rupert Norton the Third!"

*Christ. There's three of him.*

"He's a baron." She's so much more animated than usual, which concerns me. "So, his full title is Lord Rupert Norton the Third—of Norton in the County of Northhamptonshire. Did I get that right?"

"You certainly did, but please just call me Rupert Norton. Hello." He holds out his hand with long thin fingers, and I shake it. Because I am not a dick.

"Cheers. Edward Sullivan Cannavale the First. Of Youngstown."

"How do you do? We've crossed paths before, I believe."

"Yes. I believe we were at uni together. Oxford, right?"

"I did go to Oxford. Sorry—did you really?"

"No—did *you* really?"

Birdie clears her throat. "Yes, Eddie, he went to Oxford. He's the author of a bestselling book about contemporary British pop culture, and he has a very popular podcast called *That's Brilliant! With Rupert Norton*. He's giving one of the talks at the TEDx I'm going to!"

*Stay tuned for my podcast: That's Bullshit and It Is So Not Happening*

*with Rupert Norton.*

“I was hoping to tell you, actually, I think there was a small misunderstanding yesterday evening in the corridor. When I said what I said as you passed by, I was speaking to my mate on the phone. I wasn’t addressing *you*.”

“Oh. Cool. No worries.”

“I was a bit worried, so I’m glad I had the chance to clear things up.” He turns his attention back to Birdie. “So, this is the *friend* you were talking about?”

I do not like the way he said that word.

“Yes, this is my *friend* Eddie who was so sweet to accompany me on this trip, even though he already had a plane ticket to see his girlfriend—because he wanted to protect me from serial killers.”

I definitely do not like the way she said that word and I also do not like the way Rupert is giving me a knowing look.

*You don’t know, Rupert. You don’t know anything.*

“You’re on a children’s television series, Birdie tells me?”

*Fuck you, Rupert.*

“It’s a high school drama—*End Zone*. We won a Golden Globe award for best new show. I was actually just signing some autographs for fans on my way over here.”

“How lovely for you. I really should try to watch more American television. I’m sure it’s not quite as bad as people say.”

“Well, it’s a little sexier than what you’re used to across the pond, I’m sure.”

“I live in LA most of the time now, actually.”

I do not like the sound of that.

“Did you sleep well?” Birdie asks me, forcing a smile and changing the subject.

“Very well. Did *you*?”

“Very well.” She blushes and looks away, waving at the server to come over.

I order breakfast and coffee, and Rupert Norton the Turd asks for more hot water for his tea. Oh, look at that. He brought his own tea bags for a proper cuppa. How fucking quaint.

It looks like they’ve both finished their meals, so I really hope he’s planning on taking that tea back to his room or his throne or wherever the

fuck he goes next. I don't care, as long as he leaves really soon. I do not like the way he's looking at her and I really don't like the way Birdie's looking at him and I have not ruled this guy out as a serial killer yet.

He finishes telling Birdie the riveting and hilarious story about him and Salman Rushdie, while I stare at him hard, trying to make him really uncomfortable. I think it's working. He keeps shifting around in his chair, but maybe it's that stick up his ass that's bothering him.

I keep my arm on the back of Birdie's chair, and with the other hand, I reach for an untouched piece of toast on her plate. "I had an interesting phone conversation earlier, Bird," I say, but I keep my eyes on the Brit. "Can't wait to tell you about it." I take a bite of that toast.

"Oh good," she says, eyeing me warily. "Can't wait to hear about it."

The server comes by with a small metal pot of hot water for Rupert. He makes a big show of leaving a ten-dollar bill on the table before standing and picking up his box of teabags and the metal pot. "I've got to rehearse my Ted Talk in my room, if you'll excuse me."

"TEDx talk," I correct him.

"Indeed." He smirks at me and then smiles at Birdie. "I shall see you back here at noon, then?"

"Indeed," she says. "See you then."

"I look forward to it." He nods at me and then leaves.

"Back here at noon, huh?" I mutter. "Hot date?"

"Nooooo." She absentmindedly twirls the loose strands of hair while watching that skinny fucker go, and I do not like it. "He just wants to learn more about what I do as an archivist. He might interview me on his podcast." She dabs at the sides of her mouth with her napkin, carefully places and folds the napkin on the table while staring at it and blushing. "Tell me about your phone call."

"You're not seriously into him, are you?"

"Who?"

"Lord Snottingham McFartnugget of Fuckyoushire."

She frowns at me. "He's a very well-respected person. He was very nice to me and it would be an honor and a huge deal if he interviewed me. But it's not like that."

"He's so pale."

"And?"

"And blonde. You can't see it, but his shade of blonde hair totally clashes

with yours.”

“Edward.”

“And old. He’s probably what—thirty-five? I mean, I know you like nerds, but he’s not even a cool nerd. Very thin lips, really thin fingers—not too promising if you want my opinion.”

“I don’t want your opinion.” She shakes her head and crosses her arms in front of her chest. “He’s thirty-two. And his lips are not thin. You talk to Alana yet this morning?”

“Oh right...no... Shit.” I totally forgot to read her texts. Completely. Forgot.

I pull my phone out from my back pocket and check my messages. There are five from Alana. One of them is a screenshot.

“Shit.”

“What?”

I check my email app for the link that Eric was supposed to send me. There’s one bar, so it takes half a year for the video to load, but it finally does, and... “Shit.”

## CHAPTER TWELVE

---

**ALANA: Hi.**

**ALANA: Still having fun on the train?**

**ALANA: Because I'm having an amazing time reading all these comments and DMs about how in love you are with that girl.**

**ALANA: And how I need to dump you.**

**EDDIE: Babe I was going to call you but I wasn't getting a signal. Calling you now.**

**ALANA: Don't bother.**

**ALANA: I'm too mad to talk to you right now.**

**EDDIE: Babe. She's just a friend and I was just acting. I told you.**

**ALANA: I know what you told me.**

**ALANA: But I also know what I saw in that video.**

**ALANA: I know what everyone sees in that video.**

**EDDIE: Did it really not occur to you that I'm a good actor?**

**ALANA: Did it really not occur to you to tell me that the "friend" you're traveling with is a woman?**

**ALANA: Did it really not occur to you that someone would film you professing your love to her?**

**ALANA: Did you seriously not think for one second about how that would effect ME?**

**EDDIE: It was a monologue written by William Shakespeare. I'm sorry that it didn't occur to me how it would AFFECT you when I was totally in character. And I've been friends with Birdie for six years. We're just friends.**

**ALANA: Please. <face with rolling eyes emoji>**



**ALANA:** I've had sex with literally every guy friend I've ever had.

**EDDIE:** Are you serious?

**ALANA:** <smiling face with halo emoji>

**EDDIE:** Well I've never had sex with Birdie and I haven't had sex with ANYONE since you and I decided to be exclusive.

**ALANA:** Oh...

**ALANA:** Was THAT what we decided?

**ALANA:** Oops!

**EDDIE:** What is that supposed to mean? I think we need to have this conversation over FaceTime.

**ALANA:** Can't.

**ALANA:** I have a fitting in half an hour.

**ALANA:** For a designer friend of mine.

**ALANA:** A straight designer friend.

**ALANA:** <winking face emoji>

**ALANA:** I think it's a little premature to decide to be exclusive with someone when you haven't actually met that person in person, don't you?

**ALANA:** Soooooo sorry for the confusion.

**ALANA:** Oh.

**ALANA:** Maybe you lost your signal.

**ALANA:** Kbye.

**ALANA:** <face blowing a kiss emoji>



**EDDIE:** Where are you?

**EDDIE:** Did you leave for the dinner cat alright?

**EDDIE:** Dining car. Already. Duck you autocorrect.

**BIRDIE:** You need to drink a lot of water and you need to take an Advil and then you need to take a nap.

**EDDIE:** I'm not drink.

**EDDIE:** Drunk. Not drunk.

**BIRDIE:** You are on a timeout, young man.

**EDDIE:** Are you at the dining car already?

**EDDIE:** With lord snobbery farnsworth of skinnyfingerton the <pile of

**poo emoji>?**

**BIRDIE: You need to stop ordering alcohol. You need to stop drinking alcohol. You need to take a nap. You need to calm down. And then you need to call Alana to smooth things over with her.**

**EDDIE: <rolling on the floor laughing emoji> No. No to all of that.**

**EDDIE: I'm coming to the dining car.**

**BIRDIE: Eddie.**

**BIRDIE: Eddie stay in the room!**

**BIRDIE: Edward.**

**BIRDIE: <woman facepalming emoji> Just promise me you'll behave yourself around Rupert, please.**

**BIRDIE: He's not here yet.**

**BIRDIE: Eddie.**

**BIRDIE: <frowning face emoji>**

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)



---

BIRDIE

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

THE ONE WITH THE CLEAR VIOLATION OF RULE NUMBER TWO



I came to the dining car early because I need a glass of wine before lunch.

Because I accidentally pleased myself while thinking about Eddie while I was in the same room with Eddie last night.

Because I have a feeling, based on the way he's been looking at me this morning, that he heard me and that he did not buy the snoring.

Because someone recorded and uploaded Eddie's Romeo monologue to the Internet, and now a bunch of idiots are somehow convinced that he's cheating on Alana and madly in love with me—just because he's such a good actor.

Because multiple idiots forwarded the video to Alana, and now it sounds like poop's getting real and I haven't ensnared a meaningless penis for self-cockblocking purposes yet.

Because Eddie has been drinking ever since he texted her after breakfast, and he's so vulnerable right now that I just want to wrap him up in a blanket and rock him to sleep in my arms while singing him a lullaby. I am definitely not naked in that scenario and I'm definitely not singing like Ariana Grande.

Because my only non-Eddie penis prospect on this train has very long, thin fingers that make me slightly sad and somewhat uncomfortable.

But Rupert Norton is an excellent fellow and he's exactly the sort of chap that I should be dating.

He's a well-bred, glasses-wearing intellectual that I can have interesting conversations with. And he's perfectly fine-looking. *And he has an English accent!* He's exactly my type.

I just need a little more wine to convince myself of this for some reason.

And I don't want Eddie to show up, but I'm also not sure if I want him to

work things out with Alana. Because, as a friend—I know she’s not the girl for him. She doesn’t deserve him. Not even a little bit. I’ve known this, as a friend, all along. He deserves someone who appreciates all of him. Someone who really knows him. Someone reliable. Someone who can keep him on track and inspire him to be the best version of himself.

As soon as he finds that person, I will encourage him to marry her, one hundred percent.

Until then, I will drink wine and try not to pleasure myself while thinking about him ever again.

Just as I’m polishing off my first glass of wine, I look up to see Rupert walking in, with Eddie right behind him. Rupert has a polite, neutral expression on his face, and Eddie is trying very hard not to laugh. He straightens his posture and carries himself like an uptight old Englishman—which is not how Rupert carries himself at all. Not exactly.

Rupert looks over his shoulder to check what I’m looking at, and Eddie stops imitating him just in time.

Well, this is going to be a flippin’ flappin’ awesome delight.

I stand up and curtsy at Rupert...immediately wishing I hadn’t done that, but it’s too late now.

“Your lordship.”

Rupert chuckles, the skin around his eyes wrinkling more than you’d expect it would for a thirty-two-year-old. “Your grace.” He carries a leather journal in one hand and places the other hand lightly upon my shoulder when leaning in to barely kiss me on the cheek. With his rather thin lips. “Lovely to see you.”

“Lovely to see *you*.” I try to ignore Eddie, who has taken the seat next to me—not only without waiting to be invited to join us but before Rupert and I sit down.

He waves the attendant over and asks for a beer.

“And what can I get for you, sir?” the attendant asks Rupert.

“It’s a bit early in the day for me to start drinking, I think. Just a tonic water for me, cheers.”

“Oh, same for me. That sounds refreshing,” I tell the server.

“You sure you don’t want another glass of wine?” Eddie prods.

“I would also like another glass of wine, thank you.” Turning to Eddie, I smile and say, “Perhaps you should enjoy a tonic water or just plain bottled water, Edward...”

“Perhaps,” he says. “But first—beer.”

“How about a coffee too, then.” I call the server back. “Sorry, can we have a cup of coffee too, please?” I nudge the breadbasket over to him. “Eat the bread.”

“And ruin my cute figure?” he says, pulling up his shirt to pat his lower abs. “I don’t think so.”

“You need to eat something, Eddie.”

His eyes suddenly go hooded and his tone gets very suggestive. “What would you like me to eat, Birdie? Your wish is my command.” He’s leaning back against the wall, away from me, but it feels like he’s right up in my very warm face.

Damn him.

He’s flirting with me.

He’s flirting with his face.

He’s flirting with his voice.

He’s flirting with his abs.

He’s even flirting with his butt somehow—I can’t see it right now because he’s sitting on it—but I know he’s doing it.

“You’re in clear violation of rule number two,” I tell him.

“You were in clear violation of rule number five last night,” he replies without even blinking.

*So he did hear me. Fan-flubbing-tastic.*

“They’re really just guidelines, not rules, so...”

“Exactly. So, if I were to reference, for instance, a certain *slipple nip* and frock rocket incident, I wouldn’t really be breaking a rule so much as I’d be respectfully disregarding said guideline.” He grins. “I might even eat a block of parmesan cheese in our room tonight. Really throw caution to the wind.”

I shake my head at him. My head is just a big neutral face emoji right now, but my panties are basically melting down the inside of my pant leg. I don’t know what has gotten into him, but he needs to go take a nap.

Someone clears his throat.

*Oh shit, it’s Rupert.*

I totally forgot he was sitting there.

“The romaine and goat cheese salad looks quite good,” he says, staring down at the menu.

“Oh. Yes. Yes, I was thinking of ordering that too.”

Rupert slides a Montblanc pen out from the middle of his leather journal

and opens the journal to a blank page, smoothing it down with his long slender fingers. "I'd love to hear about what you do at the Getty Museum, Birdie."

"Yes. I would love to tell you about my job." I turn to Eddie, who is still leaning back against the wall and resting his head against his fist, all languid and sexy-like. "You probably don't need to hear me talk about this yet again. Why don't you order something to take back to the room? A burger, maybe."

"Is that what you want me to do, Bird?"

*No, I want you to put your mouth on my mouth and your hands on my everything, and I want your big hard cock inside me and I also want you to be my friend forever.*

"Yes. That is what I want you to do, Eddie."

He slowly stands and squeezes my shoulder with his big, strong hand. "Okay. I'll order from the room. You can have my beer."

I may have imagined the slight tremble in his voice. I hope I did. Because if I actually hurt him by asking him to leave, I couldn't bear it.

"Thank you."

"Enjoy your lunch." He addresses Rupert as he lets his fingertips drag across the back of my bare neck, sending shivers down my spine, awakening some gorgeous, terrible ache in my belly, in my heart.

*What a jerk.*

"I'm quite sure I will," Rupert says.

"Cheers," Eddie says with a flourish.

And then he walks out.

And he's flirting with his butt as he goes.

I don't know how he does it, but I swear, he's doing it.

And I can't look away.

And I wipe away one stupid hot tear from the corner of my eye.

I hope he isn't sad.

I hope he doesn't do anything stupid.

I hope I don't do anything stupid.

I hope I don't think about him the entire time I'm talking to Rupert, but so far, no luck.

"Where would you like me to begin?" I ask Rupert.

He pushes his glasses up the bridge of his nose. "Why don't you tell me about your university degrees, actually. Start from there."

I start to tell him about what I studied at UCLA, but all I'm thinking



about is the way Eddie looked at me that first time he walked into American Lit class and sat down next to me. I've spent the past six years trying to forget about it, but now, all of a sudden, I can't remember why.



The really great thing about trains versus planes? The observation car—and all of the different cars that you can walk through and to, if you're a little bit tipsy and a little bit antsy. If you don't want to go back to your room to be alone with Eddie. If you don't want to go back to Rupert's room to continue talking with him. You can go to the observation car to enjoy the view and make so many new friends...with a bunch of little kids who aren't going to flirt with you or hit on you.

And I'm definitely not thinking about how good of a dad Eddie would probably be or how cute our babies would be. I'm not thinking about Eddie at all right now. I'm thinking about what Simon would say.

"Simon says touch your nose!" I declare to the group of five kids who've gathered around me. "Simon says stick out your tongue!"

It started with two little kids, when their harried mom asked if I'd watch after them while she went back to her room to look for her phone. And then a couple more parents asked me to look after their kids, and now I'm drunk Mary Poppins in the rear corner of the lounge car.

"Rub your head and bark like a dog!"

The four-year-old boy rubs his head and barks. The other kids don't and then laugh at him because: "She didn't say 'Simon says!'"

"You're out!" his older sister says. "You lose! Yooooouuu loooooose!"

The little boy pouts.

I can't deal with another pouty sad little boy today.

"Okay, okay, nobody wins or loses at this game. Sometimes we just get confused, and that's okay! Why don't we just start another game—would you like that? What other kind of games can we play?" I ask the pouty little boy because *don't be sad, little boy*.

He smiles at me and says, "Can we sing songs? I think you have a nice voice."

"Oh, well, I don't know about that—but okay! What should we sing?"

"Oh oh oh oh oh!" His sister's hand shoots up. "'Baby Got Back'!"

“Ohhhhh I know I know I know!” another little girl shouts. “The new Rihanna song!” She’s five.

“I don’t know that one.”

“Seriously? It’s like, really popular.” She raises her eyebrows at me and gives me sass face.

“Why don’t we do a round of ‘Row, Row, Row Your Boat.’ You know that song, right? Do you all know what singing a round means?”

“Yeeeessss,” they all shout out together, rolling their eyes.

“That’s a baby song!” one of them complains, followed by a chorus of complaints from the rest of them.

Tough crowd.

“Well, let’s start with a baby song, and if we do it well, then we can graduate to something a little more grown-up. Like an Eminem song.”

I divide us up into two groups of three and lead them in the round. This is great. I’m not thinking about Eddie’s penis at all right now.

*“Row, row, row, your boat  
Gently down the stream  
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily  
Life is but a dream – now you!  
Row, row, row your boat  
Gently down the stream  
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily  
Life is but a dream – keep it going!  
Row, row, row your boat  
Gently down the stream  
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily,  
Life is but a dream.”*

Crap. Now I’m thinking about Eddie’s penis.



---

EDDIE

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

## THE ONE WITH THE NOT AT ALL SKINNY FINGERS



This has been a long day. Time does not fly when you're on a train. But I don't regret not flying to New York.

I've been getting messages on Instagram all day. Some of them are from fans of mine who want some clarity about whether or not Alana and I have broken up and who the "Girl on the Train" is so they know who they should be following. Some of them are from fans of Alana's who think I'm an asshole and an idiot for even looking at any other girl. Some of them are guys who have an opinion as to who is hotter—Alana or the "Girl on the Train"—and they're pretty much tied at the moment. Only about half of the people have complimented me on my performance in the video, which is disappointing.

People can be very disappointing.

Alana is very disappointing.

My inability to predict just how disappointing she'd be is disappointing.

But the thing is—I'm not all that disappointed about her. I'm disappointed in myself for fooling myself about her for over two months. I'm disappointed in myself for trying to fool myself about Birdie for six years. And I'm disappointed in myself for not taking the high road in my unscheduled journey to head Sir Rupert Skinnyfingers off at the pass.

The only person who isn't at all disappointing is Birdie.

I can't blame her for wanting me to leave her alone at lunch. I was being an ass. She's the one person from LA who brings out the best in me and I was behaving like a little shit. I've sobered up a little. I did take a nap after lunch and I did feel better afterward.

And I made my way over to the observation car to do some reading.

But then I saw Birdie in the corner, surrounded by a bunch of little kids. Singing. And it felt like my heart would explode. I had to leave. She's never talked about wanting to get married and have kids, not around me, anyway. But seeing her like that made me want those things, and I can't seem to see myself doing or having those things with anyone except her. It's a feeling that I've had ever since I was home in Ohio for Christmas. Now it's become a thought. It won't be long before it becomes a goal.

And she has no idea.

But she was so happy for me when she found out about my meeting with the casting director. That made me happy. We had dinner together in the room. That made me really happy. I won't be completely happy until Rupert Borington is completely deterred, but at least she declined his invitation to join him in the dining car again. I've been on my best behavior, but I've also been gesturing with my hands and flexing my fingers a lot, just to remind her how *not* skinny they are.

Nancy has already removed our dinner trays and turned down the beds. When I asked her for an extra blanket, she told me they only have one extra, so we might have to share. And then she gave me a knowing wink. Birdie and I are both wearing sweats because it's gotten pretty cold on the train now that the sun's gone down. She's returned from the restroom with her wavy hair all loose and wild, her face scrubbed clean. She smells less like wine now but more intoxicating than ever.

She's used some kind of body lotion, I think, probably all over. And now all I can think about is how soft and smooth her skin is. And having my hands all over her.

She puts her cosmetic bag into her overnight bag and then gets her winter coat out from the closet. "I think I'm going to use this as a blanket tonight. You should wear your jacket."

"Good idea."

She notices the plain white sheets on the lower bunk. "What happened to your own sheets?"

"They're in my bag." I give her a meaningful look.

She doesn't get the meaning. "Why? You should use them."

"I will have to launder them first before using them again."

I watch as she puts two and two together and comes up with a wet spot. Her blue eyes widen. Her cheeks turn an enchanting shade of pink. She looks away and holds her coat in front of herself, like armor. "Oh."

“Yeah.”

“Well, anyway... Wear your jacket to bed.”

“I will.”

She holds my gaze for about three seconds, and it feels like she’s going to say something. I know *I* want to say something, but I’ll wait for her to go first.

But then my phone starts dinging with notifications. We hadn’t been getting cell service for about an hour, and I can just tell, from all the dings, that it’s Alana.

“Were you going to say something?”

“Nope. You should check your texts. I actually need to text my parents.” She gets her phone from her handbag and climbs up to the top bunk with her iPad and her coat.

I spot her—to make sure she doesn’t slip and fall again. And to get a good look at that sweet ass in those gray sweatpants. I don’t even feel guilty about it.

When she’s settled in bed with her big coat on top of her blankets, I check my phone.

**ALANA: Having a nice time with your Juliet?**

**ALANA: I’ve had an amazing time defending you to people.**

**ALANA: Everyone thinks I should dump you.**

**ALANA: I think you just need some boundaries.**

**ALANA: So here’s an ultimatum...**

**ALANA: Get off the train in Chicago and fly the rest of the way here.**

**ALANA: Never see that girl again.**

**ALANA: And I will pretend this never happened.**

**ALANA: Otherwise...**

**ALANA: You will never get to see me in this, in person...**

**ALANA: <image sent>**

Yeah. It’s a good image. It’s a hot image. It’s a semi-naked image. She’s wearing exactly the kind of thing I always pictured her in two months ago.

And I already know I'll never get to see her in it or out of it, in person.  
And I'm fine with it.

"Is it Alana?"

"Yeah."

"You should take a walk and call her."

"Nah. I'll call her when we're in Chicago. At the hotel."

She holds my gaze again, and I wait for her to say something.

But she doesn't.

"Okay, well. I'm gonna read." She switches on the light on the wall, turning away from me.

"Me too." I sure as shit don't want to watch *Sherlock*.

"Oh, shoot," she whispers.

And I know she forgot to take her glasses up with her. "Where are they?"

"In my cosmetic bag. In the overnight bag. The black one."

I unzip the overnight bag and pull her eyeglasses case out of the cosmetic bag. And when I zip the cosmetic bag back up, I just happen to notice a strip of condoms. *Which is interesting.* And they're regular sized—which is sad.

"Oh shit, wait—I'll get them!" She bolts upright and turns to see that I've already got the glasses. She squeezes her eyes shut, scrunching up her whole face.

I'm sure she's expecting me to give her a hard time about them. But I won't. I just zip up the weekender bag and then hand her the eyeglasses.

She takes them from me without looking at me. "Thank you," she mumbles.

"You're very welcome."

"Shut up."

"I just said you're welcome."

"I hear what you're thinking and shut up."

"Okay."

I grab my jacket from my duffel bag, along with another pair of socks because my feet are already cold in only one pair and wearing this jacket doesn't do much good either. Those two thin wool blankets aren't going to do much for me. Serves me right for not bringing a proper coat. And I really need to not bring up the condoms, but it can't be helped.

"I'm not judging you for being prepared for sex, Birdie."

She hides under her big coat. "Shhhhh! Shut up shut up shut up!"

"Why are you so embarrassed?"



“I’m not. Stop talking.”

“Okay.” I don’t know why it bothers me that she’s planning to have sex with someone on this trip, other than the fact that I know she wasn’t planning on having sex with me. And I’m sure Lord Scarfington has to have his condoms custom made so they don’t slide off.

But I don’t make a comment about that because—high road.

The speaker on the wall crackles, indicating another announcement from Gavin the conductor, who seems to think he’s hosting a late-night FM radio show. “Good evening, everyone. Gavin the conductor here with my last announcement for the night until we reach our next stop. Unless, of course, something goes terribly, horribly wrong... But nothing will go terribly, horribly wrong. So go ahead and settle in for a good night’s rest. But baby, it’s cold outside as we make our way through Kansas. We’re looking at below freezing temperatures out there, so you may find it a bit chilly on board too. I’m told we’re out of blankets. Hopefully you’ve brought along some warm clothes and socks to sleep in and an extra blanket. If not, maybe there’s someone special you can cuddle up to—for purely thermogenic reasons of course. I know there’s someone *I’d* like to be cuddling with, but I won’t be able to see her for a week. So, if you’ve got a special someone nearby...don’t be shy. Keep it warm, people. Gavin, out.”

Birdie’s coat is shaking, and I know she’s laughing under there.

“Keep it warm, Birdie,” I say. “Eddie, out.” I switch off the main lights and climb into bed.

Fuck.

It’s cold.

It’s so fucking cold.

I let out a heavy, annoyed sigh.

“You’re cold, aren’t you?”

“I’m fine.”

“Why don’t you put on more clothes?”

“These are the only sweats I brought.”

“Put on a sweater.”

I don’t respond.

“You only brought those thin sweaters, didn’t you?”

“I was planning to buy a coat in New York.”

“You were planning on being naked the whole time.”

My stubborn silence is the only answer she needs.

“Oh, Edward.”

“I’m fine. Read your book.”

I turn on the wall lamp beside me and open up *Infinite Jest*. It’s too fucking cold to read. I think my eyelashes are frozen. How can it be this cold inside the train?

This is the perfect way to end a weird fucking day that started out great.

I close the book, drop it to the floor and turn off the light. Maybe being asleep will warm me up. I mean, I know exactly what would warm me up right now, but I also know it’s not going to happen. I’m not going to change tracks that abruptly. I may never have been down this particular road with a woman before, but I know better than to do that.

Maybe I should ask her to be my fake girlfriend—worked for Declan.

But no. I’ll do my own thing.

Birdie’s a planner. I like a good plan too.

*New goal for February: Make Birdie comfortable with the fact that she will be mine.*

I’ll take my time and get it right.



“Eddie. Eddie, wake up!”

I wake up. I realize my teeth are chattering. I am so fucking cold I might actually be dead.

I turn onto my back, but I can’t see anything in the dark because something warm and heavy is being placed on top of me. It’s not Birdie, unfortunately, but it does smell like her.

“Turn around.”

“What?”

“Lie on your side, face the wall.” She sounds so annoyed with me. I’d find it cute if I didn’t have hypothermia.

“Yes, ma’am.”

“I will lie with my back to you. It’s fine if your back touches me. If you need to do that, to warm up. But that’s it. Just your back. No butt stuff.”

I mean. I may be half-dead, but I have to laugh at that.

“I meant no touching butts! Shut up.”

“Will you get under the covers already?”

She huffs, and I feel her warm body nuzzling up against mine and then I feel her moving her lower body away from me.

Our backs are pressed together. She adjusts the coat over us. I can feel her gathering her hair to one side. And then I feel the back of her skull knock against the back of mine.

“Owww!” we both cry out at the same time.

“Shit!” Birdie hardly ever swears. Usually only when she stubs her toe or spills something.

“Are you okay?” I flip around to rub the back of her head.

“No.” She laughs quietly. “Oh God, your hand’s cold! I can feel it through my hair! Put your hands back under the coat!”

I do, but I don’t turn to face the wall again. I press up against her back, all of her, spooning her.

She sighs. Not annoyed but resigned. And then she presses back into me, finds my right hand, and pulls it around her waist. I wrap both arms around her. She covers them with hers, rubbing my hands, warming them up. It’s sweet and comforting but it’s also something else.

The train is rocking us back and forth, up and down, and the friction between us is unbearable and good. Really unbearably good.

We stay like this, quiet for a while, and then she breaks the silence with, “Are you still going to see Alana in New York?”

“No.”

“Are you going to end things with her?”

“Yes. I’ll call her in Chicago. Are you going to go out with Rupert?”

“I don’t know.”

“I don’t think you should.”

She stops rubbing my hands. “Why not?”

“I don’t want you to.”

“Why not?”

*Okay, new plan.*

“Because he can’t make you feel good the way I can.”

“He can’t make me angry and confused either.”

“You’re only angry and confused because you’re resisting it.”

“Resisting what?”

“Me. And all the things I can do with these hands.”

She releases her grip on me altogether, and I take that as a sign that she wants me to be free to use my hands.

So, I do.

I press into her back a little more, grip her hip with one hand, and stroke the side of her thigh with the other. Down and up. Down and up.

“I mean, I don’t recall anything in your guidelines that would restrict me from using my not-at-all skinny fingers to make you feel good...”

“Don’t talk.” I can tell she’s squeezing her eyes shut again. Her body is so tense.

I’m going to do something about that.

I’m going to do a number of things about that.

But first, I remove my jacket so I can have more mobility. I place it over the blankets, closer to the foot of the bed.

And then I slide the palm of my hand down the side of her thigh, up the back of it. I cup her ass and squeeze it, and Birdie’s loud gasp is so satisfying. My left hand works its way under her sweatshirt, slowly, as my right hand takes the high road over her hip and down between her legs, over her sweatpants.

She twitches just a little when I touch her there. And it’s already damp there. She’s been wet for a while now already, and that is all the encouragement I need to move my left hand up farther and to apply more pressure with my right hand.

She squeezes her thighs together, wriggling around, making cute little kitten sounds.

“Tell me to stop and I’ll stop.”

She doesn’t say a word.

“I’m not going to stop until you come for me, Birdie.”

“Big talker,” she mumbles.

*Sassy little...* “What was that?”

After a beat, she says, “I’ve read that the body heat from bare skin is better at warming a cold person up...”

“I’m ready to test that theory.”

She pulls off her sweatshirt, tossing it aside, and I remove mine.

She struggles to pull down her sweatpants, so I yank them down for her.

She somehow manages to tie her hair up into a knot on top of her head before lying back down.

I start to straddle her, but she covers her breasts and rolls onto her side again. “Stay the way you were.”

I spoon her again. Still wearing my sweatpants but pushing my ever-

stiffening cock up against her ass. I trail kisses along the back of her shoulder and then cup her breasts. Those perky, friendly breasts and those perky, friendly nipples. She is exactly as smooth and soft as I imagined she would be. I kiss her neck and massage her tits, and she moans softly. She isn't relaxed yet. She's shivering. Her whole body's trembling.

"Are you cold?"

"No." She says it like I must be an idiot.

And I must be an idiot because only an idiot would wait six years to kiss Birdie Beckett.

I reach down between her legs, over her wet panties. They're all lacy, and I bet they're black, and I want to see them, but more importantly, I want to gently massage her clit through them. I kiss the crook of her neck and bite her there, not hard because she isn't ready for that yet.

"Oh, shit," she whispers as her back arches. She reaches back to grab on to my neck, combing her fingers through my hair and tugging on it. Kinda rough.

Well, maybe she *is* ready for more.

I swirl my tongue, suck on her neck, kiss all the way down along the top of her shoulder, holding her hair up out of the way while stroking her scalp with my fingernails. She tastes clean and sweet and spicy, and I want to know what she tastes like everywhere.

She's already undulating, rocking her hips and pressing her ass back against me. I wish I could see her face, but I know she's biting her lower lip right now because of the way she's groaning. I kiss all the way back up her shoulder, to her neck and behind her ear, and she goes limp.

*That's my girl.*

I'll remember that spot.

She's twisting around to face me now, her bent arm cradling my head, and I think she wants to kiss me. I kiss along her jaw and up to her open mouth. I lick her lower lip, and our lips touch for one hot second before she pulls away, burying her face into the pillow.

She can't handle the intimacy of kissing yet.

Okay.

I bite the top of her shoulder, a little harder this time, and I know that no man has ever done that to her before. I know that I'm the one who's teaching her what she likes. And I know that I could be happy spending the rest of my life teaching her and learning what she likes.

I slide my hand down under her panties. It's already soaked down there. Just when I touch my fingers flat against her slick, warm clit, a train passes, the horn and the loud rattling causing her to squeal and jolt. Or maybe it's my fingers on her clit. I flutter and circle and make a V with my fingers, sliding up and down alongside it, getting faster and faster. And then I rub with my whole hand, nice and slow.

She bucks against my hand, just once, says my name, and that's when I know it's time to slip my fingers inside her and fuck her with them. Hard. She cries out, reaching her arms up and back again, trying to find me. My cheek is pressed against hers. She grabs my face, strokes the stubble on my cheek.

"You still want me to keep quiet?"

"No. Shit! No."

"You like how that feels?"

"Yes. Oh God, Eddie. Don't stop."

"I'm not gonna stop. I told you, I'm not stopping until you come for me." She is so impossibly wet, and my throbbing hard cock wants to be inside her. "Has anyone else made you feel this good before?"

"No. Never."

"You knew I could do this for you though, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Did you think about it?"

"Yes."

"I've thought about it too, Birdie. Fucking hell, you have no idea how much I've wanted you. I thought about it the first time I saw you and I've thought about it ever since I saw your beautiful tits that night in your room."

She writhes around, magnificently, whimpering.

"You're beautiful. I think you're beautiful, you know that, right?"

"Eddie."

I curl my fingers to massage her G-spot, and that's when something awesome happens.

Birdie Beckett screams my name, contracting and releasing around my fingers, and now *I'm* flying.

I brace her torso against mine with one arm as she comes and comes and comes, alternately sounding like she's in pain and in ecstasy.

Arching her neck, she swears a blue streak, and Shakespeare himself could not have written a more beautiful monologue.

There's no song or music that could make my heart race more than the sound of her wailing and the rhythm of the hurricane of pleasure that's ripping through her.

I wait until she's gone completely still before pulling my fingers out and massaging her tits again.

I'm high as a kite and hard as a rock, and I don't want this to be over.

Just when I'm about to kiss her neck again, she wriggles around, and I feel her hand on my cock.

Fucking hell, she is the best friend I have ever had.

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)





---

BIRDIE

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

## THE ONE WITH THE FRORGASMS



Holy shit, my hand is on Eddie's cock.

This was certainly not a part of the plan. This is the exact opposite of what I had resolved to accomplish this year. But he *is* wearing gray sweatpants. And he *did* just give me the first or possibly *several* of the first orgasms that I've ever experienced with another person, so it would be rude not to thank him and return the favor.

Did I just have multiple orgasms?

Is that really a thing?

From fingers and hands and *oh God* his mouth and tongue on my neck.

Take *that*, frequent flyers! Who gets spooned and fingerbanged while lying down in a private room on a commercial flight? No one, that's who.

He is so hard and so very erect. I stroke the length of him over his sweatpants. *How are you not the cockiest man on earth, Eddie Cannavale? Oh my God!* This is a magnificent male sexual organ. I'm so proud of him.

He kisses my neck, up to that spot, that spot right behind my ear, and oh God, oh God, oh God, how did he know to kiss me there? How did he know to curl his fingers inside me and touch that spot? He groans and exhales, groans and exhales, and it's such a rush to know that I'm making him feel good.

I want to make him feel so much better than good.

I'm goin' in.

I reach down under the waistband of his sweatpants, under the waistband of his boxer briefs, and cup my hand over the head of his cock. His skin is so warm and smooth. He sucks in a breath when I twist my palm over it, sliding down and then up and then down, slowly, delicately.

He grips my shoulders and rocks his hips, slowly, gently.

It's nighttime, and I'm still a little tipsy and the train is rocking us around like one of those coin-operated beds they used to have in cheap motels. I have no doubt that I will regret this in the morning because my heart won't be able to handle this, and I know for a fact that my brain will ruin everything. But our bodies deserve this, and merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily, this feels like a sex dream. And you do not want to wake a person up in the middle of a sex dream. So, I will see this through.

I just hope my hands and fingers are as talented and skilled as his.

And I hope I can bring him to completion without having to face him because I can't look at him. I can't look at Eddie's face, into his eyes, when I'm touching his penis. I can't kiss him on the mouth when we're both topless like this.

Now I understand why Julia Roberts had that No Kissing rule in *Pretty Woman*.

I will work that cock like an unpaid pro.

Or like a very good friend who is totally capable of understanding that sometimes sex really is just sex.

But it is just too awkward, doing this at this angle, so I turn around to face him, but I keep my head down. It's not completely dark. I could still see his features, but I still don't want to. I push his shoulders, so he'll lie back, slide my hands down his arms, grab his wrists and move his hands up to clasp behind his head. He stays like that for me.

I loved it when he was talking dirty to me, but the sound of his heavy breathing, the sound of him trying to control his breaths, is just as sexy.

I lower myself a little to let my nipples skim across his chest, just once.

He sighs, and it's so beautiful.

His jaw must be so tense right now.

I glance up quickly because I just know his eyes are closed. His neck is arched and his whole body is tensed up. I want so badly to kiss him on the mouth, but I can't.

So, I kiss the crook of his neck, just once. He tries to kiss me, but I move away.

I let my hands explore his hard chest and then his abs, those perfect, flirtatious abs, as they travel down. Glide my fingertips around, soft and slow.

He is beautiful, everywhere, inside and out. I know this even when I'm

not looking at him.

He shivers.

“Are you cold?”

He scoffs. “No.” Like I’m an idiot.

I am an idiot for not kissing him, I know.

*O, then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do.*

*They pray; grant thou, lest faith turn to despair.*

I remember those lines from *Romeo and Juliet*. Romeo, begging for a kiss.

Eddie’s whole body is silently begging me to kiss him.

So, I do. I plant kisses down to his pelvis, across that skin that’s stretched so tight, down along those common iliac arteries.

I pull his pants and underwear down, kiss the head of his cock very quickly, and then climb over to lie down on the other side of him so my right hand can do its best work. Resting my head against his chest, I stroke up the bottom of his shaft with my fingertips and then wrap my whole hand around it, squeezing before moving my hand up and down.

“Do you like that?”

“Yes.”

“Okay.”

He hisses, raising his hips up and down again. “Fuck, that feels so good.”

I’m taking it slow so this will last, but I don’t want to bore him. “Do you want me to go faster?”

“You’re doing everything right.”

“Okay... I just want you to know that you have a really wonderful penis.”

He blows out a laugh. “Thanks. You’re really great with it.”

“Thanks.”

I reach down a little farther, to see if he likes it when I touch him there, and he bucks once, groaning. He seems to like it a lot.

I feel his hand on my chin, the fingers of his other hand in my hair.

“Look at me, Birdie.”

“I can’t.”

“Then close your eyes and let me kiss you.” He has that authoritative tone in his voice, and I feel it in my abdomen.

I let him lift my chin up. I straddle him, and we both catch our breaths, because *fuck*, his cock feels so good between my legs. My soaked lace panties are the only thing separating us now, and part of me is so grateful for

the barrier but part of me hates them and just wants him to rip them off me.

I press down on his chest, lifting my chest up a little, hovering over him the way I did that night of my party. This is just the natural progression of that night, I suppose. I remember exactly how he looked at me then, and I'm sure he's looking at me the same way now, but his eyes are probably cloudy with lust and even more hooded. I wouldn't know, though, because my eyes are closed.

He flips me over onto my back, not very gently, and I like it. His chest is pressing down against my breasts. He pushes my hair out of the way, strokes the sides of my face, and when his lips touch mine, it's the most tender form of electric shock. He kisses me twice like that, close-mouthed and gentle. And then his tongue slips between my lips, his hands are up in my hair, his hips rock against mine, and I have no idea where we are in Kansas right now, but this is exactly where I'm supposed to be. Under Eddie Cannavale. The weight of him on top of me, his beautiful mouth on mine. My hands are all over him, everywhere they can reach, stroking and squeezing and scratching.

I wonder if Lucretia Mott and Mary Cassatt really did get this up close and personal with their closest male friends too.

Maybe Layla was right. Maybe we do just need to have some vacation frogasms and then get on with our lives.

I just want to devour this man.

I lick his stubbly chin, nibble on his lower lip, and then French kiss the life out of him. I can't get enough of him. *Not* kissing him is definitely the dumbest thing I've ever done in my life.

Eddie Cannavale kisses like a cross between Romeo and a porn star, and I would double high-five him if my hands weren't so busy squeezing his butt.

"Jesus, fuck, you're so hot."

"So are you."

*Okay, new plan.*

"I want you inside me."

"I want that too, Bird."

"You can rip my panties if you want to."

"How 'bout I remove them with my teeth?"

"Yes, do that."

He kisses me on the mouth again once, hard and fast, and then trails down the center of me with his tongue, alternately swirling and licking and kissing, all the way down to my panties. I feel his teeth graze my skin, just above the

waistband of the panties, his hands massaging my hips, and then cool air rushes in when he pulls those panties down to my knees with his teeth, shoving them down the rest of the way. He kisses back up the inside of my leg, inner thigh, and then—*oh, thank you sweet St. Valentine and all those weird pagan guys before him*—he flicks at my clit with the tip of his tongue, and I think I just died and went to frorgasm heaven.

“Be right back.” He slides out from under the covers, making sure the blankets and coat stay on top of me.

“You can use the ones in my bag,” I tell him.

“I have my own, thanks.”

Right. The not-regular-sized ones.

I tie my hair up into a knot, wondering if I should just leave it loose so Eddie can keep running his fingers through it and tugging on it. Whatever. He can pull it loose if he wants to. He can do pretty much anything he wants to me tonight.

My body is ready.

I’ll worry about my heart and my brain tomorrow.



---

EDDIE

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)



## THE ONE WITH DIRTY BIRDIE



I will be giving this train five-star glowing reviews all over the Internet. I will tip Nancy with all of my cash. I will even tip Gavin the conductor.

But more importantly, I am going to give Nerdy Birdie the ride of her life.

I'll start slow, though.

She is so damn stunning. Lying naked beneath me as I straddle her. She's touching her puffy lips with the fingers of one hand, twisting loose strands of hair around the fingers of the other, the way she does when she's reading a book. I am a very open book right now. A filthy one. Except she still refuses to look me in my eyes so they can tell her exactly what I'm feeling. I want her to look at me. I want her to read me.

It's pretty dark, but I can see her. She is staring at my chest, which is fine. It's a good area to focus on when trying to avoid my eyes and monster erection. But I need her to get used to seeing me hover over her like this, aching for her. If I have my way, I will be doing this a lot from now on. And I'll have my way.

I position myself between her legs, lowering down to kiss her, nice and slow, on the mouth. The tip of my cock is right there at her entrance, and I can feel her long, slender legs spreading and bending for me. I have never felt this much tenderness and lust for a woman before. I have to take it easy with her because I know for sure that she's never been kissed or fucked properly by another man.

She's humming as she kisses me hungrily, cradling my face in her hands. I'm starving for her, and I love her mouth. I love her enthusiastic tongue. I love how she sucks on my tongue and then nibbles on my lower lip. The

train's rocking us side to side, she's wriggling around, and her hot, wet pussy keeps kissing the head of my cock and it's killing me. She's so girlish and innocent, and she has so much nervous energy, but it suddenly occurs to me that she might be teasing me on purpose.

I'm holding myself over her as still as possible, and just when I'm about to ask her if she's ready for me, she pulls her mouth away and squeezes my biceps.

"Eddie... I think you need to fuck me like we aren't friends."

*Okay, change of plans.*

"I like the way you think."

"Good... Are you sure you know what I mean, though?"

"Are you sure *you* know what you mean?"

"Yes."

"Well, maybe you should explain it to me, then. With words."

She exhales loudly, giving me a playful punch on the arm. "I don't want to tell you what to do."

"I'm an actor. I'm good at taking direction. And I want you to tell me what you want from me."

She squirms around a little, and it's excruciating, but I like it when she gets mad. "I told you. I want you to fuck me like we aren't friends. Just do it."

"I'm going to need you to be more specific." I nudge myself inside her, a tiny bit, and the resulting gasp is delightful.

"I don't want you to be gentle."

"Good." I rub my thumb over her hard little nipple and dip down to lick it. "And?"

"I want you to fuck me hard."

"I can do that. You sure you can handle it?"

"Try me." I feel her hand around the base of my cock, squeezing.

Fuck. Birdie Beckett is hot as fuck and full of great ideas and surprises.

I let her guide me inside her. The resistance, followed by the sweet, impossibly tight glide inward, is the best kind of reward and torture all at once. I suck in a breath, and she groans, releasing me to throw her arms around my neck, wrapping her legs around mine.

I thrust in and out and back in, just once.

"Oh my God!" she squeals.

"Good?"

“So good. Again.”

“As you wish.” I thrust in and out, over and over, hard but not too fast. Her lithe body moves with mine. She practically sings every time I penetrate her, and she is perfect.

“You talk,” she whispers into my ear between heavy breaths.

“You want me to talk dirty, Birdie?”

“Yes.”

“You want me to tell you how good it feels to have your warm, wet pussy around my cock?”

“Yeah.”

“You want to know how bad I want you? How hard you make me? How fucking desperate I am to come inside you?”

“Irish,” she mutters.

“Irish?” *Ohhhhh*. “You want to hear me talk about yer sweet, hot fanny like a filthy Irishman now, do ya?”

“Yes! More.”

“The first time I saw you, Birdie Beckett, I wanted to tug yer hair, lick you all over and eat the box off ya.”

“Really?”

“I’d never lie about wantin’ to lick a lass all over. *Macushla*.”

“What’s that mean?”

“My darling.”

She groans. “I’ve had to change my panties five times ever since we got on this train.”

“Jesus.”

“I came prepared.”

“For me?”

“I guess I wanted you.”

“You guess?”

“I did.”

I grab one of her legs and lift it up to rest on my shoulder. She’s so tight around me now, we both groan. “Fuuuck, Birdie. You feel so good.”

She arches her back. “Harder. Faster.”

“Whatever you say.” I go harder, faster. “You like that?” I move her other leg up onto my shoulder, and goddamn, it’s tight, wet, heavenly torment. I go deep, as far as I can. She screams my name, and it’s driving me crazy. “You’ve never been fucked like this before, have you?”

“No. So good. Don’t stop.”

“I’m not done with you yet, Bird.” I keep going and then flip her around, so she’s on top of me.

It takes her a few seconds to get her bearings, but then she rocks her hips back and forth, bearing down on me.

“That’s my girl.”

She’s moving slow so we can both catch our breaths. I reach for her perky swollen tits, massage them until she drops her head back, moaning.

“You’re so beautiful, Birdie. You don’t even know.”

I sit up, and she arches back so I can kiss her breasts. Her hips sway faster, urgent, and she starts to contract and release around me. I lick her all the way up her neck to her jaw, drag my fingernails down her back, and then spank her ass. Real quick.

She gasps and shudders, and I drive up into her, holding on to her shoulder with one hand, gripping the mattress with the other for support.

“Eddie! Oh my God.”

I can’t form words anymore. I’m just sweat and heavy breathing and grunts and thrusts. I am so fucking grateful for the ab strength to do this, but I need her to come right now so I can too.

I reach up to grab the loose knot of hair on her head, tug on it, and her long waves tumble down all around her just as she falls apart—crying out. Loud and surprised and elated.

I wrap my arms around her tight, letting go of the thing I’ve been holding on to inside of me. There’s a flash and then darkness. Like a train blasting through a tunnel.

I have no sense of how long it took to get here. I don’t know how long it takes for me to get through to the other side. But when I open my eyes, I find Birdie looking into them. She’s a goddess. Her hands on my face, her legs wrapped around my waist. She kisses me so deeply. It takes my breath away and gives me back something that I didn’t realize I had lost—the belief that I deserve a woman like Birdie.

No, that’s not right.

There is no other woman like Birdie.

It’s just Birdie.

I get this flash of a memory—not a memory so much as a feeling—of how I felt back in Ohio. At my brother’s bachelor party. When I was drunk off my ass and all I wanted to do was call her.

She plants kisses all over my face. We're both damp with sweat, and the covers are all around us. The air is cold, but I don't care. I'm about to ask her about the voice message I left her again, but she says, "Hey, you."

"Hey."

"I think we should do that again when you're ready."

My hands are all up in her wild mane of hair. "I think you'd be surprised what I'm ready for now, Bird."

She rests her forehead against mine. "No more talking tonight. Okay?"

It's not okay, but also everything is okay.

"Whatever you want" is what I tell her.

But what I'm thinking is:

*Did my heart love till now? forswear it, sight!*

*For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night.*

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)



---

BIRDIE

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

THE ONE WITH THE RED LIPSTICK



**LAYLA:** Girl. I felt a disturbance in the Friend Force last night. How many frorgasms did you have? Tell me everything.

**ME:** Shhhhhh!!!

**LAYLA:** Did you really just shush me in a text? Really?

**ME:** I'm in the room with him right now. He's still sleeping.

**LAYLA:** Exhausted from banging you? Poor boy.

**ME:** A lady never tells.

**LAYLA:** Something tells me you're not quite the lady you claim to be.

**ME:** Okay, ninety billion. That's how many I had. But they weren't frorgasms. I made him treat me like we aren't friends.

**LAYLA:** OMG. You are a sexy evil genius. It was good?

**LAYLA:** Hello? Did I lose you?

**ME:** No. I'm just trying to think of a better adjective than "good."

**LAYLA:** Fanfuckingtastic?

**ME:** It was Cannafuckingvaleful.

**LAYLA:** LOL

**ME:** It was Cannav-awe-inspiring

**LAYLA:** <thinking face emoji>

**ME:** It was totally Edwardian. Nope. Never mind. It was really great.

**LAYLA:** So you banged it out? Did he break up with that IG dildo?

**ME:** It seems to be over. He said he'd make the call when we're in Chicago.

**LAYLA:** Oh.

**ME:** I have no reason not to believe him. He said he's not going to see her.



**LAYLA: No, I totally believe him. It's good. Better than good. You're one and done, then?**

**ME: I think so. Well...three and done, technically.**

**ME: Shhh! I think he's awake! Gotta go.**

**ME: Do NOT tell anyone about this!!!**

**ME: Love you bye.**

Eddie is groaning as he stretches, and I think I might be at ninety-billion-and-one orgasms now.

I need to *not* have orgasms every time he stretches or makes a noise or looks at me or does or says anything at all.

We are three and done.

Which is why I got up early and changed into my bulkiest sweater and the jeans that only make my butt look moderately good. I put my hair up into a not-at-all-sexy bun and put on my glasses. To ensure that he would get the hint that I do not have any intention of kissing him, I applied bright red lipstick. Yes—I have read the Manchester University study which confirmed that men are attracted to full red lips—but I am confident that Eddie will understand that this means I don't want to smear my lipstick all over his stupidly handsome face. I definitely look like I don't want to get drilled again and again by my best guy friend.

Who am I kidding? My best *friend*, period.

He hasn't even officially ended things with the Instagirlfriend that he had barely started things with, so it wouldn't be good for either of us if we kissed again in the harsh light of day.

And if I let myself fall for him any more than I already have and it doesn't work out for us, there is no way our friendship could withstand that.

And I can't lose him.

I can live without the Cannavorgasms, *I think*. But I don't want to live without Eddie in my life.

"Hey," he says, looking back at me and groaning again.

He's still naked under the covers.

And he currently has what can only be described as Fuck Hair.

He is simultaneously gorgeous and sexy and cute.

It is not conducive to not-orgasming. It is also not making it any easier to not fall for him. But I'm working on it.

"Good morning! I took the liberty of ordering us breakfast in the room. Unless you want to eat out? At the dining car? Eat *up* in the dining car, I mean. If you do, I'll go down here. *Stay* down here, I mean."

He rubs his eyes and yawns. Hopefully he's not awake enough to catch my verbal blunders. "No, let's have breakfast in bed." His morning voice is so seductive, it's totally unfair. He combs his fingers through his hair, and without even smirking, he says, "I'll eat out and you can go down."

"Oh, hah! No, thank you. I'm up. I'm dressed. I mean, you can have breakfast in bed. I'll eat at the table."

"C'mere." He rolls over onto his stomach, arms outstretched.

Dear Lord, I want to go to him, but I have to get us back on track. I need to be the engineer of this Friend Train. I need a fucking miracle.

There's a knock at the door. "Somebody order breakfast for the Friend Zone?" Nancy practically yells from the corridor. Nancy is my fucking miracle.

Eddie heaves a loud, exasperated sigh as he reaches for his discarded jacket. I wait for him to put it on before opening the door for Nancy. She has two small meal trays for us, and I take the carafe of coffee and the coffee mugs from her. "Come on in!" I holler, a little too eagerly. "Good morning! Welcome!" I already said good morning to her out in the corridor earlier, but my brain is too busy getting yelled at by the rest of my body to come up with something more original.

"Well, good morning to the both of you," she says as her attention deftly goes from the top bunk with no blankets to the lower bunk with all the blankets and Eddie with the Fuck Hair. "Well, now. Hope you both managed to stay warm last night..."

"Not really!" I say, just as Eddie replies, "Tried as hard as we could, Nancy." He gives her a wink.

I bark out a laugh. "How was *your* night, Nancy? Did you stay warm? Are you able to sleep when you're working? How does that work?"

She arranges the trays on one of the small tables under one of the windows. "Fine, sort of, not really and Maximum Strength NoDoz. Can I bring you anything else?"

"No, thank you," Eddie says just as I ask her if she'd like to have a cup of coffee with us.

“I gotta make the rounds, but thanks for the offer. You two enjoy your meals. Give me a shout when you need me to put the beds back up, or just the top one, maybe...”

“We’ll definitely need you to put both beds back up,” I tell her, just as Eddie says, “I think we’re good.”

“Perfect.” She gives us a little wave. “Bye now.”

As soon as Eddie hears the door close, he says, “How’s it going?”

“Great! How are you? Did you sleep well?”

“Uh-huh.” He finds his underwear and sweatpants, puts them on under the covers, and then sits on the edge of the bed, grinning at me. “You?”

*Damn you, dimples.*

“I did. Eventually. We should eat before the food gets cold.”

“Birdie...”

“Did you want me to bring this tray to you?”

“Birdie.”

“We’re supposed to arrive in Chicago at 2:50. I’m going to pack everything up after we eat and then go up to the observation car—to read and see the view.”

“Birdie.”

“It’s snowing a little—did you see? It’s really pretty out there. You should probably buy a coat in Chicago if you have time.”

“Bird. I had a really good time last night.”

“Me too! It was really good. Super fun. Glad we did that.”

“So am I.”

“Great! We don’t have to do the thing where we talk about it.”

“I think we should. I’d like to talk about how beautiful you are and how great the sex was and how badly I want to kiss you again.”

*Fuck me, I want to smear my lipstick all over this guy.*

I cross one leg in front of the other and twirl strands of hair around my finger. “Oh, well, that’s so sweet, but you wouldn’t want this lipstick all over your mouth.”

“I want it all over my cock, to be honest.” He doesn’t mumble it like a creep. He looks me straight in the eyes. His eyes are clear and honey brown and earnest. My stomach is fluttering. My ears may have heard exactly what he said, but my heart heard a Shakespeare sonnet because his delivery was so sincere.

“Umm... You don’t have to keep doing that thing where you don’t treat

me like a friend anymore.”

“I want to treat you like more than a friend. Last night didn’t mean nothing to me. I want you to know that.”

“It didn’t mean nothing to me either, Eddie, but...”

There’s a crackling sound from the wall speaker. Another fucking miracle because that means we have to put a pin in this conversation until Gavin is done with his announcement. But we keep our eyes trained on each other the whole time.

“Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls. Gavin the conductor here with a little update on our schedule. It’s going to take a little longer than expected to reach our final destination of Chicago Union Station. There’s a buildup of snow and ice on the tracks, and our winter fleet is already hard at work clearing the tracks ahead of us, but we’ll be traveling at a slightly slower speed along the way. Not to worry—things could be a lot worse. This is just a minor delay of approximately forty minutes at this point. So take a little more time to get to know one another, why don’t you? Good things come to those who wait. The Love Train always gets you to your HEA eventually. So sit back, relax, and enjoy the slightly longer than anticipated ride... In other news, we’ve run out of bacon. Please don’t start a riot. Gavin, out.”

By the time the speaker has gone silent, my heart is racing because Eddie has basically made love to my neck and mouth with his eyes from about six feet away.

The air between us is filled with longing and tension, and I’m realizing now that this room totally smells like we had sex in it for hours last night.

I make the tiniest, involuntary move in his direction, and he is up off that bed and meeting me in the middle of the room. Our mouths smash against each other. For one glorious minute, I’m weightless and aware of only our lips and tongues and his hands on my face and the undeniable feeling of hurtling toward a target that I’ve been trying to evade for six years.

But I have no idea what to do once we get there.

I somehow manage to pull away from him, kissing him once or five times, quickly, all over his face.

I grab the container of wipes from my bag and hand it to him. “To wipe the lipstick from your face.” And then I realize I’ve given him the disinfectant wipes, so I take that back and retrieve the packet of regular wet wipes.

“Thanks,” he says, laughing and shaking his head.

“Welcome. Okay. Well. Nice kissing you. Last night was fan-fucking-tastic. I loved it. But we need to go back to being friends. So I’m going to take my breakfast up to the observation car because I can’t handle being around your face and your hands and your Fuck Hair and your penis right now. I’ll be back to pack in a couple of hours.”

I take my phone and my purse and my breakfast tray, and I don’t turn around when Eddie says my name because if I look into those eyes again, I will be screaming out his name in about three minutes.

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

---

**EDDIE:** Still thinking about your sweet red lips on my cock, by the way. Doesn't really matter which car you're in, so we might as well be together.

**BIRDIE:** Edward!!!

**EDDIE:** Just sayin'.

**BIRDIE:** You're supposed to be talking to me like a friend again, remember?

**EDDIE:** And I told you I want to be more than your friend.

**BIRDIE:** I know I'm probably sending mixed messages. And that's obviously because I have mixed feelings about this. I mean, I have a lot of feelings and they're mostly good. They're all good, actually. I'm just confused.

**BIRDIE:** I mean, we just needed to get that stuff out of our systems. Right?

**EDDIE:** I don't think I'm ever getting you out of my system, Birdie Beckett. Anything about you. I don't want to.

**BIRDIE:** You can't say things like that to me.

**EDDIE:** I can't not say things like that to you anymore. Sorry.

**EDDIE:** Nope. I lied. I'm not sorry. But I'll try to wait for you to be more comfortable with this if that's what you need.

**EDDIE:** Is it because I haven't called Alana yet? I'll call her right now.

**BIRDIE:** It's not just that.

**EDDIE:** Calling her now.

**BIRDIE:** Eddie.

**EDDIE:** And then I'm gonna text you what I've been thinking about

doing to you all morning. <winking face emoji>  
BIRDIE: Eddie.



ALANA: Great talk, Eddie!

ALANA: You really want this to be over?

ALANA: Is that really what you want?

ALANA: You don't get to break up with me.

ALANA: I break up with you!

ALANA: Done.

ALANA: Just unfollowed you.

ALANA: It's true, you can check.

ALANA: I'm going to unlike every single post of yours that I ever liked.

ALANA: You better call me back if you want any fucking chance of seeing me when you're in New York.

ALANA: You'd better fucking call me back, Eddie.

ALANA: I'm not kidding.

ALANA: I'm not going to chase you.

ALANA: When you call me back, I will follow you again and re-like your posts.

ALANA: You have five minutes.

ALANA: Four minutes, Eddie.

ALANA: I'm giving you ten more minutes, in case you're in a dead zone.

ALANA: Fine.

ALANA: You're dead to me.

ALANA: <image sent>

ALANA: See how upset Kiki and Foo Foo are right now?

ALANA: YOU. DID. THAT.

ALANA: <image sent>

ALANA: I printed out pictures of you and lined their crates with them.

ALANA: They are NOT potty trained yet, Eddie.

ALANA: Kiki and Foo Foo are going to pee pee and poo poo all over your face, Eddie.

ALANA: That's what happens to guys who try to break up with me.

ALANA: I swear to God if you don't call me back in the next few hours,

**it is SO OVER.**

**ALANA: Like, beyond over.**

**ALANA: I will never ever EVER forgive you.**

**ALANA: Ever.**

**ALANA: So if you ever want any chance of working things out with me, you need to call me now.**

**ALANA: <image sent>**

**ALANA: That's what I'm wearing FYI and if you don't call me back that's the last picture you will ever see of me.**

**ALANA: I will block you on IG and on my phone.**

**ALANA: I will figure out how to block you from seeing images of me on Google.**

**ALANA: Not even kidding.**

**BLOCKED CONTACT: Call me.**



**EDDIE: Okay, so Alana has been taken care of. You want to come back down to the room, or would you like me to come up to the observation car to kiss you?**

**BIRDIE: Eddie, this is too weird. It's just weird getting this kind of text from you. I'm so used to you teasing me about being a nerd.**

**EDDIE: To be clear, I will never stop teasing you for being a nerd. Even when I'm inside you. <nerd face emoji> <eggplant emoji>**

**EDDIE: I'm coming up there. Is the duke with you? I will slap him with his own bloody scarf. I will serve him a weak cup of Lipton tea with sugar and watch the old chap squirm in his fancy throne.**

**BIRDIE: He's not here. Eddie, are you just being like this because you finally think I've met someone who's worthy of dating me or something?**

**EDDIE: I'm being like this because I finally realized I'M worthy of dating you.**

**BIRDIE: Eddie... That is so sweet.**

**EDDIE: And I don't think Lord Properfuck is worthy of you at all.**

**BIRDIE: I don't think he's even interested in me like that.**

**EDDIE: I think most guys are interested in you like that. The fact that you don't realize it makes you even more attractive.**



**BIRDIE:** Okay, thank you. But you have to stop saying awesome things like that. I'll be down in an hour to pack. I still need time away from your face and your mouth and your hands and your penis.

**EDDIE:** And that's a no, re the sexting?

**BIRDIE:** For now, yes. It's a no. <frowning face emoji>

**EDDIE:** You've never sexted with anyone before, have you?

**BIRDIE:** I have. I haven't had satisfying sext with anyone before, but it was easier when I barely knew the guys.

**EDDIE:** You want to start over with me, don't you?

**BIRDIE:** I don't know. Maybe. I don't even know if that's possible for us.

**EDDIE:** I'm pretty sure anything's possible for us, Bird. I got this. You'll see.



---

EDDIE

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

## THE ONE WHERE EDDIE FINDS OUT



I'm the youngest in my family, but I never wanted to be treated like the baby brother. I've always been trying to prove myself to people, it seems. About being a responsible adult. About not being a player. About being more than just a pretty face with abs. About not being attracted to my female best friend. I'm done with that last one. And I think that this shift in the way I feel about Birdie proves the first three points.

It's not that I feel like I have to prove myself to Birdie now. I just want to show her that we won't lose what we have if we add in the other stuff. And I'm going to give her some good old-fashioned valentines in a hot new-fashioned way. I'm gonna woo the fuck out of that woman.

The train ended up getting to Chicago an hour and a half late. Could have been worse, as Gavin kept assuring us, but it gives us less time until we have to board the train to New York. I checked us into the downtown Marriott, took a quick shower, ordered a bottle of champagne from room service just to be baller, and then let Birdie do her thing while I went out to run an errand. I had to find a store that sells burner phones, for a little project that I need to get started on ASAP. I can't rewrite our history, but I can share some key moments that have been left out of my telling of our story so far.

I've been in the hotel lobby, setting something up, but I really need to go buy a winter coat because it's so fucking cold out there. I also want to spend a little time warming up in that luxury hotel room with Birdie, although I won't be doing it in the way that I'd like to.

I never did kiss her again after breakfast today. After last night, I'm wondering how I managed to resist kissing her for six years, because resisting it for six hours feels like torture now. But I'll do it. I've made it a goal to wait

until she's ready, no matter how long it takes.

But I will do whatever it takes to not wait very long.

When I enter the hotel room, it's empty. The door to the bathroom is closed. I don't hear the shower running in there, but I can feel the steam.

"I'm back," I call out as I remove my jacket. "You here?" It is alarming, how much I like saying that. *Honey, I'm home.*

"Oh hey! Taking a bath. I showered too. It's so nice in here! Be right out." She sounds relaxed. And naked. And wet.

But I'm not going to think about that right now.

The champagne bottle is uncorked, sitting in the wine cooler. There's one unused champagne glass on the table, which means Birdie is probably enjoying a glass of champagne in the tub. I like that. I grab the bottle and drink from it—because no one's looking and there's no time to waste.

I place an envelope inside Birdie's handbag. It's marked with the words **FOR BIRDIE BECKETT, FROM YOUR SECRET VALENTINE**. All caps, carefully written in an unfamiliar way.

And then I just happen to notice that Birdie's phone is charging right next to it on the desk...and when I touch the home button, I just happen to notice that it's unlocked. Which is interesting. And the voicemail app is open on the screen. Which is very interesting. And the only saved message is from me, dated December 29th. Which is fascinating.

And I know there are rules about not listening to other people's saved voicemails.

But they're really more guidelines, if you were the one who left the voicemail when you were drunk.

As Birdie herself has demonstrated over the past couple of days—guidelines are merely suggestions when it comes to us.

So I put down the champagne bottle, play the voicemail and raise the phone to my ear.

I barely even recognize the sound of my recorded voice. It's always weird, watching myself on screen. Whether I'm acting or it's an interview. But this is beyond weird. I'm not the guy who leaves drunk voicemails. I'm the guy who leaves cool voicemails. I'm the guy who leaves funny voicemails. Sometimes I'm the guy who leaves voicemails that are hot as fuck. But this guy...this guy is vulnerable. Definitely hammered. Very confused. And he's a fool. A fool in love.

I know for a fact that I've never been like this with anyone else.

*“I know you’re the best girl. I’ve always known it.”* What the fuck?

I can’t believe Birdie’s been living with this for a month and a half and didn’t tell me.

*Okay, new plan.*

I cannot go another month and a half without kissing her.

I tear off my sweater, leaving my T-shirt on, kick off my shoes, and then open that bathroom door. And there she is. Just stepped out of the tub, toweling off her beautiful, relaxed, wet, naked self. As if this view weren’t perfect enough, she’s so startled that she drops the towel. And now she’s a startled, beautiful, wet, totally naked woman who’s getting kissed by a fool. A fool who’s been in love with her forever, probably, without realizing it.

I hold her face in my hands, kissing her mouth. The gasps and sighs and moans echo quietly around the steamy tiled bathroom like a dirty hymn. I will do nothing but sing praises of this woman for the rest of my life.

Her hands are on my chest, gripping my T-shirt. Her tongue tastes like cinnamon toothpaste and champagne and starting over.

When I finally pull my lips away, I rest my forehead against hers. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Tell you what?” she whispers, eyes still closed, swaying a little.

“Why didn’t you tell me what I said in that voicemail?”

“You listened to it?” She opens her eyes, but surprisingly, she does not sound surprised by this.

“Tell me why.” Her damp hair is held up by a clip, and I release that clip, sending it flying. The scent of her hair wafts in my direction, and she smells like a fucking chai latte that I want to have sex with.

“I didn’t want you to feel bad about it.” Her lower lip and her voice tremble. They’re the only parts of her that I don’t want to make tremble right now. “It was so important to you to be faithful to Alana.”

I plant greedy, possessive kisses all over her pretty face. “Fucking hell, that’s exactly why I love you, Birdie. You want me to be the best version of me. But *you’re* the one who brings out the best of me. It was never her or anyone else. It was always just a matter of time before I realized how I felt about you.”

“Eddie...”

“I know. We don’t have to talk. But I have to kiss you.” I pick her up, naked in my arms, and carry her to the bed.

She doesn’t complain. She just wraps her arms around my neck and

kisses my cheek. I place her at the edge of the mattress and kneel before her on the carpet.

“Eddie, we don’t have enough time,” she mutters while pulling off my T-shirt.

“There will always be time for this, Birdie. I will make you come on my face twice before you’ve finished telling me how long it will take us to get to the train platform.”

I massage her hips because I already know how much she likes it. She shifts around, thighs pressed tightly together. She crosses her arms in front of her breasts.

“Let me see you, beautiful girl.”

I trail my fingertips down the sides of her legs. She’s just shaved them and they’re so smooth. Smooth and dewy and already starting to tremble. I push her knees apart and kneel between them, kissing and biting the inside of one knee, looking up at her.

She bites her lower lip, uncovering her tits, and then cups and squeezes them.

*Jesus.*

“Fuck. Baby.” And that’s when I notice just how flushed her skin is. Just how swollen those beautiful perky tits are. “You already made yourself come when you were taking a bath, didn’t you?”

She doesn’t smirk like a vixen. She blushes. My blushing Birdie. My blushing, naked, Dirty Birdie who made herself come in the tub while I was out.

“You thought about me while you touched yourself?”

She nods.

I pull her closer to me, taking one shy pink nipple into my mouth. “You thought about me doing this?”

“Yes.”

I lick her all over. She is clean and warm and smooth and dewy, and I can taste and smell her arousal and it is all fucking delicious. “You didn’t think you could handle me doing this to you, but you touched yourself while thinking about me? How is that fair, Birdie Beckett?”

I get a delicate grunt as a response.

“I’d like to establish some new guidelines... One...” I lick her all the way up to her jaw, over to that spot behind her ear, and then settle between her legs again, squeezing her hip while massaging her clit with my thumb. “I will

be the only man who touches you like this from now on.”

She slowly lies back onto the bed, stretching her arms out to the side, grabbing hold of the bedspread. “Mmmmm” is all she says.

“Two.” I kiss my way up her inner thigh. “If you and I are in the same city, you wait for me to get you off.”

“Unacceptable.” Her voice is shallow and breathy.

“What’s that?” I blow warm breath over her clit, making her shiver.

“I will touch myself whenever I want to.”

“Then you will only think of me when you do that.”

“Mmm. Only you. And Sherlock.”

She gets a little smack on the side of her ass for that, and then she gets a taste of my Sherlock impression. “Look at you lot, you’re all so vacant. Is it nice, not being me? It must be so relaxing.”

I’m not sure how happy I am about the moan and shudder that this elicits, but I’ll chalk it up to my amazing acting and light-handed spanking skills.

She mumbles something that I can’t understand. Her breaths come fast now, her bent arms covering her face, and she is writhing around. This is torture for both of us—my erection is straining against my jeans. I hop up to take off my pants and then flutter and flick my tongue at that pleasure center that has grown so slick and engorged from teasing. “What’s that, Luv?”

“Train,” she forces out.

Ahhh, yes. The lady was promised two swift orgasms, and I am a man of my word.

“No more talk.”

She still can’t handle it. Fine. My mouth is about to get busy anyway. I tug her back down to the edge of the bed, place her feet on my shoulders, and part those sweet folds. As I kiss the wet heat of her center, my groans vibrate through her. I could spend hours and days and years down here. Her hips move to the rhythm of my swirling and sucking. When her cries get louder and more high-pitched, when I feel her begin to spasm, her fingers clutching at my hair, I fuck her with my tongue. My arms are wrapped tight around her thighs to hold her in place as she bucks around. My name is the only word she knows right now, and it’s all I need to hear. The bucking is followed by rolling waves.

That’s when I pull back to let her revel in it, so I can watch in awe as she disappears into some ecstatic realm that I took her to. This is what I was longing to see last night, in the dark. The surprise and joy and torment in her



face. The way her lithe body dances in place on top of the covers.

I don't know if I was falling for her slowly, day by day, or if it all started when I met her and then got suspended for years by sheer force of will or denial. But I just fell so hard and fast for Birdie Beckett in the past half hour. I am dizzy with love for her.

I feel everything for this woman. In my heart and my soul and my aching hard cock. When the waves become tiny electric aftershocks, she forces her eyes open, trying to focus on me. She licks her lips, reaches out for me. We clasp hands and she pulls me up to lie on top of her. She wriggles around so my erection, still raging inside my boxer briefs, is snug between her legs. Right up against the warmth of her pussy.

“Eddie...”

“Yeah, baby?”

“Did you buy a coat?”

I laugh, and it's a while before I can stop laughing. She's still at the tail end of an orgasm and she's worried about whether or not I have a warm coat for the rest of the trip.

“Not yet. I had to get something else. I'll run out to get it in a bit.”

She shakes her head. “You need to get a coat.”

“I will get a coat.”

“We need to get going.”

“We still have a few hours.”

“I mean...” She hikes herself up onto her elbows. “We need to have sex in the shower really quick before you do that.”

Dizzy.

Absolutely, fucking dizzy with love.



---

BIRDIE

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

## THE ONE WITH A VOICEMAIL ON THE BURNER PHONE



When I decided to turn off the passcode on my phone and leave it out on the hotel desk, I was tempting fate. Or tempting Eddie, I suppose. I didn't know if he cared anymore about that voicemail or if he even remembered leaving it. But the champagne told me that it was time to let him hear it, if he wanted to.

I honestly didn't know if it would scare him and make him back away or not. I didn't know if he'd be mad at me for not telling him what he'd said. It just never occurred to me that it would result in him kissing me so passionately and then making out with my lady bits like nobody's business.

That boy is just full of surprises.

And talents.

And more surprises.

After the shower sex that the champagne had also made me do, he left the hotel room to go buy a coat, taking his bags with him. I thought I should go along with him, because while Eddie is a very responsible person—sometimes I wish I could put a leash on him. Especially when there's a train to catch. But he didn't want to rush me. He told me to stay and enjoy the room and he'd meet me at the lounge at Union Station. He told me to order more room service and relax.

I did. I'm relaxed. Until I find an envelope in my purse, with unfamiliar handwriting on it. That makes me a little tense for a minute. Because what if some creep had snuck into the room while I was in the shower and put something in my purse?

But then I realize the creep was Eddie. I can tell by the boxy capitalized letters that he tried to disguise his penmanship, but I recognize the slant of his handwriting and the size and spacing of each letter. I recognize the care he

took in writing it, the same as I always know when it's him knocking at my door.

Inside the envelope, I find a phone. No note. Just a charger and an unlocked cell phone with notifications for one voicemail message and three texts.

I feel a rush of excitement, a whole new flock of butterflies in my tummy and a shiver of realization that Eddie might just be the best guy alive.

And he might just be mine.

I take a seat in the armchair, hands shaking, and play the voice message from YOUR SECRET VALENTINE.

***February 11th, 2:15 p.m.***

“Hi, Birdie. I’m the guy from your American Lit class. You know me. You know me better than most people know me, but you don’t know certain things about me...yet. I remember once you talked about a Thomas Jefferson quote that you loved. ‘I like the dreams of the future better than the history of the past.’ I do like my dreams of the future with you, but I can’t say that I regret our past. That would mean that I didn’t like the time we spent together, and that would be the opposite of the truth. But I do want you to have a clearer picture of our history. There are some things that I never told you, things that I need you to know.

That first day of American Lit, you were already there when I walked in. We hadn’t met yet, but I’d actually seen you around campus before. You never seemed to notice me, which was...different. And intriguing. But everything about you intrigued me. Head to toe. The way you tilt your head when you’re reading. The way you twirl loose strands of hair around your finger and point your toes when you’re concentrating on a book. The way you walk, like a dancer who’s always late for an important class or meeting. But you’re never late. You’re always just a little bit early. You just treat everything and everyone like they’re really important, I think. Anyway.

You didn't notice me when I walked into class and you didn't even look up when I asked you if anyone was sitting next to you. You just said "Nope!" and continued scribbling in your notebook like a maniac. The class hadn't even started yet, so I had no idea what you were writing. I said, "Excuse me," because I wanted to pass you so I could sit to the left of you—because I wanted you to see my good side. You finally looked up at me, and in that moment that we stared at each other, I had this feeling that you'd be an important person in my life. I figured you'd be a lover. Because at that point, it had never even occurred to me that I could be friends with a woman, much less a woman I was attracted to.

And then Layla showed up and plopped down on the other side of you and the moment was over.

But that feeling was still there. It's always been there. It was a new feeling, but I recognized it. In the same way that you were a stranger I'd admired from afar on campus, but you seemed familiar. Familiar but also mysterious. Something I needed to study in order to understand.

Like when I first read those monologues from *Romeo and Juliet*. You get this sense of what the words mean the first time you hear or read them, when you're a teenager. This sense that they mean something to you, even if you've never actually experienced love at first sight before. I hadn't, when I first started auditioning with that monologue. But I researched the words I didn't understand. I taught myself what it meant to be that in love. I found my inner Romeo, even though I hadn't found my Juliet yet. Even though I got really good at performing that monologue, deep down I knew there was a key piece that was missing. From the performance and from my life.

On Valentine's Day—that first Valentine's Day after we'd met, I wasn't seeing anyone special. You hadn't been either, not for a while. And we had a class together on February fourteenth. Like I said, I'd never had a female friend before, so I wasn't sure if I should give you something or not. A card or a rose or whatever. I got all worked up about it. It was so dumb. But on the thirteenth, I called my brother Declan and asked him what I should do. I explained to him that we were just friends, and he didn't believe me. But he told me to get you a card that just said 'thanks for being a friend' or something like that.

And then he hung up on me because he was such a dick back then, but whatever.

So I bought the least shitty Valentine's Day card I could find at a stationery store and wrote 'thanks for being such a great friend.' There was so much more I could have said. There's always been so much more that I could have said to you. But that was all I wrote. And I brought it to class to give to you. You wore a red sweater dress that day, and those knee-high boots that you should wear more often, and you looked so hot and beautiful. I had very *un-friend-ly* thoughts about you, and I thought about asking if you wanted to have dinner with me that night. I didn't even care if you were going to ask if I meant as a date or not. I just wanted to be the guy who had dinner with you on Valentine's Day. But then Layla showed up and asked you where you were going for dinner with 'that guy from the library.' I wanted to yell out 'WHAT FUCKING GUY FROM THE LIBRARY?!' But I didn't.

That card stayed inside my jacket pocket. It seemed wrong to give it to you if you had a date. So I never did. I tore it up and tossed it into the recycling bin and that was that.

Incidentally, in case you don't remember, according to you, that guy from the library went from being 'the stud in the stacks to a dud in the sack.' I mean, that's neither here nor there, but it's worth mentioning. I think I fell in love with you at first sight, Birdie. It just took me six years to realize it.

You were that key piece that I'd been missing. I was still looking for it in other women, even after I'd met you. Because it seemed like you and I didn't fit together in certain ways. And maybe we don't. In some ways. But we do in every way that matters.

There's a reason why my performance of those monologues on the train was the best I've ever given. It's because I finally understood what those words meant. I was finally saying them to the right woman.

It's you.

It's always been you.

I'm going to find my own ways of saying it, so you can understand too.

I'll say it in as many different ways as I can until you do.

Happy Valentine's Day, Birdie.  
Thank you for being a great friend.  
I'm glad I decided to sit next to you.  
I'm glad I decided to take the train with you.  
I hope to sit next to you for the rest of our lives."

And *that's* how you leave a message, people.

I weep for fifteen solid minutes. Can't even bring myself to listen to it again. Don't have to. I heard it. Really heard it, with all my heart and soul.

When the tears have finally dried, I read the text messages on the burner phone.

**YOUR SECRET VALENTINE: Here's another thing I've never told you: every time you wear your hair up, all I want to do is kiss your neck. Even as a friend. It's like when I'm getting in shape for a shirtless scene on the show. Even though I'm fucking dying to eat pasta and bread and cookies, I know I shouldn't, so I don't. Because I'm goal oriented. And my goal with you used to be to do whatever I had to, to be the best friend that I could be to you. My new goal is to be the best friend that I can be to you, while also kissing your neck. And every other part of you. In the best way that I can. I'm going to be the best boyfriend you've ever had, Bird. Whenever you're ready. Because I am. I am beyond ready for you.**

**YOUR SECRET VALENTINE: I also never told you that after I saw your tits at your party last month, I went home and beat off and came harder than I ever had when I was thinking about Alana or any other girl. Thought you should know.**

**YOUR SECRET VALENTINE: And another thing: I loved sleeping in the same bed as you. It was a pretty shitty, not very comfortable bed, but I slept better next to you than I have in any other bed since moving out of my parents' house. I want to fall asleep with you, dream with you, and wake up with you in my arms. Whenever possible. And before we fall**



**asleep, I want to do absolutely filthy things to you. Filthy, beautiful things. In a loving way. But really fucking filthy.**

Yeah. Eddie Cannavale just might be the best guy alive.

I don't reply to him because I have to get ready to leave for Union Station. But I'm already thinking of all the things that I'd like to say and do to my secret valentine when I get the chance.



And now, I've boarded the train to New York *by myself*, and these are the texts I've received from my dear longtime friend Eddie that I probably should have kept on a leash...

**EDDIE: Hey. Bought a coat. Got a voicemail from Rita's office. Sounds urgent. Have to call her back.**

**EDDIE: Hey. Turns out they need me back on set in Vancouver in a week, so I can't take the train back to LA. But I want you to fly to LA with me. That way, we can stay an extra day or two in New York. I don't want you taking the train back by yourself.**

**EDDIE: Hi. Forgot to wear my sunglasses and baseball cap, so I got mobbed by fans. Turns out I'm huge in Chicago. Doesn't seem to be doing me any ducking good though because I'm trying to find a ducking cab but it's starting to snow so they're all taken. Going to walk as fast as I can to the station. I'll make it. Don't worry.**

**ME: Eddie. Just tried to phone you. They're making the final boarding call.**

**EDDIE: Duck. Shit. Duck.**

Okay, so Eddie Cannavale is still the best guy alive, but he's not perfect.

Nobody's perfect. But he could at least be fucking *here*. We are moving. This train is actually leaving the station. Those butterflies are still there in my belly, but now they're getting a little bit ragey and they want to smack that boy up the side of his head.

I'm staring down at my phone—the regular one—about to call him, when he calls me. “I am so sorry.”

“You're not on the train?”

“I am so, so sorry. I just got to the platform. I'm watching it go.”

“Eddie!” I go to the window that faces the platform, but I can't see him.

“Look, it's not ideal, but I will work this out. I can fly to New York and be there to meet you at Penn Station when you get in.”

“You're really not on the train? This is a joke, right?”

“Would you consider it a funny joke, if it were?”

“No.”

“Well then, it's not a joke. I'm sorry. I'm dying to see you.”

“I'm dying to see you too.”

“Yeah?”

“Yes! Of course.”

“Did you listen to the message on that phone?”

“Yes. It's the best message I've ever heard. Even better than the drunk one. And the texts. I love all of them. I love you, Eddie. I can't believe I can't tell you that in person right now.”

“I love you. I screwed up. I mean, I'm glad I'm wearing an actual fucking coat now because it's really fucking cold, but I can't fucking believe I missed the train.”

“Okay. It's okay. Don't beat yourself up about it. It totally sucks, but I was going to take the train by myself anyway to begin with, right? You fly to New York and hang out with your brother, and I'll meet you there.”

“Yeah. I'll meet you there.”

“I can't wait to see you.”

“You don't even know how badly I want to see you. We'll stay in touch. Whenever we can, right?”

“Yes—there's Wi-Fi on this train. It's not great, but it's better than nothing.”

“Great. Perfect. You can choose which phone you want to use to reach me. I'll keep them both on when I'm not on the plane.”

“Yes. I love the phone. I love that you did that for me.”

“I’ll do anything for you... Is it okay for me to say things like that?”

“It’s more than okay, Eddie.”

“Good, because I miss you already.”

“I miss you too.”

“Is Lord Fuckwit on that train with you?”

“Well, now you’re just getting lazy. And I have no idea. I’ve only been in this room since I boarded.”

“Okay. Well, I better get to the airport. I’ll let you know when I’ve booked a flight.”

“Okay. Bye.”

“I will see you soon. Not soon enough, but soon.”

“Yes. See you soon.”

I end the call. And I’m already feeling a little sick. We’re traveling in a straight line, but I’m heading in the wrong direction—away from Eddie. It already feels wrong, after spending the past couple of days with him. This bedroom doesn’t smell at all like snowy beach sex. It doesn’t smell like snow, or the beach, or sex. It smells like a train. And other people.

But if Eddie is headed for New York, then I guess I am going in the right direction. It’s just going to take about twenty flippity floppity hours to get there.

There’s that crackling sound from the wall speaker that precedes an announcement from the conductor. I pull the burner phone out from my purse and get all settled on the sofa, thinking about what I want to text to my valentine first.

“Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls. Welcome onboard the Polar Express. Just kidding, this is the Lake Shore Limited, now leaving Chicago Union Station for a final destination of New York, Penn Station. I am Gavin, your conductor, and in case you haven’t noticed—it’s snowing. Travel time to Penn Station is just under twenty hours, with eighteen scheduled stops along the way. I say ‘scheduled stops,’ because, well, it’s snowing. So let’s not get our hopes up. But it’s important to stay positive. It’s important to enjoy the ride. But let’s be real—things don’t always go according to plan. We might not get you to New York City on time, but we’ll get you there. And no matter what’s awaiting you there, it will be worth the wait. With a little patience and a little forgiveness, things always work out for the best in the end. The poet Richard Aldington, as you may have read on the Amtrak website, wrote: *Adventure is allowing the unexpected to happen to*

you. *Exploration is experiencing what you have not experienced before.* So with that in mind...please note that we are unable to serve beef or chicken until further notice. Gavin, out.”

...

Fuck.

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

# CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

---

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

THE ONE WITH A BUNCH OF TEXTS FROM THE BURNER PHONES

**YOUR FILTHY VALENTINE:** Hi! I'm writing a book on the most important dates in American history. Ours will be the final chapter. <winking face emoji>

**YOUR FILTHY VALENTINE:** I'm so happy I finally get to use that hilarious pickup line!

**YOUR FILTHY VALENTINE:** Also, here are some sexy words: fuck, cock, pussy, clit, bang, jizz, testicles, nipples, tits, vulva, honey pot, shaft, tumescence, rimming, pile driving, beaver, muff, Cumberbatch.

**YOUR SECRET VALENTINE:** You forgot Venus's court, tinderbox, flapdoodle, bumfiddle and cunny-hole. <thumbs down emoji> Cumberbatch <thumbs down emoji>

**YOUR FILTHY VALENTINE:** Hot, wet nether lips.

**YOUR SECRET VALENTINE:** Fuck, babe. Fuck. Oh my Godddd. Fuuuuuuuck.

**YOUR FILTHY VALENTINE:** Wow. You're really good at this. And it really is easier for me to do this on the burner phone for some reason. For now, anyway. Thank you. I think you know me better than anyone else too. Better than I know myself sometimes, maybe.

**YOUR SECRET VALENTINE:** I look forward to getting to know you even better. Inside and out.

**YOUR FILTHY VALENTINE:** Front to back!

**YOUR SECRET VALENTINE:** Go on...

**YOUR FILTHY VALENTINE:** Wait. Nope! Never mind.

**YOUR FILTHY VALENTINE:** What I really want to tell you is this...

**YOUR FILTHY VALENTINE:** I thought about you while touching

myself too. After the froner-y nipple slip incident. I mean, the friendly bonerific tits-outscapade.

**YOUR SECRET VALENTINE:** The platonic boobtastic half-mast-fest.

**YOUR FILTHY VALENTINE:** You know the one.

**YOUR SECRET VALENTINE:** Look at you, breaking all the rules.

**YOUR FILTHY VALENTINE:** Guidelines.

**YOUR SECRET VALENTINE:** Whatever. It's hawt. Keep talking.

**YOUR FILTHY VALENTINE:** Yes sir, Mr. Secret Valentine.

**YOUR SECRET VALENTINE:** Yes. More of that.

**YOUR FILTHY VALENTINE:** And I may have also accidentally thought about you while touching myself prior to that too...

**YOUR SECRET VALENTINE:** Let me know when you've figured it out.

**YOUR FILTHY VALENTINE:** Okay, I definitely did. But you made unscheduled appearances. It was really annoying.

**YOUR SECRET VALENTINE:** Oh yeah? Did you pleasure yourself in an angry way when I made those unscheduled appearances?

**YOUR FILTHY VALENTINE:** Affirmative.

**YOUR SECRET VALENTINE:** Attagirl.

**YOUR FILTHY VALENTINE:** And I want you to know that I did notice you around campus before that first day in American Lit. I was just better at hiding it than most women are.

**YOUR SECRET VALENTINE:** Interesting. Continue.

**YOUR FILTHY VALENTINE:** I noticed your butt first. I mean, first I noticed your butt. Because you were walking in front of me. And then I noticed the back of your neck. Which is very pleasant. And then I heard your voice because you were talking on the phone. And I don't have to tell you how very agreeable your voice is.

**YOUR SECRET VALENTINE:** You do have to tell me, actually.

**YOUR FILTHY VALENTINE:** It's hot, Eddie. Your voice is hot.

**YOUR SECRET VALENTINE:** Pleased to hear it.

**YOUR FILTHY VALENTINE:** I especially like how you sound when you come.

**YOUR SECRET VALENTINE:** Spit take.

**YOUR FILTHY VALENTINE:** It's really cute.

**YOUR SECRET VALENTINE:** <grimacing face emoji>

**YOUR FILTHY VALENTINE:** In a really hot, super masculine way, of

course.

**YOUR FILTHY VALENTINE:** Anyway, I noticed your voice. And then I noticed your hands. Your big, beautiful hands.

**YOUR SECRET VALENTINE:** Was this when you were still walking behind me?

**YOUR FILTHY VALENTINE:** Yes. I then continued to stare at your butt for a while. However, I do want to be clear that all of your physical attributes pale in comparison to your personality and the way you have always treated me and your talent.

**YOUR FILTHY VALENTINE:** Okay, they don't pale in comparison, but you're the whole package.

**YOUR SECRET VALENTINE:** Nobody has ever called me that before. The whole package.

**YOUR FILTHY VALENTINE:** I think maybe you've been saving your whole package for me.

**YOUR FILTHY VALENTINE:** I mean, I know a lot of other women have seen your package, but...

**YOUR SECRET VALENTINE:** You are the only woman who gets the whole package. You're right.

**YOUR SECRET VALENTINE:** BRB



**EDDIE:** Hey. I'm at O'Hare. I'm on standby for a flight that leaves in two hours and they said there's a good chance I'll be on it. So I'll be in NYC in like four and a half hours. I'll start looking for a hotel for tonight, I guess. I'm assuming you'll let me crash with you when you get there...

**EDDIE:** Or if I can find a more baller suite last minute, you can cancel your room and stay with me.

**EDDIE:** Guess you're in a dead zone.

**EDDIE:** You'd better not be busy talking to Lord Vader.

**EDDIE:** Forget I said that. He's not cool enough for a Star Wars reference.





**YOUR SECRET VALENTINE: Hi. In case you're not checking your other phone, your secret valentine would like you to know that you should check your other phone.**

**YOUR SECRET VALENTINE: I dunno... Is this getting complicated? Are you ready to commit to our original phone numbers yet?**

**YOUR SECRET VALENTINE: I'll just sit here and think about your sweet, delicious pussy while I wait for you to get a signal or stop talking to Sir Rupert Snoredon.**

**YOUR SECRET VALENTINE: Man, I am not on my game. I should probably get something to eat.**



**EDDIE: Okay, I'm boarding the flight to JFK now. Message me when you get a signal. I love you.**

**EDDIE: Shit. Sorry. Is it okay that I said that with this phone? Whatever, gotta go. Talk to you when I'm in NYC. Xo**

**EDDIE: P.S. Tell Lord Froofy McSnootypants the third that I got mobbed by fans when I was in line at Chili's.**

**EDDIE: Wait, tell him I was at a bar and grill.**

**EDDIE: Never mind.**



---

EDDIE

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

THE ONE WITH THE TEXTS FROM AN UNKNOWN NUMBER



I am fortune's fool.

I'm here in New York.

It's snowing lightly outside, which makes the gray February slush look slightly less horrible.

I'm here with my brand-new warm winter coat, and I would give anything to be freezing my ass off, naked on a train with Birdie.

As Declan had warned me weeks ago, there isn't a single fucking hotel room available in Manhattan or Brooklyn. So here I am at my brother's badass penthouse, collapsed on his badass leather sofa. Birdie hasn't called or texted in hours, so they're probably still in a dead zone. I'm going to stay here reading *Infinite Jest* all night because I don't want to miss a call from her if I go out.

And I can't wait for Declan to get his smug handsome lawyer face out of here because I don't need him to tell me he was right. Again. About the hotel rooms. About Alana. About Birdie.

"I'm just saying—you're not stupid." He saunters out of his bedroom, having changed out of his Hugo Boss suit into a Hugo Boss sweater and jeans. He used to wear Italian suits to the office when he worked in Big Law, so he thinks he's being casual now that he's a general counsel for a real estate firm. In German suits. "You've had twenty-six years to figure out that I'm right about everything, every time, so why don't you listen?"

"Don't you have to be at Maddie's place for dinner or something?"

"I told you I'm meeting her at her sister's place for dinner. You sure you don't want to come? It would make Piper's year. Especially if you show her your butt."

“Piper’s her sister?”

“Her niece.”

“Right. The thirteen-year-old. I’m good, thanks. I’d just come off as rude if I’m staring at my phones all night instead of talking to people,” I tell him... while staring at my phones.

“She’s obviously just not getting a signal. You’re not actually worried, are you?”

“Yeah, no. I just can’t believe I missed the train. I can’t believe how much I miss Birdie.”

He gets a far-off look in his eyes. “Yeah. That’s what it’s like, when you’re in love with a woman. One minute without her feels like a fucking year. Every day with her is the best day of your life. Even when she spends most of the day thinking you’re an asshole.” He snaps out of it and then fixes me with his penetrating asshole lawyer gaze. “Or an idiot, in your case. It’s problematic.” He messes up my hair, like he has my whole life ever since I’ve had hair, and then gets up and goes over to the open kitchen. “But you’ll live. You’re on the right track now, at least.”

“That might be the nicest thing you’ve ever said to me.”

“Well, this is the least idiotic you’ve been in years. Despite the problematic issue of you missing a train that the love of your life is on. Who *does* that? You’ll just have to make it up to her once she gets here.”

“Oh, I plan to.”

“Yeah, well. Don’t fuck it up.” He stares into the refrigerator. “I’ve got leftover Chinese from a couple of days ago, frozen borscht from Maddie’s landlady, and about ninety bottles of Italian sparkling water. I can order something to be delivered if you want. The doorman will bring it up for you.”

He still treats me like I’m twelve. “I know how to order food.”

“I just don’t want you to forget to eat when you’re staring at your phone and pretending to read a book that nobody actually reads all the way through. I don’t want Ma finding out you’re starving on *my* watch.”

“She won’t know.”

He gives me a look. Because our ma always knows. “I’ll eat the leftover Chinese. You can go.”

“All right.” He puts on an awesome wool coat and beanie. He’s a dick, but the guy knows how to dress. “You remember how to start a fire in the fireplace if you feel cold?”

“Yes, Declan. I remember how to start a fire in a fireplace.”

“Well, you’ve been living in LA for almost a decade. You want me to start a fire for you, so you don’t burn the place down?”

“I will burn this place down right now if you don’t get out of here.”

And now he tilts his head at me like I’m an adorable, impetuous four-year-old. “Awww. Okay, poopie head. You got the spare key I gave you, right?”

“Yes.”

“I’ll be at Maddie’s overnight, but I’m always reachable. Except when I’m busy blowing my hot fiancée’s mind in bed.”

“Kay, buh-bye.”

“Have a good night.”

“Thanks for letting me stay here,” I offer reluctantly.

“You’re welcome.” He pauses as he’s halfway out the front door. “Shit. I told Nolan you’re here, so you’ll probably hear from him.”

“Great. So he’s in town? Can you tell your doorman not to let him up if he comes by?”

“My Irish doorman? The one Nolan gave a bottle of Jameson to the first time he came over? Suuuure. Lemme just ask him.” He winks and disappears.

Now he disappears. Leaving me with the added sense of dread about being kidnapped by my beast of an Irish cousin on top of the anxiety of waiting to hear from Birdie. I stare down at my phone, just in case I missed a notification, even though I have the volume turned all the way up.

I didn’t miss a notification. I have four bars of reception, an empty stomach and no dignity left when it comes to Birdie Beckett.

**ME: Hi. Still here in NYC. Still wish you were here. Lemme know how you’re doing as soon as you get a signal!**

**YOUR SECRET VALENTINE: <heart emoji> <eggplant emoji>  
<winking face emoji>**

I’m pretty sure I was a cool guy once. Possibly even up until yesterday.

I feel sick. I can't stop picturing her with the Brit. It's not that I don't trust her. It's that I don't trust any other men to keep their grabby hands and long skinny fingers off her. But I guess I'll have to either get over it or get used to this feeling, since I work in a different city from her for six months a year.

I'll just fly in on the weekends more. Fly her up to visit. She'll be okay with flying now, I'm sure of it. We'll be seeing each other more than we did as friends ever since I started working in Vancouver, and our relationship has always been solid. I'm not worried.

But it would be so great if I book that movie in LA in the summer, whatever it is.

And now I'm nervous about my upcoming meeting with the casting director, like a total fucking badass.

Probably just hungry. I get up, take the leftover Chinese food out of the fridge. After putting it in the microwave, I check both my phones, *like a boss*.

Nothing from Birdie. But as I'm staring at my iPhone, Nolan Cassidy comes up on my Caller ID and I get a shiver down my spine. The bad kind. The kind that you get when you're watching *The Exorcist* or *Rosemary's Baby* or *The Omen* or any of those movies that my ma made us watch growing up to get us to go to church with her.

Pretty sure I'm still hungover from when I saw him at New Year's, not that I'd ever admit that to him. But against my better judgment, I find myself answering the call. Because while my cousin may in fact be possessed by the devil, he is really fucking cool, looks like a young Colin Farrell, and I've always had a man crush on the guy.

"Please tell me you aren't downstairs."

"Well now, how's that for greeting a loved one?"

"Sup, Nolan? Dec said you're in town."

"I am indeed. Thanks for ringin' to let me know you're here."

"I just got in."

"Yeah, did ya now? Thought I'd welcome you to the great city of New York and have you over to my flat for a pint or two—unless you'd care to invite me over to Declan's for some of that twenty-five-year-old single malt Glendalough he keeps in the top shelf like an old biddy."

"He does? That shit's like five hundred bucks a bottle."

"Aye, it'll change yer life. For the better, and then for the worse, and then for the better again. Shall we head on over, then?"

“We?”

“Hey, kid, how are ya?” my cousin Billy O’Sullivan aka Billy Boston shouts out in the background. “Put it on *speakahphone*, will ya?! Lemme talk to that *cocksuckah*, come on!”

Shit. What’s he doing here?

“Get yer face away from my face and I will put it on speakerphone, ya eejit.”

“Don’t be a dick, Paddy Magee. This guy loves me, right Eddie?”

“Sure. How’s it going, Billy?”

“It’s goin’ wicked awesome, that’s how it’s goin’. Get your ass *ovah heah* or we’re comin’ *ovah theah*.”

“I can’t hang out with you guys tonight. I’m waiting for a call from my girlfriend.”

“What—that sick nasty chick from the Gram? I thought Dec told your ma and she told my ma that the Gram chick dumped your sorry ass for the guy in that movie that my ex was obsessed with last *yeah*. Whatsisface who was on that show? Chris? Or Jack somethin’?”

“*What?* I have no idea who you’re talking about, but no. That is not how it went down.”

“*Whatevah*. Have one drink with us. Come on, don’t be a dick.”

“Yeah, I can’t tonight, but why don’t we meet up for breakfast tomorrow?”

“Breakfast? What are we—the Golden Girls? Fuck that. Don’t be a tool, come on.”

“Why are you even here, Billy?”

“Where the fuck else am I gonna be? Cassidy’s *heah*, Dec’s *heah*, you’re *heah*. What am I gonna do? Stay at home and let you *skeezahs* get into trouble without me? Get *outta heah*.”

“All right, that’s enough outta you.” And now Nolan plays the Good Cop. I know this routine. Not falling for it. “Our William’s just hidin’ out from a bitta fluff who turned out to be a nutter. I heard you got yourself a fine mot. I do too.”

“Yeah, why aren’t you with her tonight, then?”

“She’s traveling. For work. I am well acquainted with the particular torment of missin’ a good woman.”

“Well then, you’ll understand why I don’t want to miss my woman’s call.”



“She gets in tonight then, does she?”

“She gets in tomorrow evening. Or she’s supposed to, anyway.”

“Right, then. You spend tonight with us. If ya don’t want to invite us over like a proper sham, then pull yer socks up and get over here. I’ll text ya the address.”

“I really can’t. I want to see you guys, you know I love you, but I can’t. We’ll meet up tomorrow. I wouldn’t be any fun tonight anyway.”

“Boooo!” Billy yells from the background. I can hear him opening up a can of something. “Listen to this guy. You think you’re *bettah* than us, Cannavale? *Whatevah*. Yeah, we’ll see you *tomorra* *whethah* you like it or not.”

“Best of luck to ya, friend,” Nolan says, and I can’t tell if that was menacing or not, but he hangs up.

So that’s dealt with.

Except, when I look at my phone screen, I see that I have a missed call and a message from Birdie.

WHAT THE FUCK?

How did I not hear the call waiting?

Probably because Billy Boston kept yelling in my ear.

***February 11th, 7:27 p.m.***

“Hey! Finally got one bar of service! The Wi-Fi is not working on this train. At all. It’s Birdie, by the way. Rupert has a Wi-Fi booster that he brought, but it’s not helping. Too much weather, I guess, or maybe it’s the... Anyway, I’m glad you... to New York and I’m glad you... place to stay. You’re probably out gallivanting around town and that’s... I’m fine... Shoot, I think it’s cutting out, I better... I just wanted to say... And I wish you were here, but Rupert’s going to...”

That’s it. That’s the end of the message, and it kept cutting out.

WHAT. THE. FUCK. IS RUPERT GOING TO DO!?

I'm on the phone with my asshole cousins when I could have been talking to Birdie, and now Lord Fucknut is going to do something with or to her?

Oh hell no.

I call her back, but it immediately goes to voicemail.

"Hi, it's me. I can't believe I missed your call. I am definitely not out gallivanting around town. I'm at my brother's place and I'm going to stay here all night waiting to hear from you. I was just on the phone with my asshole cousins, so I didn't hear the call waiting. Anyway. Call me again as soon as you can. I miss you."

I hang up and I'm about to hurl my phone at the wall when I hear the ding of a text notification.

But it's not from Birdie.

**UNKNOWN NUMBER: Hi, Eddie! It's Piper! Maddie's niece? Declan's fiancée Maddie's niece. Declan's at our place RN. U posed for a picture with her for me? In Ohio. On Christmas Eve. BEST. CHRISTMAS. GIFT. EVER!!! And then u had a signed headshot sent to me? I have it up on my wall in my bedroom.**

**ME: Hey Piper. How are you?**

**PIPER: OMG hi! TY for replying! I am gr8! How RU?! Declan said ur in town at his place! He gave me ur number. LOL hope u don't mind! Hi!!! Welcome to New York!!!**

**ME: Thank you!**

**PIPER: He said ur there all alone. <sad face emoji> I am available to come keep you company! LOLOL JK! Not really kidding tho <smiling face with halo emoji> I mean I do have to finish an essay for tomorrow, but u should come have dinner with us! We haven't started eating yet. I can save the chair next to me 4U! U would have to sit next to the baby but he's not always messy.**

**ME: Thanks for the invite, but I have to wait for an important call, so I'm gonna stick around here. But that's really nice of you. <hugging face emoji>**

**PIPER: Okay! <hugging face emoji> <face blowing a kiss emoji> NP!**

**Well if u get the important call soon then u can still come for dessert!**

**ME: We'll see, thanks.**

**PIPER: Is it the IG girl? The important call? I saw that she unfollowed you. <woman shrugging emoji>**

**ME: Nope. We broke up. I'm waiting for my friend Birdie to call.**

**ME: My girlfriend Birdie, I guess.**

**PIPER: Oh cool! She sounds nice!**

**ME: She is. She's really nice. She's on a train headed for New York RN.**

**PIPER: Ohhhhhh! The Girl on the Train!!! She's so pretty! I <heart emoji> her long wavy hair. Oh and btw I really <heart emoji>ed ur Romeo monologue!!!! I liked it even more than Leo's! <smiling face with three hearts emoji> It was more alpha and HAWTTTTT.**

**ME: Thank you, Piper. I appreciate that.**

**PIPER: And you have a way cuter butt.**

**PIPER: Oops. I guess I shouldn't say that 2U. <woman facepalming emoji>**

**ME: It's cool. Be sure to tell Declan you think my butt is hotter than his.**

**PIPER: LOLOL. Ur butts are kind of tied for me TBH. Tied for #1 Best Butt in the World Everrrrrrrr!!!**

**ME: Guess I can live with that.**

**PIPER: Okay, well. My mom's yelling at me to set the table. Have a GN if I don't CU! Xoxo**

**ME: You too, Piper. Thanks for checking in on me. <smiling face emoji>**

**PIPER: Oh well, I can check in with u every day if u want! LOLOL. JK. I mean, I totally will if you want me to. <smiling face emoji> <red heart emoji> <face blowing a kiss emoji> Okay TTY later! BBFN.**

**ME: BBFN.**

Sweet kid.

But still no call or text from Birdie, on either of the phones.

It's going to be a long, terrible night.



---

BIRDIE

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

## THE ONE WITH THE SHADOOBIE



“Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Gavin your conductor here. As you may have noticed—there’s an ice storm, and our train, which has been traveling at under twenty-five miles per hour due to weather and signal outages, is currently not moving at all. This is due to what we like to call ‘freight train interference.’ A freight train on the track ahead of us is stuck because it hit some low-hanging branches that damaged its engine. A crew is on its way to repair that freight, but we are unable to move forward until that happens. It could happen in a few hours. It could happen in more than a few hours. But it will happen. Until then, we’ll be passing out free drink coupons to everyone on board. Please drink responsibly, and for those of you who are enjoying one of our passenger’s portable karaoke machines—I’d like to request that someone sing ‘You Make my Dreams Come True’ by Hall and Oates for me and dedicate it to my Valentine, Michelle. Gavin, out.”

Sorry, Gavin. I’ve already picked out my karaoke song and I stopped drinking responsibly two beers ago.

It has been a couple of hours since I was able to get a cell phone signal. The last text exchange with Eddie went like this:

**ME: This entire train ride has been a real shadoobie.**

**EDDIE: You know, I assumed the word “shadoobie” was some Old English word that meant “tribulation.” But according to Urban**

**Dictionary it's shit-related. I love you so much right now, I could just shadoobie.**

I wrote back that I also love him so much that I could shadoobie, but the message still hasn't been delivered. Now I'm feeling a bit crapulous—which actually is an Old English word meaning I feel ill after too much eating and drinking. There's really nothing else to do here. I've prepaid for my hotel room in New York, so I don't have to call them to make sure they hold my reservation. I just wish I could call Eddie to make sure he doesn't think I'm not responding to his "I love you" text.

The exhausted and harried-looking conductor makes his way through the dining car, where many of us have gathered to blow off steam this afternoon. By blow off steam, I mean the Americans are getting wasted and singing, while The Earl of Fiddle Faddle Fart Knockerville has been sitting here fuming. Things aren't going exactly as planned, and apparently, things usually go the way Rupert wants them to.

You'd think he'd somehow arranged for Eddie to miss the train himself, he was so pleased to find me alone yesterday. It was almost sweet, the way he took it upon himself to help me with the Wi-Fi signal, and he even offered to call to try to get Eddie a ticket for the TEDx talk tomorrow. He wasn't able to, but it was nice of him to offer.

But ever since the ice storm started and the train began traveling at a snail's pace, he's been a turd squire of the highest order.

Now he's got his sights set on poor Gavin. Rupert puts down his cup of fancy tea, gets up and marches over to him. I follow him. I don't want to lose my place in the karaoke lineup, but I also want to make sure he isn't too much of an ass to Gavin.

"Oi. You're the conductor, yes?"

"Yes."

"Right. I'm Lord Rupert Norton III, and this entire situation is absolutely unacceptable. I cannot arrive in New York City late tonight nor early tomorrow morning—I'm giving a Ted Talk tomorrow morning. I need to be well-rested and prepared. This young lady I'm traveling with is attending the conference as well and must also arrive there tonight. Do you understand?"

“A TEDx Talk,” I mumble. “And we aren’t traveling together.”

Lord Twaddlebottom either didn’t hear what I said or ignores it because he’s very focused on being an irate upper-class asshole. “Let me speak to your supervisor.”

Gavin gives him a blank stare. “About the ice storm? Hang on, let me just get God on the phone for you—oh wait. There’s no signal. Enjoy your tea.” And with that, he rolls his eyes and continues on his merry way.

*Drop that mic, Gavin.*

“Unacceptable,” Rupert mutters, shaking his head. “This would never happen in England.”

“I seem to recall reading an article that said trains in northern England travel at the same pace as a horse and cart.”

He pushes his glasses up the bridge of his nose and blinks twice before saying, “I wasn’t speaking of rural England.” He places a hand on my shoulder. “Shall we retreat to my room, perhaps? This ruckus is giving me a raging headache.”

I take a step away from him. “I’ve put my name on the karaoke list, so I can’t leave. But you should definitely go lie down. There’s really nothing we can do about our arrival time, so we might as well enjoy the ride.”

“That is a very un-British thing to say.” He frowns. “Shall we meet back here for dinner, then?”

“I’m going to be staring at my phone, waiting for a signal so I can call my boyfriend, so I wouldn’t be very good company.”

“Your ‘boyfriend’?”

“Eddie.”

He grimaces. “Your friend the actor?”

*What a shadoobie.*

“Yes.”

“That seems...unlikely.”

“I know.” I shrug. “Turns out I like guys who have a big brain *and* a big cock that they know how to use! That’ll be the subject of *my* TEDx Talk.” I give him a wave over my shoulder as I walk away from him. “Feel better!”

I might be a tad drunker than I thought I was.

A few of the little kids I babysat on the train to Chicago finish up the cutest version of a Ghostface Killah song I’ve ever heard. It really cleared the air after that girl who screamed the Alanis Morissette song into the mic. And then the woman who owns the karaoke machine calls me up to the “stage,”



which is by her table.

I let my hair down, shake it out, clear my throat, and then belt out one of my mom's favorite songs, by Vanessa Williams. I never really cared much for it before, but now it's my anthem. Because sometimes the snow does come down in June. Sometimes the sun really does go 'round the moon. This world *is* a crazy place. And just when I thought our chance had passed—Eddie fucking Cannavale went and saved the best for last.

I just can't wait to be standing face-to-face with him again.

I will never stop kissing that face.

I will never stop telling him I love him.

When I'm done singing, I curtsy for my audience and immediately pull my phone out from my pocket.

“Fucking motherfucking shadoobie fucker fuck!”

I did not mean to say that into the microphone.

I am definitely drunker than I thought I was.

I smile and hand the mic back to the karaoke machine lady and then hurry out into the next car so I can listen to the voicemail that just came through from Eddie.

I can't believe I missed his call.



---

EDDIE

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

THE ONE WITH ANOTHER DRUNK VOICEMAIL



***February 12th, 4:32 p.m.***

*“Baby, won't you please come home - come on home, baby  
'Cause your daddy's all alone - who's your daddy?  
I have tried in vain  
Never no more to call your name - Birdie Beckett that's her name*

*When you left, you broke my heart  
Because I never thought we'd part - okay, that was my bad  
Every hour in the day you'll hear me say  
Oh, Birdie, mmmm come home - come home to Daddy.”*

(muffled voice in background) “Why the fuck's Declan got so many Dean Martin records? Who is he—Matlock? Come on. Put on something cool.”

“Dude. Don't scratch Declan's record or I'll get in trouble!”

(muffled voice in background) “Don’t touch that record, you feckin’ maggot. Let me do it. Animal.”

“Hello? Did I...wait...did I already call? Hello? Is it...? Are you there? Is this voicemail? Hi. Birdie, hi. It’s Eddie. Your friend Eddie, who loves you.

Did it—was it weird that I said I love you that time in the text? Because I never didn’t get heard back from you... Wait... Wait...

Hey, I just got a text from you! Yay! You love me too. I was worried you changed your mind, but you did not and that is good. You are good. Sooooo good.

I’m not as drunk as they sound. As I sound. They made me—that’s my cousins over there, Noodle and Bully.”

(muffled laughter in background)

“I just called you guys Noodle and Bully!

They made me day drink because I miss you and I was sad. You were supposed to be here tonight, but I called the train people and they said not tonight and I said *fuck you train people!* Get my girl here now! But they can’t. They’re mean and I hate them.

I’m hungry? I should have eaten lunch, but they didn’t want to and now there’s whiskey and I still miss you.

But I'm here. I will be there. At Penis Station... Wait."

(laughter)

"At *Penn* Station. *You're* my Penis Station.

We are hashtag Breddie. Or hashtag Erdie. Or...Birdward?

(loud sigh)

"I miss you. You're my filthy valentine and I hope you get here and I hope you're safe and I'm gonna kiss you on all the places when you get here.

Okay, call me. Bye."

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)



---

EDDIE

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)



## THE ONE WITH THE BABY PANDA



“Real love is beautiful, you guys. It’s so fucking beautiful.” I hug one of the pillows I brought out from Declan’s guest room. The one I covered with the shirt that still smells like Birdie, because I’m a badass alpha.

“You are firmly correct, my friend.” Nolan reaches over from the other side of the sofa to clink glasses with me.

We’ve been enjoying a few fingers of Declan’s Glendalough whiskey. The good stuff. The really good stuff. A few hands worth of fingers, I guess. I feel warm and dizzy and loved. But it’s still not enough to ease the pain of missing Birdie. And it probably doesn’t help that someone put on Radiohead a while back, but at least Billy isn’t making us belt out that fucking Chumbawamba song anymore.

“It hurts. I’m happy, but why does my heart hurt so much?”

“Ahhhh, because it’s growin’. A boy’s heart has to break first so it can grow bigger. Man-size. For a real woman.” Nolan winks at me, with those glassy black eyes, and I sort of want to kiss him.

“That’s beautiful. It is. I can feel it growing.”

“I want my heart to grow too.” Billy is in an armchair across from us, hugging himself. “I just wanna be loved, y’know? For real. I just wanna find the right woman to love. So I can love her back.”

“Cheers to that, boyo.” Nolan pours a little more whiskey into Billy’s tumbler. “Cheers to that.”

“I’m so tired of being single. I fuckin’ hate Valentine’s Day. Every year, man. Christmas and New Year’s make me feel lonely, but at least you can spend them with family, right? But V-Day... Fuck you, Valentine’s Day! Where’s the love of *my* life, huh? Why do you guys get to have great

women? And Declan and Brady and Aiden and Mark and Fergl and Sean? Everyone. Everyone but Billy.”

“Because you’re a feckin’ tool.”

“So? Lots of women love tools. I just need to meet the right one.”

They both look so sad, and I love them. I love these guys. They’re both assholes, but I love them. “You’re my best friends. Both of you. After Birdie. And Declan. And a bunch of guys I went to school with and worked with. But you’re on the list.”

“Cheers to you, my friend.” Nolan reaches for the bottle again.

“No more for me. I need to sober up so I’ll be in good shape when I have to meet Birdie at Penis Station. Penn Station. Fuck.”

“Our grandad met Granny at the church and married her when he was scuttered and banjaxed after stayin’ out all night with his mates, and she loves him still. *Cheers to you, my friend*,” he repeats, this time in a menacing tone, as he pours me another couple of ounces of whiskey.

My phone beeps with a notification.

I put down my tumbler and whip my phone out of my back pocket, expecting a text, but there’s a voicemail. From Birdie.

What the fuck, phone?!

How did I miss the ring again?

I jump up, still hugging the pillow to my chest.

“Aww. Don’t leave, man. Where ya goin’? Things were just gettin’ good.”

“Everyone shut up. Shut up!” I storm into the guest room and shut the door so I can listen to the message without those sad, lonely losers mumbling over it.

***February 12th, 6:45 p.m.***

“Eddie! It’s me, Eddie! Can you hear me? Shit. A bunch of kids just ran down the hall, yelling. I got your message, but then I lost the signal, and I’ve been waiting and now there are two bars. I don’t understand how we can sometimes get a signal and sometimes not, even though we’ve been in the same fucking place for ten fucking

years. Oh yeah—I swear now. Pretty hot, right?

Hi! I'm drunk too and I miss you too! I was singing karaoke when you called. I was singing about us. And thinking about your sweet, beautiful heart, and all the sweet things you say to me, and also your cock. I can't wait to see it again. I mean, I can't wait to see you again. I'm gonna climb you like a baby panda. Like, you're the tree and I'm the baby panda. A horny baby panda. No wait. Something sexier. A sexy baby cheetah. Rawrrr.

Yeah, so I should be there in New York by now, but I'm not and I'm sad. It sounds like we won't get in until really early tomorrow morning. You don't have to pick me up. You should sleep. It sounds like you'll need the sleep. I hope you remember to eat and rehydrate. I will go to the hotel if you aren't there. And then we'll have all the sex. Hotel sex! Shower sex! Elevator sex, maybe even!

I miss you. And not just your penis, either. My heart hurts when I'm not with you, but I still feel you with me, Eddie. I'm filled with thoughts of you. I still can't believe I'm saying these things to you—but screw it. I'm gonna tell you I love you to your face. I'm gonna love you all over your face, so hard. I'm gonna put your... in my mouth and... and then I'm gonna take your... and... until you..."

Fuck you, cell phones and trains and weather!

What's my girl gonna put in her mouth and then take and do with it until I—what?!

This is worse than waiting to find out if I got a part that I really want.

But I heard the part that I really needed to hear, I guess. She loves me. She's gonna love me all over my face. Hard.

I will eat and I will rehydrate, but I don't think I'll be able to sleep until I can see Birdie's face and hold her in my arms again.

Just as I'm walking out to tell my cousins to get out of here so I can beat off to thoughts of my girlfriend in private, my phone rings and I answer it without looking at the Caller ID. "Thank God! I am so glad I actually heard my fucking phone this time!"

"Well, I'm very glad you answered too, but you kiss your mother with

that mouth?” asks my ma.

And suddenly I’m sober and there goes my Birdie Boner.

“Hey, Ma. I was gonna call you.” I return to the sofa in the living room as my cousins get up and retreat to the kitchen. As if my ma can smell the booze on them through the phone. And let’s face it—she probably can.

“Declan said you’re in New York by yourself.”

“I’m not by myself.”

“I heard the online woman dumped you and now your sweet Birdie’s stuck on a train all by herself because you missed it?”

*Fuck you, Declan.*

“She’s on her way here, Ma. She’s fine. We text and call each other all the time.”

*She just doesn’t get my texts, and we keep missing each other’s calls, and fuck you, Catholic guilt.*

“What kind of grownup misses a train when they’re in town—right by the train station?”

“There was a lot going on. I got mobbed by fans. I had to buy a coat. I had to call my agent. It was snowing.”

“You sabotaged yourself.”

“I did not sabotage myself. I wouldn’t do that with Birdie.”

I can hear her sniffing.

She’s crying.

*Well, this is a fucking unbearable surprising delight.*

“Ma. Don’t cry.”

“I just don’t understand where I went wrong with you. Such a beautiful, sweet boy, but you just can’t seem to get it right. I don’t want you to die alone.”

“I’m not gonna die alone. I’m getting it right. I’m making it right. Birdie isn’t mad at me—she’s fine.”

My asshole cousins are laughing at me for defending myself to her. As if they aren’t total mama’s boys too. Assholes.

“Are Billy and Nolan with you? Are you drinking? During the day? While that girl is stuck on a train all by herself? Because you missed it?”

“Yes, I am here with two of my cousins from *your* side of the family, Ma. There was no stopping them from coming over. You know how it is.”

“I know that you’re drunk and you’re hungry and you should be sober and counting your blessings that you finally got yourself a good, real woman

instead of those fantasy girlfriends with the boobs and the hair.”

“I do. I know how lucky I am. And Birdie has boobs and hair too.” I hold the phone away from my ears and roll my eyes at my cousins.

“Don’t you roll your eyes at me, young man. You think I can’t tell what you’re doing? Put me on speakerphone.”

“You want me to put you on speakerphone so Billy and Nolan can hear you?” I say, grinning at my cousins.

Billy and Nolan start shaking their heads and waving their hands.

“Okay.” I put her on speakerphone.

“William Oscar O’Sullivan. Can you hear me?”

“Yes, ma’am. Great to hear your voice, Mrs. C.”

“Get closer to the phone so I don’t have to yell.”

Billy takes one cautious step closer to my phone as Nolan backs away quietly.

“Closer! I don’t have all day.”

He takes ten loud steps over toward me. “Right here, Mrs. C.”

“You stop trying to corrupt my baby boy, you hear me?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“You think your father didn’t try that garbage with me when we were growing up? You think just because your love life’s a mess, everyone else’s has to be too?”

“Yes, ma’am. I mean—no, ma’am. I do not.”

“Pull it together, kid. You’re better than this. You were a sweet little boy who made me the cutest Valentine’s Day card. When you were eight, you remember?”

Billy covers his face and mumbles, “Yes, ma’am, I sure do.”

“You remember what it said?”

He shakes his head.

Nolan is laughing into his leather jacket in a corner.

“You tell me what it said. I know you remember.”

“It said, ‘Hi Aunt Mamie. U R pretty and I hope I get to marry a lady like U when I grow up.’”

“That’s exactly right. You think you’re grown up enough to handle a lady like me yet?”

“I guess so.”

“That’s right, you are. And it’s about damn time too. Stop messing around and find yourself someone like me. And leave my boy alone. You

hear me?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“All right. You’re a good kid. Act like one. Now get outta here.”

“Thank you.” Billy exhales and stumbles back to the kitchen like he’s leaving a boxing ring after being knocked down in round one.

“Nolan Seamus Cassidy. You there?”

Nolan saunters over. “Aye, I’m here. Lovely to hear your voice, Mary-Margaret. Howya?”

“Don’t try to brogue me, Cassidy. I will not fall for it. You behave yourself when you’re a guest in my son’s home.”

“Right.”

“You think I don’t know what’s going on with you? Your ma and I email every week. I know you’re hurting—don’t try to drag my boy down with you.”

Now my brain hurts. This makes no sense to me. “Wait—why are you hurting?”

Nolan makes a face and shakes his head at me like my ma doesn’t know what she’s talking about. “Don’t you shake your head at me, young man. I know about the girl you met who suddenly stopped talking to you.”

“She’s just busy with work and travel,” Nolan explains to all of us.

“Uh-huh. You want to lie to your family and drown your sorrows, you do it on your own time, in your own place. Eddie’s there for Birdie, not for you to project your troubles onto, and he’s definitely not there for you to corrupt and destroy his beautiful, healthy young liver.”

“I swear I wasn’t projectin’ my troubles onto him.”

“He wasn’t, Ma. I don’t think.”

“*Irregardless!* You are older than him, Nolan Cassidy. You should be taking better care of him.”

“Agreed.”

“You want your girl back—you go fight for her. Leave Eddie alone to fight for his. And Billy...”

“Yes, ma’am?”

“You’re gonna get your shit together too, right?”

“Absolutely, Mrs. C. You got it.”

“All right, I love you guys. All of you.”

“Love you, Ma.”

“Nolan—you make sure my boy eats something.”

“On it.”

“You boys better leave Declan’s apartment the way you found it!”

“Thanks for calling, Ma. Bye now.”

“Good-bye, my sweet angel. Text me when you—”

I hung up on her. Shit. I did not mean to do that.

I immediately text her to tell her I didn’t mean to hang up on her and that I will let her know when I’m with Birdie.

Billy is now trying to figure out how to use Declan’s coffeemaker.

Nolan carefully puts the bottle of whiskey back in its cupboard, on the top shelf.

“What’s going on with you and your woman?” I ask Nolan.

He blows air through his lips and waves off the question. “She’s just givin’ me space. You know how women are.”

“Yeah. They’re the opposite of that. You got dumped, didn’t you?” Billy says, giving up on the coffeemaker.

“If I did, she neglected to mention it.”

“Yikes. She ghosted you?”

He combs his fingers through his hair and opens up the refrigerator, leaning into it. “Seems that way, yeah... Should we order in?” He grabs a bottle of Italian sparkling water and hands it to me.

“Does she know you love her?” Never in a million years did I expect to have this conversation with Nolan Cassidy.

“Well, I’m here, ain’t I? Why else would I be in America if I didn’t?”

“Dude. You need to tell her.”

“I will, yeah,” he says sarcastically. “Pizza, then?” He walks away, and I swear I can see his lower lip quivering.

“I’ll order it.”

“Order coffee too, will ya? This fucking machine is broken, I think.”

They both pick up the tumblers from the living room and bring them to the sink, where Nolan washes them.

My ma’s right. They’re good guys. But I still want them out of here so I can be alone with my thoughts of Birdie and what she’s going to do to my whatever until I whatever.

Whatever it is, I am beyond ready for it.





---

BIRDIE

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

## THE ONE WITH THE HOT, HOT SNOWY STREET SEX?



I'm here. I'm here I'm here I'm here I'm here I'm here. I am in Penn Station. It doesn't look or smell very pretty, but Eddie Cannavale texted to say that he is in the building, and I don't care about anything else in the world right now. I don't care that I've had maybe five total hours of sleep in the past two days. I don't care that a sweet little boy projectile vomited three feet away from me last night. I don't care that I probably stepped in pee just now. I don't care about that old man with no teeth who's yelling at me about the hot dog that he lost here ten years ago. I definitely don't care about the TEDx Talk that I'll be missing later this morning.

All I care about is telling Eddie that I love him—to his stupidly handsome face—and then engulfing him with my vulva.

When I step off the escalator, I look around for the stairs near the 7th Avenue exit, because that's where he said I'd find him waiting for me. My heart is beating so fast, I don't even feel tired anymore. When we were just friends, there were stretches of time when he'd be shooting in Vancouver and we wouldn't see each other for a few weeks between his visits back home to LA. We'd always keep in touch and I still hung out with him more often than anyone else because—well, I'd almost always rather stay home than go out with anyone besides him. It was always fun to see him again and maybe that's what kept the spark alive in our friendship over the past couple of years.

It has only been two days since I last saw Eddie, but I have never missed anyone so much. He's the same person, but I know more of him now, so I missed more of him, I guess. And I'm not just talking about his penis or his abs or his butt or his hands or his mouth. I'm talking about his heart and his

soul and his real feelings. And his tongue.

And there he is. All of him. My best friend. My boyfriend. The best-looking guy in Penn Station, even under his baseball cap. He's holding a bouquet of red roses and blue violets and standing there smiling at me because I'm his valentine.

I run over, drop my bags when I'm in front of him and jump up and down. "I love you! I love you! I love you!" and then I throw my arms around him. I am fully aware that I'm about as sexy as Will Ferrell in *Elf* right now, but fuck it. I do love him. I love Eddie Cannavale even more than I love Santa and Benedict Cumberbatch. There. I said it.

"I love you too," he says into my ear. "A lot."

I can feel the flowers tickling the back of my head as I pull back to kiss him on the lips. "I love you, I love you, I love you," I tell him in between each kiss. He tastes like toothpaste and testosterone, with just a hint of whiskey and pizza, and it all makes me even hungrier for him.

There are about five inches of polyfill and fleece padding between us, but I can feel his body heat and his muscles and his semi under all of it, I swear.

I'm not suggesting that our separation or what I've been through on that train is anywhere near like what the American soldiers and their lovers experienced, but I keep thinking about those black and white pictures of those couples kissing outside Penn Station. I used to wonder what it would be like to reunite with someone you loved that much, and now I know.

"Where's Rupert?" he asks almost cautiously.

"Lord Knob Head of Tosserville decided to get off in Albany and hired a car to drive him the rest of the way. He offered me a ride, but I declined." I try to squeeze him even harder. "You're the only one who'll be giving me a ride from now on."

"You got that right, Luv."

"However, he does still want to interview me for his podcast."

"As he should. You're brilliant."

"That casting director was on the train too."

"I actually saw her bolting out of here right ahead of you."

"Did she see you?"

"Nah. I'm not ready to think about that meeting yet."

"Okay." I inhale his neck, in the way that I have wanted to before but never dared attempt. He smells like snowy beach sex and it doesn't make me angry at all.

We still haven't let go of each other.

"I'm so tired, but I'm so happy to finally be here with you. I want to do everything. I want to see everything! Let's walk to the hotel from here."

"Are you sure? It's like twelve blocks away and it's really cold out. I took an Uber from Declan's."

"I know, but I want to see as much of the city as I can!"

"It's still kind of dark out and it's really cold and there's a lot of snow on the ground, but sure." He finally lets go of me, hands me the bouquet of flowers, and picks up my suitcase and weekender bag.

I clutch the bouquet to my chest. "Thank you so much for the flowers!" I close my eyes to smell the roses, and I think I may have fallen asleep for a few seconds. As soon as I open my eyes again, I blurt out, "Let's have sex somewhere!"

"Okay."

"Like somewhere discreet, on the way to the hotel, I mean."

"Yes. I'm on board with this."

"Or maybe I should shower first? I probably smell like flop sweat."

"No, you smell like you."

"Oh."

"I mean, in a good way. Not sweaty."

"Okay. So, yes to sex on the way if we can find like, a corner to duck into or something?"

"Yes to sex with you whenever, wherever. We might get mugged, but it'll be worth it."

I can tell he doesn't really think I want to have sex on the way to the hotel, or that I would if we could, but I do. I'll show him. I don't want to get arrested or anything, but I mean, we're twenty-six years old and this is New York. People probably find discreet public places to have sex in all the time here.

I get up on my tiptoes to kiss his cheek and then give the bouquet of flowers and a twenty-dollar bill to a beautiful homeless woman who's curled up on the floor by the storefront nearby. Now both of my hands will be free to have hot, hot snowy street sex with Eddie.

"Did you get any sleep last night?"

He shakes his head, yawning. "I was too excited to see you."

I take my weekender bag from him, and we hold hands. People pass by us, staring down at their phones, completely unaware that they are in the

presence of two people who used to be friends and are now madly in love with each other. It seems incredible to me that they could miss this, because it feels like I'm shouting about it from every one of my cells. *I'm in love with Eddie Cannavale and he's in love with me too and we're about to have the kind of reunion sex the likes of which New York City has never seen!*

Or maybe we should take a nap first, I don't know.

The cold air simultaneously slaps and bites me in the face when we step outside. There is about half a foot of new-fallen snow. The sun is just starting to rise, but it is still fairly dark out.

"I love it. I love it here."

"Already?" He looks up and pulls me to the left. "This way."

"You know how to get there without looking up directions on your phone?"

He nods toward our right. "We head over to the Empire State Building and then go up Fifth Avenue."

I gasp when I spot the Empire State Building. "Wow! That's it, right there?"

"That's it."

"Wow, it's just like—right there!"

"Yup. You chose that hotel because it's close to the library, didn't you?"

"Yes sir, I did!"

"Well, I got us tickets to an after-hours party there tomorrow night. At the library. A Valentine's Day party. If you want to go to that."

I stop in my tracks and yank him back so I can kiss him again. "I just had an orgasm, and I'm not even kidding."

"I believe you. The thought of being in a library with me is incredibly sexy."

"Last month you made fun of me for wanting to go to the library here."

"I know. I'm still gonna make fun of you when we're there. I just want to be there with you."

"I love you."

"I love you too."

"It's so fucking cold I can't feel my feet. Whose idea was it to walk to the hotel anyway?"

We cross the street, almost slipping, holding each other up. We are stumbling through Manhattan, hand-in-hand, laughing through chattering teeth. It's kind of surreal. I have this vision, of looking down at us from up

above, like we're in a movie. Or maybe I'm slowly freezing to death and having an out-of-body experience.

Either way, we look happy.

When we're across the street from a Sephora, I look up at the Empire State Building, which is just a block away.

"Wow."

The top of the building is all lit up with red lights, and it takes my breath away.

And it also takes my balance away.

I start to fall forward, and with his Superman reflexes, Eddie senses it, immediately turning to catch me. But he falls backwards into the snow and I land on top of him. It all happens in slow motion, as these things often do. The snow and thick coats cushion our fall, and we both laugh while asking if the other is okay.

His baseball cap falls to the ground, along with our bags, and his arms slip around my waist, trying to hold me in place. I can't stop laughing, and I'm just kind of bouncing and sliding around on top of him.

Well, I *did* want to roll around on him like a baby seal... "I just had another orgasm. Does what we're doing count as sex?"

"I'm not exactly proud of my performance, but sure. Let's say it was sex and get a fucking cab."

"This is some hot, hot, snowy street sex if you ask me."

"Legendary."

I try to stabilize myself so I can plant a kiss on his lips and then roll off him and help him up. We dust snow off ourselves and each other. There's no one else around to either ignore us or ask us if we're okay, so we just pick everything up and then trudge up to Sixth Avenue to get a cab to the hotel.

As soon as we're in the hotel elevator alone together, I am so eager to get naked, I frantically start trying to unzip my coat, but the zipper's stuck. I attempt to pull it off over my head and get lost in the dark puffiness of it, and now strands of my hair are hair stuck in the zipper. So that's wonderful.

I can hear Eddie laughing, which is not cool.

I've managed to remove my arms from the sleeves, so I twist around, trying to slap him with them. Within seconds, he has pulled the coat up over my head, but I warn him that my hair is caught now.

The elevator dings, the doors slide open, and Eddie carries all of the bags, while laughing, and I hold my puffy coat up over my head like the world's worst headdress. "Are you turned on right now?"

"More than words can say." He has to stop walking so he can laugh even harder.

Ten minutes later, we're in the room, at the edge of the king-size bed, and he has gently freed my frizzy locks from their captor. As soon as he has, I push him down, climb on top of him, and try to unzip his coat, but the stupid zipper gets stuck on his sweater.

"What the fuck, coat?!"

Eddie is laughing harder than ever now, the silent kind that's giving his abs a workout, and he is completely useless to me as I try to wrestle his coat and sweater up off over his head.

By the time the whole ordeal is over, I actually *am* covered in flop sweat and so exhausted I don't even remember how sex works. Something goes in something, there's movement involved, and that just sounds like more trouble than it's worth.

I toss our coats to the floor, grab two pillows for us and stretch out beside him, sighing. "Short nap then sex?"

He grunts quietly, but his eyes are already closed.

We're together, and that's all that matters.

We wordlessly settle into a spooning position. He nuzzles the back of my neck. I swear I have another little orgasm before drifting off to sleep.





---

EDDIE

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

## THE ONE BEFORE THE ONE WITH THE VALENTINES



I remember when I was sixteen, going to school on Valentine's Day and getting candy grams from twenty-seven different girls. I had a crush on a really hot senior, so I gave all twenty-seven heart-shaped lollipops to her at lunch. She then thanked me by giving me a blow job, under a blanket, in the back seat of her Honda Civic. We both blew off the school dance that night and went to the seven-thirty showing of *The Wolfman* because that chick movie *Valentine's Day* was sold out, and she gave me a hand job in the back row of the theater.

I thought that was a great Valentine's Day.

But it was a steaming pile of horse shit compared to this one because I woke up with Birdie Beckett in my arms. I love her a lot when she's awake, but I really love to watch her sleep. In a non-creepy, appreciative way. I'm pretty sure she dreams about rapping Degas ballerinas, Egon Spengler, and me. I'm very sure that that brain of hers will never stop thrilling and delighting and confounding me.

We spent most of yesterday in this hotel room, and neither one of us has any regrets about it. All of New York is out there waiting for us, but there was so much of *each other* that we needed to explore once we woke up from our five-hour nap. This hotel is library-themed, and I couldn't have designed a more perfect room for her if I tried. I fully intend to take her to Central Park and The Met museum later this morning, after ordering room service. But first, I'm going to let Birdie do this thing that she seems really intent on doing.

It involves her mouth and her hands and my cock, and I am all for it.

She treats my body the way she has always treated the rest of me—with

studious attention to detail, a keen understanding of my sensitivities and needs, affection, and an enjoyment of certain aspects of me that many women don't pay enough attention to.

The way she slides one soft hand up and down my shaft, along with her mouth, while cupping my balls, for instance.

“Fuck. Baby. That feels so good.”

She groans with pleasure, and it just about does me in.

I reach behind myself to grab on to the headboard. There's a sense of discovery in the way she does things, but she is so bold, and it turns me on like nothing else ever has. She wants to make me feel good, like the best kind of friend and lover.

“Birdie...” It pains me to say this, but... “Baby, you need to stop. I want to fuck you and I need to do it now.”

She sucks and licks me one more time before kissing her way up my abdomen, my chest. She kisses along my jaw and nibbles on my ear lobe, and then she straddles me, adjusts herself so my erection is nestled between her ass cheeks, wiggles around, and goddammit. “You are the hottest woman I've ever been with, and you need to know that.”

She laughs quietly, smirking. She doesn't believe me, and it's killing me.

I take her face in my hands. Her mane of wavy hair hangs loose around her. She looks wild and demure at the same time, and I am mad for her. “You are. Your hair. This hair.” I comb my fingers through it, massage her scalp, and then tug on the strands. “Your beautiful crazy hair.” I kiss her lips. “This beautiful puffy mouth and all the things you say with it.” I stroke her dark eyebrows with my thumbs. “These beautiful blue eyes and the way you see through me.” I kiss her neck, from her shoulder up to that spot behind her ears, until her head tilts back and she sighs. “This beautiful long neck.” I catch her earlobe between my teeth. “The way you actually listen to what I say.” And then my tongue finds her breasts, and I forget to tell her how beautiful they are with words, but she gets my meaning.

I can feel exactly how much she gets it. She sits up, the covers fall from her shoulders. I glide one of my hands from her hip, up the side of her, to her face. She tilts her head and takes my thumb into her mouth, sucking on it. With a kind of gentle passion and urgency that makes me want to take care of her and fuck her senseless for the rest of my life.

That's how it is with us. This easy, comfortable camaraderie. A desire to do what's right for both of us—whatever it takes for us to be together—

underscored with a restrained yearning. And then all of a sudden, an undeniable ache and longing, followed by an intense need to just fucking do it already.

I flip her onto her back. Her legs bend and spread apart, feet flat on the mattress. She is breathing heavily, and she is hungry for me. “This right here—the way your body opens up for me.” I position myself at her entrance, skin-to-skin, because that’s how we do it now. “That’s beautiful, and it’s so hot.”

She grabs my face, pulls herself up to kiss me, and then drops back down. “I get it, I’m hot. I’m hot and I’m so wet for you—just fuck me already.”

“You got it.” I press inside her. Slowly at first and then hard, and the way she squeezes her eyes shut and sucks in her breath when she feels the hot sting of my hard cock entering her is so sexy. I want to hear it again, so I do it again. Her back arches. She reaches for my shoulders, wraps her legs around mine, takes me in deeper. “I love you.” There’s nothing else I need to say to her right now and I don’t have to hold those words back anymore.

“I love you.” She says it like it feels so good and hurts just a little, and that’s about right.

I can fuck her slow and steady or I can fuck her hard and fast, and she’ll still know that I love her.

So, I do both.

I make love to Birdie Beckett, slow and steady.

And then I fuck her hard and fast like our lives depend on it.

I fuck her until we’re both slick with sweat and hoarse from gasping and groaning and screaming. I fuck her until she’s come apart beneath me, on top of me, in front of me. And then I come inside her when she begs me to, because it’s what we both want and need and because I have to give everything to her, in every way possible.

I don’t know how else to do it anymore.

There’s the flash of awareness, the darkness and the nothingness, and then there’s just Birdie, calling me home.

As much as I love the sex, I think it’s the *after* part that I used to wonder about with her. With other women, I always wanted to leave as soon as the sex was over. But with Birdie, I want to stay. It’s as simple as that.

She faces me. Our heads share a pillow. I kiss her forehead, stroke her

hair. She traces circles around my pecs with her fingertip, staring at my chest.

“So, I went ahead and booked us first-class tickets back to LA. On a plane. Will you be okay with that?”

“I think I’ll be okay with it if I’m with you...” She buries her face in my chest.

*Goddammit, I don’t know if my heart can take much more of this.*

“I’m not afraid of much of anything anymore, to be honest. Maybe because of the orgasms you gave me?” She looks up at me, grinning.

“Yes. You can go ahead and make ‘Because of the orgasms Eddie gave me’ the standard reason for all the positive things in your life, going forward.”

She holds her index finger up in declaration. “This steak is perfect and delicious—because of the orgasms Eddie gave me.”

“Hey, it says here your Amazon package will be delivered a day early—because of the orgasms I gave you.”

“Every single Amtrak train is arriving on time today, for the first time in history—because of the orgasms you gave me.”

“I don’t even feel like watching *Sherlock* ever again because of the orgasms Eddie gave me.”

“Okay, you need to get over yourself, because nothing will ever make me stop watching *Sherlock*.”

“Fair enough.” I kiss the top of her head. “Happy Valentine’s Day, my love.” Five words I never imagined I’d hear myself saying unless someone else wrote them and I was paid to say them.

“Happy Valentine’s Day... Did you know that the first known Valentine card was sent by Charles, Duke of Orleans, to his wife? His second wife. He wrote her a poem when he was being held prisoner in the Tower of London. During the Battle of Agincourt in 1415. He used the term Valentine, to refer to his wife.”

“I did not know that.” I kiss her forehead again because I love that brain behind it.

“Mmm. It’s in the manuscript collection at the British Library.”

“Well then, I must take you there. We’ll have to fly to London, though. Gonna have to insist on that.”

“Okay.”

“I made you a bunch of Valentines. They’re in my coat pockets. Wanna see?”

“I made you some too. They’re in my bag.”

“Should we get out of bed and get them?”

She nuzzles up against me, and I pull the covers up over our shoulders.

“Eventually.”

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)



---

\* THE ONE WITH THE VALENTINES \*



***Roses are red,  
Violets are blue.  
Your butt is fantastic,  
And your abs are nice too.***

-- Birdie

***Roses are red,  
Violets are blue.  
Your nipples are like rosebuds,  
And now that's all I can think about.***

-- Eddie

***R4 is red,  
R2 is blue,  
I am the Force  
And I be with you.***



-- Birdie

***Baby, Yoda one for me.***

-- Eddie

***Roses are red,  
Violets are blue,  
Your Penis Station is my first stop  
And the last stop too.***

-- Birdie

***Roses are red,  
Violets are blue,  
My love life is finally on track,  
Now that I'm railing you.***

-- Eddie

***Ladies and gentlemen, we'll be arriving at our destination late, because  
Eddie Cannavale's caboose is smokin'.***

-- Birdie

***Baby, I missed you even more than I missed that train in Chicago.***

-- Eddie

***You must be the Hogwarts Express, because when I ride you, I'm transported to a magical place.***

-- Birdie

***You must be a Dementor, because it feels like I'm dying a little every time you kiss me.***

-- Eddie

***My vagina is a Horcrux and you're the only one who can destroy it.***

-- Birdie

***I was going to give you a box of chocolates for Valentine's Day, but you already have a sweet box.***

-- Eddie

*Archivists do it with gloves on, but I'm taking mine off for you.*

-- Birdie

*If you were an art history book, I'd need a magnifying glass to read you because your print would be fine.*

-- Eddie

*I'm going to catalog you under "Boyfriend."*

-- Birdie

*You have a degree in Library Sciences? Baby, I'm gonna check you out and never return you.*

-- Eddie

*Roses are red,  
Violets are blue,  
P.S. I finished reading Infinite Jest  
What the actual fuck?!*

-- Eddie

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

## CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

---

**DECLAN:** You crazy kids make it home okay?

**EDDIE:** If by “kids” you mean two high-functioning twenty-six-year-old adults and by “crazy” you mean “crazy in-love” and by “okay” you mean “barfed only once on the plane” and “barfed twice at LAX because she drank so much on the plane,” then yes. We made it home okay.

Although, we are currently in two separate apartments, so she might still be barfing and not telling me.

**BIRDIE:** I am not barfing! Declan, I would just like to point out that your brother held my hand during the entire plane ride, from taxiing to landing. Even when he was holding the barf bag for me.

**DECLAN:** That doesn’t sound like him.

**EDDIE:** And also while I did something under a strategically placed blanket. To help her relax.

**DECLAN:** That’s more like it.

**MADDIE:** Ahhh, the ol’ Cannavale “let me help you relax” move. I’m familiar with that one.

**MADDIE:** Absolutely loved meeting you, Birdie!

**BIRDIE:** I want to be you when I grow up, Maddie! <heart eyes emoji>

**MADDIE:** I want to come to LA so you can be my guide at the museums there too! I loved experiencing The Met and MOMA with you.

**BIRDIE:** Yes! I can give you a special VIP tour of the archives at the Getty! I know exactly where I can take you for lunch after! I’m so excited!

**MADDIE:** I’ll look at the calendar and see what works!

**DECLAN:** Am I invited on this trip to LA, or is this a girl thing? It feels

like a girl thing.

**EDDIE:** I definitely feel left out of this conversation... Baseball. Beer. Boobs.

**DECLAN:** Fiduciary relationship. Annual reports. Indemnification.

**MADDIE:** I'll start another text convo with you, Birdie. <winking face emoji>

**BIRDIE:** Just sent you a text, Maddie! <winking face emoji>

**EDDIE:** Let's just bump Declan off this one.

**DECLAN:** That would be stupid because I'm hilarious.

**EDDIE:** Way to clear a room, bro.

**DECLAN:** I'll just keep writing awesome texts until you people realize how awesome I am.

**EDDIE:** Seriously, though. How great is my girlfriend?

**DECLAN:** She's amazing. I'm so glad you finally took my ducking advice.

**EDDIE:** You never actually gave me any ducking advice about her, but thanks.

**DECLAN:** It was implied.

**EDDIE:** Right. Like your awesomeness.

**DECLAN:** Precisely. If you would like direct advice, you must ask for it directly. And you might get charged for billable hours.

**EDDIE:** I'm thinking it feels weird not being in the same apartment as Birdie now. Is it too soon to tell her we should move in together?

**DECLAN:** Yes.

**BIRDIE:** No! Let's discuss!

**MADDIE:** You're asking for advice from the man who asked his assistant to be his fake girlfriend?

**DECLAN:** All right, that's it. I'm charging all of you for billable hours starting ten minutes ago.

<Maddie left the conversation>

<Eddie left the conversation>

**BIRDIE:** I'm still here, Declan. But I don't think it's too soon for Eddie and me to discuss moving in together. <smiling face emoji> Although, I will be making a list of guidelines that I do not expect him to adhere to.

**DECLAN:** Birdie, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

**BIRDIE:** Well, I am awfully good at being friends with Cannavale boys...

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)





---

RITA

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

THE ONE WITH THE VOICEMAIL FROM RITA

***March 5th, 10:35 a.m.***

“Eddie Cannavale! It’s your favorite agent, Rita Baskin. Good news, sweetie. I just got word from Debra Silver.

You got the part.

Everyone over there was blown away by your take on the character and the reading.

Blown. Away.

You did it.

We did it!

Are you glad I put you up for this, or what? I’m a genius. Go on, you can say it.

They’ll have the deal memo to me tomorrow and we’ll get you a contract soon.

Pre-production starts early June in LA right after you wrap *End Zone* in Vancouver, so it’s all good.

Welcome to the Big Time, kid.

’Kay, I gotta jump to the other line. Talk later. Bye.”

## EPILOGUE ONE – EDDIE

*June 7th, 10:45 a.m.*

“Hey babe. We just finished with the script read-through, so I should be able to meet you for lunch. It went incredibly well—I can’t even believe I get to work with these people. And it’s all because of you.

Oh, and one of my costars would like to speak to you. Hang on...”

“Hello, darling... Oh, it’s an answerphone message? Yes, hello, Birdie Beckett. This is Benedict Cumberbatch. I hear you’re a fan, and I just want to say that the exquisite taste you display in English actors clearly does not extend to your taste in boyfriends. I mean, how many abs does this guy have, like six? Come on. You can do better. He does have a fantastic butt. However, I will tell you that my hands are significantly larger than his. Just saying.

Seriously, it’s a great honor to be working with Sir Edward McFancyFace. Bit of a diva, but I think we can all learn a lot from him—especially Hiddleston and Cavill. They had to leave right after the reading, but I’m quite sure you’ll be meeting them soon.”

(muffled in background) “No you won’t, babe!”

“Right, then. I look forward to becoming great friends with you...”

The name is Sherlock Holmes, and the address is 221B Baker Street... Your boyfriend wants to speak with you again.”

“Seriously? You still consider Cumberbatch to be a sex word after that nonsense? See you at lunch. Love you, bye.”

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

## EPILOGUE TWO - PIPER

*February 15th*

*Dear Diary,*

*Well, it's official. All of the Cannavale brothers are married now. It has been just over three years since the Cannavales became a part of my life, but I can no longer legally marry Eddie, LOL, because he is legally married to Birdie. I'm not even jealous of her, because they're basically the cutest couple ever. (Insert GIF of Rachel from Friends saying, "I'm so happy and not at all jealous.")*

*I also was not at all jealous when I heard about how Eddie had proposed to Birdie. Apparently, it happened the night after #Maclan's wedding. January first. At that point, Eddie's movie had come out and there was tons of Oscar buzz. Not for Eddie specifically—for the film in general—although he had gotten so much great press because of his performance and he had already booked two other great movie roles soon after he shot that one. Because End Zone was canceled. My friends and I were super bummed about that, and we even signed a petition to The CW to keep it on the air. But it was a good thing for Eddie, because that meant he was free to be in movies all year long, and it was also a good thing for Birdie because it meant that Eddie's perfect Cannavale butt wasn't up in Canada for months and months.*

*Anyhoo—the proposal. It was a beautiful winter's night in New York. The stars shone bright and the moonlight reflected upon the newly fallen snow. Well, everyone knows the story of how Eddie and Birdie made the journey*

from friends to lovers on the train from LA to Chicago, and then Eddie missed the train from Chicago to New York. So, when they were still in New York after #Maclan's wedding, Eddie rented out a vintage train car in the New York Transit Museum and had a private dinner served for him and Birdie there, as well as a four-piece classical music band. Because he's a classy guy!

After dessert, the servers and the band left the two lovebirds alone, and Eddie got down on one knee before his unwitting girlfriend. He told Birdie that his only goal for that month was to become her fiancé, and the number one goal of the rest of his life was to be her husband. She covered her mouth and got all teary-eyed. She said yes, of course! And she allowed him to place the beautiful vintage princess cut diamond ring on her finger. Then she pulled out a folded-up piece of paper that she had kept tucked inside of her bra and handed it to him. Eddie unfolded the paper and saw that it was Birdie's list of New Year's resolutions. Number one on the list was, "Ensnare Eddie Cannavale into becoming my fiancé."

And that just says it all, I think. They're both different in a lot of ways, but they both want the same things for themselves and for each other. So it works!

Would you believe that Eddie's bachelor party was super mellow—because even his cousins from Ireland and Boston have chilled out. Well, you shouldn't believe it because *JUST KIDDING!* I mean, they are all pretty chill now, but they still partied pretty hard. I heard they all got on stage at a Backstreet Boys concert. Someone ran down Sunset Boulevard naked. Declan tried to adopt all of the cats at a cat café and cried when Aunt Maddie talked him out of it over the phone—because how were they supposed to get twenty cats back to New York to live in their penthouse?! Someone woke up under the Hollywood Sign. But they all made it to the wedding on time, looking camera-ready!

The wedding was perfect. One for the history books, as Birdie would probably say! I mean, it's only the second one I've ever been to, but it was just as nice as Maddie and Declan's. I even got my own invitation! I think Declan and Maddie asked Eddie to invite me so I could look after the baby when they got up to dance, but that's okay! I love Ciara—and being around all that Hollywood actor eye candy did not suck at all! *OMG LOLOL understatement of the century!!!*

Oh yeah, by the way—I'm in Los Angeles!!! That's where the wedding

was because Birdie's family is from here. I flew out here with Maddie and Declan and Ciara, and we're staying at a hotel by the beach!

The wedding venue...drumroll please...was Union Station—that place from which they began their fated journey on the Love Train. Can you believe it??? It's a beautiful Spanish-style building in the middle of downtown. Certain people from Eddie's side of the family, in particular his nonna, may not have been thrilled that they did not have their ceremony in a Catholic church, but even Nonna was impressed by the location.

All of the decorations were rose-red and violet-blue with hints of pink and white. Birdie wore an elegant shimmering white gown with pretty pink beading and a bouquet of roses and violets. And the best part?! She wore glasses! She was the most beautiful nerd bride ever. I guess it was a surprise for Eddie, because when he saw her coming down the aisle, he laughed at first, but then he got all choked up and it was so cute. I took so many mental pictures of the way he looked at her, to keep in my heart-hug bank (which is the opposite of a spank bank).

Since they got married on February fourteenth, their vows were Valentines that they wrote to each other.

The final one that Eddie said was:

“Roses are red,  
violets are blue,  
you're the love of my life,  
and it's about ducking time I get to marry you.”

The final one that Birdie said was:

“Roses are red,  
violets are blue,  
you're my best friend and lover,  
and my ducking husband now too...”

There was not a dry eye in the train station.

During the reception, there was a video projection of their friends and family who couldn't make it to the wedding and guess what?! Benedict Cumberbatch recited Shakespeare's Sonnet 116 aka “Let me not to the marriage of true minds...” It was pretty baller. I'll have to ask him to do that for my wedding too LOLLOL. Well maybe—who knows?!

I guess Eddie Cannavale is just one of many crushes that I won't end up marrying, and that's fine. It really is! Every crush door that closes just leads you to the door that the love of your life will be waiting behind. Hopefully,

*the love of my life will be my best friend too—who also happens to have the world’s finest butt.*

*And here’s the thing... If Eddie hadn’t married Birdie and if they hadn’t invited me to their wedding, I would not have experienced the **FIRST REAL KISS OF MY LIFE!!!** No Spin the Bottle, no Truth or Dare, no Seven Minutes in Heaven. An actual spontaneous free will kind of amazing kiss. On Valentine’s Day, no less. It was like a dream come true. And as you know, Dear Diary, my dreams are pretty romantic, always awesome, and very **BUTTASTIC!!!***

*But I’m going to write about that in my extra-special super-secret diary—the one that you don’t know about, Mother! That’s right. I know you still read my journals. I’m sure I’ll tell you all about it one day when we’re sipping daiquiris by a pool, celebrating the release of the blockbuster romantic comedy that I will one day write with the screenwriting software that I had to purchase for myself with babysitting money because my parents never bought it for me.*

*I’ll just end this by saying that yesterday was the most **EPIC VALENTINE’S DAY EVER**, and I’m so happy that Eddie and Birdie’s beautiful love story got woven into the most **EPIC FUTURE LOVE STORY EVER TO BE WRITTEN...Mine!***

THE END

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)



More Very Holiday books are coming in 2022!!!



[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

## THE ONE WITH ALL THE ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*To Jen Mirabelli—all my thanks and love and ALL the Friends GIFs. Thanks for helping me with basically everything, including Commageddon.*

*Thank you so much to Chelsea George and to Royal Reads for the very stellar beta reads and feedback! <https://www.royalreads.net/>*

*Thanks to my editor, Jenny Rarden, for being consistently great.*

*I will never stop thanking all of the wonderful readers, bloggers, Bookstagrammers, Facebookers and lovely authors who have been recommending *A Very Bossy Christmas*—ever since October 2020. The word of mouth for that book has been stunning and I'm so grateful.*

*It feels like the magical creatures that are Bookstagrammers were working overtime to recommend *Bossy Christmas* and the results were nothing short of miraculous.*

*I would hug each and every one of you if I could, but I haven't showered yet today, so you're lucky I can't.*

*My love for narrators Mackenzie Cartwright and Connor Crais is real and it's their voices in my head that make everything funnier and sexier. So thanks for not being terrible, you guys, and I can't wait to hear the audiobook in February...*

*I am especially grateful to Connor Crais for being my Shakespeare consultant, and to Mackenzie for being *The Official Voice of Kayley Loring's**

*Lady Parts. Also, thank you to Dane Anderson for inspiring the Gavin character, who quickly became a favorite!*

*Cheers and ta very much to Louise Brown, for being my Britspeak consultant on this one!*

*Thanks, thanks and more thanks to Viviana Izzo for the Audiobook Lovin'.*

*Special thanks to the citizens of Kayleyville, my Facebook reader group. You are the wind beneath my wings, the cat's pajamas, and my favorite people to share pics of models, Bridgerton actors and baby animals with.*

*Thanks to Wildfire Marketing Solutions and Give Me Books for the promotional support.*

*Thanks to Benedict Cumberbatch for being such a good sport (just kidding I haven't met him...yet).*

*P.S. I have never read Infinite Jest by David Foster Wallace... How is it?*

*P.P.S. **The cover model is Sergio Carvajal.** He's so sweet and he's on Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/sergiocarvajal7/>*

[OceanofPDF.com](https://www.oceanofpdf.com)

## KEEP IN TOUCH WITH KAYLEY

You finished the book!

Hooray!

I really hope you enjoyed reading it.

If you did, please consider leaving a brief review on Amazon,  
I'd appreciate it so much.

I'D LOVE TO SEND YOU UPDATES ABOUT NEW BOOKS!  
SIGN UP FOR MY NEWSLETTER [HERE](#)

My newsletter is the most reliable way to receive emails about new releases,  
but if you are on [BOOKBUB](#), you can follow my profile for notifications on  
the day of release too. Sometimes I even recommend books.

FOLLOW ME ON [INSTAGRAM](#)

FOLLOW ME ON [FACEBOOK](#)

Hey, I finally started a private reader group!  
COME JOIN ME IN [\\_Kayleyville !](#)

FOLLOW ME ON [PINTEREST](#)

Visit my [WEBSITE](#)

EMAIL ME at: [authorkayleloring@gmail.com](mailto:authorkayleloring@gmail.com) ! I'd love to hear from you!

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

## ALSO BY KAYLEY LORING

All of my books are available in Kindle Unlimited!

A VERY BOSSY CHRISTMAS (Declan and Maddie's story) - listen to Connor Crais and Mackenzie Cartwright perform the audiobook narration!

SLEEPER (Shane and Willa's story) – listen to Teddy Hamilton and Mackenzie Cartwright perform the audiobook narration!

CHARMER (Nico and Kat) - audio is performed by Jason Clarke and Mackenzie Cartwright!

TROUBLEMAKER (Alex and Emilia)- audio is performed by Zachary Webber and Mackenzie Cartwright!

(The New York/Brooklyn standalones)

REBOUND WITH ME (available in audio)

COME BACK TO BED (available in audio)

TONIGHT YOU'RE MINE (available in audio)

THE PLUS ONES (available in audio)

THE BROOKLYN BOOK BOYFRIENDS: a collection – contains Rebound with Me, Come Back to Bed, Tonight You're Mine and The Plus Ones, plus bonus epilogues for all four novels! You can get the audiobook bundle for one Audible credit! Narrated by Teddy Hamilton and Mackenzie Cartwright

BACK FOR MORE (available in audio)

HELLO DARLING – in audio and narrated by Shane East and Mackenzie Cartwright

SEXY NERD

EVERY INCH OF YOU

The Work Less/Play More series of standalones

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)