

Two authors, an intertwined plot,
and one heck of an alluring ending
to their unexpected bestseller...

Behind the Pages

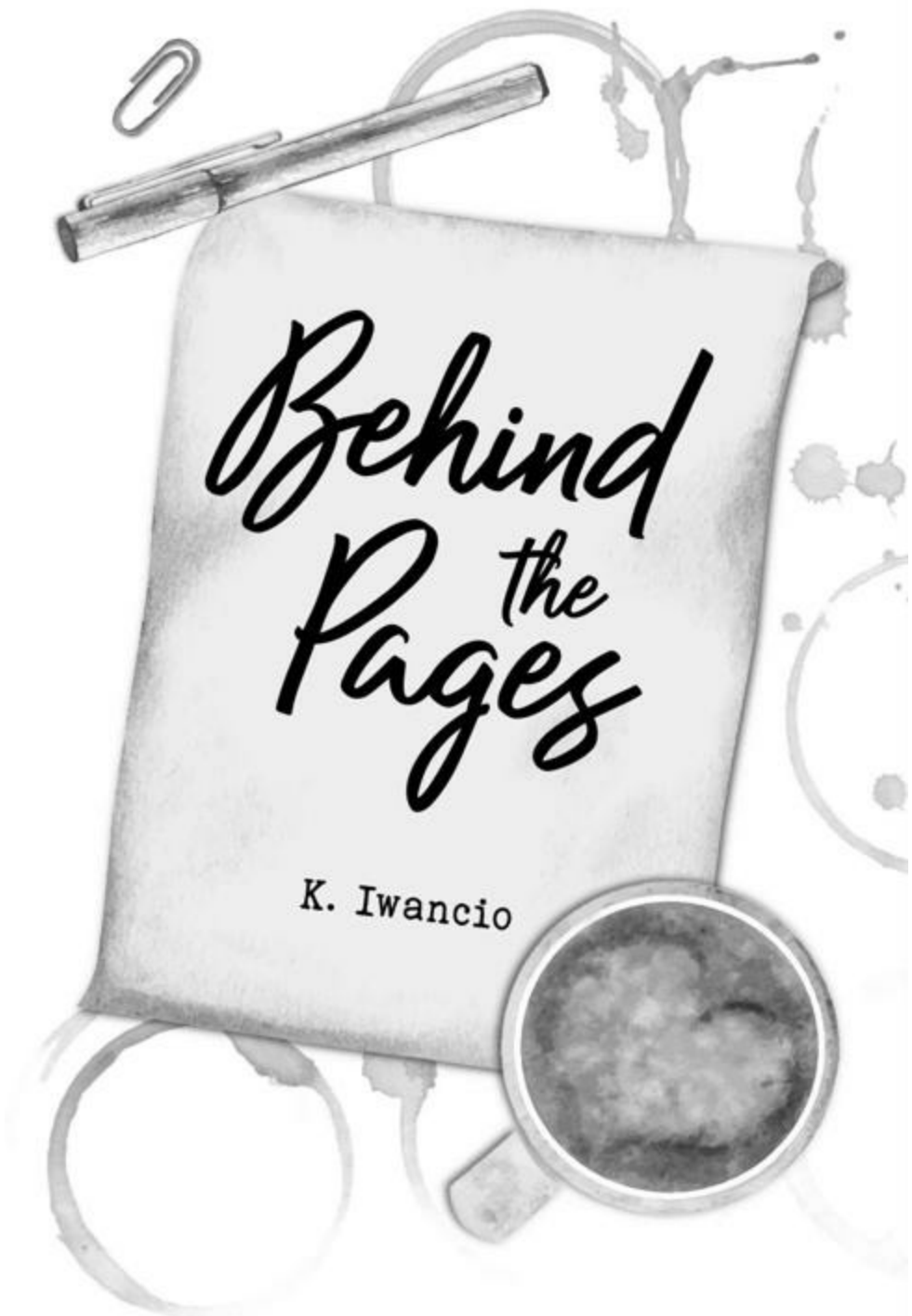
K. Iwancio

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This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, organizations, and events portrayed in this novel are either products of the author's imagination or are used factiously. References to any public figures, celebrities, and fictional characters outside my fandom are used with the utmost compliments. Behind the Pages.



Behind
the
Pages

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Enjoy the

*Behind
the
Pages*
playlist!



Dedication

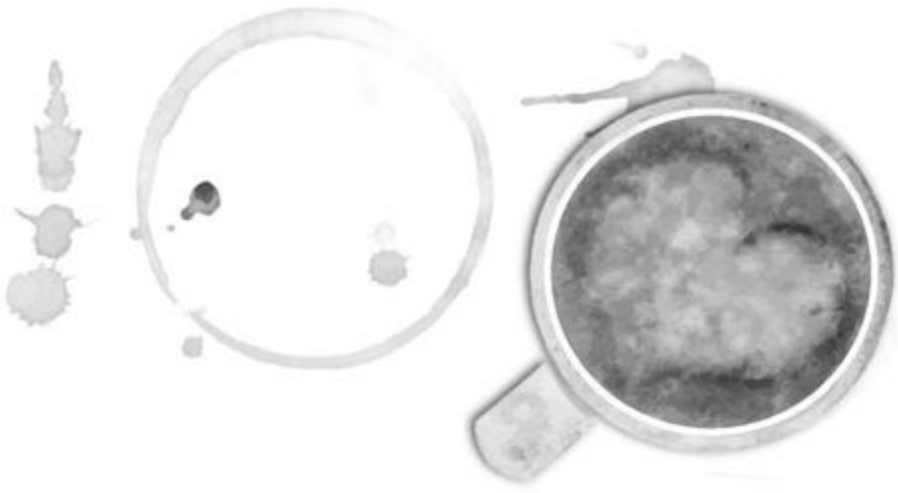
This is dedicated to the partners who allow us to explore our utmost fantasies without judgment.

TRIGGER WARNINGS:

Graphic language
Strong sexual content
Graphic use of sexual toys
Sex Bucket List
Anal play
Female ejaculation
Sexual acts in public

FUN FACTS:

"Dick" is mentioned 65 times
"Cock" is mentioned 68 times
"Fuck" is mentioned 151 times
"Fucking" is mentioned 100 times



Chapter 1

Paige

The chaos of snowflakes that whirled outside my frosty windshield was akin to the turmoil of anxiety deep in my stomach. Bad driving weather was the bane of my existence. My only two accidents were in snow and rain. But what I despised even more than paying for car damages was to put myself into a situation in which I had no idea what to expect.

Currently, I was deep into cursing out my past self as I second-guessed my last-minute panicked decision to attend my first writers' retreat. Why couldn't I have picked something tropical if it needed to be in January? Stupid manuscript deadlines.

My literary agent thought it would be a good idea to be amongst other like-minded individuals since I was in such a writing rut with my current project. I thought it sounded like one of the nine circles of hell. But I was desperate. I was determined to keep up with the deadline my publisher put in place for the final installment of my wildly popular fantasy trilogy, *The Merryweather Chronicles*. Despite the excitement for the first two books, I was still green around the gills when it came to popularity and how to deal with it. The publisher took a leap of faith with me. I didn't want to disappoint them. Or worse, lose them as my publisher.

I always knew I wanted to be a writer. Ever since first grade when we had guided writing. It was then that I got a taste of the publishing process. I had my first book (Okay, so it was hand-drawn and laminated) published at seven years old.

Ever since then, I've chased that first-grade high. Except I chickened out for almost a decade until my middle and high school English teachers read my assignments and encouraged me to keep writing. I joined all the literary clubs, published some poetry, short stories, entered contests, and won some awards. All I did in high school was read and write. I read almost every book in the fiction area of the school library before I graduated. But then the stressors of college happened and I got my first big girl job, so my writing took a backseat. Everything was fine and dandy until I was unexpectedly laid off right before Christmas one year.

I was almost at my ten-year mark with the company and looking at a

decent bonus. Not that the job was anything to write home about. It was a boring office job that paid the bills, a standard 9-to-5. Honestly, I wasn't sure how I survived that long. I guess the routine was a comfort to me. I knew where I was going and when, which played well with my anxiety. It's not like the job was difficult. For the most part, it was a mindless dribble.

Oddly enough, my being laid off lined up with National Novel Writing Month, which occurs in November every year. I was depressed, bummed, and full of excess energy. I thought it would be a good excuse, and honestly, a good distraction, until I felt mentally ready to start applying for jobs. It turned out that it was exactly the kick in the ass I needed to start writing again. I ended up writing almost 100,000 words in thirty days.

By that point, I was a manuscript machine. I spent the holidays perfecting and editing my first draft. I made the lofty goal for the new year to send my novel out to agents and see who would bite.

To distract myself from the ungodly wait, I was able to supplement my lost income and found two part-time jobs instead of one full-time one. It was all I could manage. The job market after the holidays was always slim pickings.

Over the summer months, I received half a dozen full manuscript requests. By the following November, I signed with my incredible literary agent, Faith Wild, and she then sold it to one of the bigwig publishing houses for a six-figure advance after a pretty hairy bidding war. I was fairly sure I died and went to heaven. It was a wild Cinderella story. Having that sort of turn of events for brand-new authors was one in a million.

Now if only I tried this bullshit sooner.

Fate has an odd way of getting you to your destiny in unexpected ways. Maybe I was a terrible writer in my teens and twenties. Maybe I needed all that life experience from horrible bullies and anxiety-inducing situations that had been out of my control. I hadn't always dealt with anxiety. It was a horrid beast that made itself known in high school and just never left. While anxiety ate a hole in my stomach, I sat at home to catch my breath after school and to read so many romantic fantasy books to escape my illness. Maybe that's exactly what helped make my story so beloved.

The book ended up being an international success and the publisher demanded the rest of the books in the trilogy as quickly as possible. Anyone familiar with the genre of fantasy, writing a complicated world with magic and whatnot, is no easy feat. Even if it was the second book after all the

world-building was already established. So safe to say, after all that popularity and excitement over the first book, I was stressed about the second and third ones. *Very* stressed.

It was safe to say that I quit both my jobs, but it didn't help my stress or anxiety levels to focus only on writing all of a sudden. I was stressed to the point where I could hardly sleep at night. I would spend hours staring at a blank page, willing the words to come. But they never did. I think Faith was sick and tired of me texting her at all hours of the day with ideas. Sure, she knew what sold books, but she was no professional developmental editor. She was the one who not-so-subtly emailed me a list of writers' retreats and got me into this anxiety-riddled mess in the first place.

As much as I hated the idea, I didn't want to lose her as my agent. Up to this point, I followed her every shred of advice. She hadn't steered me wrong yet. Even though I wanted her to be wrong, this one time, just so I could turn around and drive back home.

I was hesitant to shell out the money. Despite all the unexpected fame, I still wasn't quite used to the money that went with it. At least no one had seen my face and my book in the same room. Well, no one who *knew* that I wrote said books.

I wrote under the pen name, Bridget Paige. Bridget means "power, strength, exalted one" in Gaelic. Everything that I wanted to emulate with my fantasy series. Everything that I was *not* in real life. Maybe she should be my alter ego.

I liked my privacy and anonymity. I was thankful that my publisher respected that aspect of it. It might have been the reason why my first book took off so fast. Who was the enigmatic Bridget Paige? What was her background? How could she sculpt such an incredible, magical world with just words, ink, and the pages of a book?

Those said fans would be wholly disappointed if they ever met the real me. I looked nothing like most of the women on the bestseller list. I was short and slightly curvy, an overall hot mess in a fun-size candy wrapper. (I'm 83% Twix bars at any given time.) I did hire a personal trainer when my first advance check cleared so I could at least get into shape if I ever found the courage to do public appearances and book signings. Something deep down inside me secretly wanted to do them, but then the anxiety ate away at that idea like a rabid, starved version of Pac-Man.

I wasn't unfortunate looking, but I wasn't anything memorable either.

Maybe I could perk up my self-esteem with a new haircut and color one of these days. Anything beyond my drab and sad excuse for brown hair. Was it blonde or was it brown? It was more like an icky, used paint-water color.

Perhaps a new wardrobe was in order as well. Eventually. Something different than my skinny jeans, leggings, and t-shirts. I was a writer. I didn't need or want to be a supermodel or vain about my appearance. I just wanted to be comfortable. I wanted to be me.

Was it even worth going through all the effort? Did authors get a crazy fan base like celebrities? Did authors ever reach celebrity status? Stephen King was practically a recluse and people know who he is. I guess there was hope for me yet. Hope that I could be a hermit of a swamp witch and still be a bestselling author.

The welcoming lights from the mountaintop hotel were a beacon in the flurries. I let out a labored sigh of relief as I eased my SUV up the drive and under the portico. It was late and was well past the welcome mixer event. I wasn't exactly mentally up for the feat of being crammed in a room full of strangers and making strained conversation anyway, so no loss there.

Besides, after that harrowing ride through the snow mountains, I probably reeked of stress, sweat, and anxiety. A delicious cocktail of rancid nerves. I was ready for a shower, a warm bed, and to pass the hell out. Or attempt to after some nighttime painkillers. I had the darndest time falling asleep in a place that wasn't my townhouse. I was ready for a good, medicated coma.

"Welcome to the North Winds Resort and Spa. Checking in?"

I offered a curt nod, "Yeah, for the writers' retreat."

"Oh, excellent!" The receptionist was far too chipper for it being after 8 p.m. The clack of the keyboard jarred against the quiet of the lobby. "You snagged one of the last deluxe suites. Lucky girl."

I made some noncommittal noise as I handed over my credit card and ID. Those suites were the *only* ones left for the retreat. I despised waiting until the last minute for anything because of shit like this. At least I earned airline miles on this trip. Small, adulating victories, am I right?

"What time does breakfast run in the morning?" *Priorities after all.*

"From 6 to 10 am. But since you're with the retreat you'll have your breakfast in ballroom number three." A paper was pushed across the granite check-in counter. "Here's your itinerary for the weekend. There are a lot of lovely events for you all!"

“Excuse me, but what are the hours for the gym? They aren’t posted anywhere.” The voice magically appeared to my left and my heart alerted my brain to dive head-first into fight-or-flight mode. Great, more adrenaline-filled stank for the collection.

The eye full I got only added to the already awkward state of my body. A set of toned forearms slid into my peripheral vision. He was uncomfortably close. Did he have any comprehension of personal space?

“Oh! Yes of course.” A bright pink bloomed across the receptionist’s cheeks as she smiled shyly with a flutter of her eyelashes. “It’s uh...open, um...all the time. Just use your room keycard.” The dude asked an innocent question. It wasn’t like he outright flirted with her. But she leaned forward, ready to hang on to his every word.

“Great. Thanks.”

He slid away from the counter. With amusement I watched the receptionist’s face fall. Wasn’t it against some sort of code of conduct to fraternize with guests? Although I guess a girl could dream. Not that I had any experience with that sort of thing. The only men I fraternized with were online role-play partners and fictional ones in books and movies. The only way I knew how to flirt was through a computer screen.

I chanced a glance up at him as he stepped away. He was almost a foot taller than me, lean body, perfectly quaffed hair, and...*gorgeous*. Okay, now I understood what the fuss with the receptionist was all about. He was way too pretty for me to even try. He looked like he spent more money on beauty products than I had spent on everything in my entire life. I bet his girlfriend was a model.

The moment his eyes met mine, I realized I’d been unabashedly staring for far too long. Most of the time I couldn’t help it. I was a writer. Internal monologues about dissecting peoples’ character was what I did. It helped me with character development during my projects. To me it was normal. To others, it probably was admittedly creepy.

Those eyes gave me a slow once-over and I felt a shiver run up my spine. A quirk of amusement upturned the corner of his mouth. Great, I probably look like the epitome of a swamp witch with my sheepskin boots, fleece leggings, and oversized sweatshirt. My hair was a mess up in a bun. Come to think of it, I don’t remember brushing my hair after I rolled out of bed this morning.

At least I was fodder for his amusement. He was probably just trying to

be polite and not laugh.

“Miss? Miss?” *Shit, right.* I was checking in before I was so hotly interrupted. “Here’s your room key. You’re in suite 1225.”

“Thanks.”

Well, that was enough human interaction for one day. Time for a hot shower, cozy pajamas, and to drum up enough courage to get through this agonizing disaster of a weekend and hopefully get somewhere with my novel.



Chapter 2

Penn

These writer retreats were the one place I could be myself. I relished the thought that I could leave my CEO hat at my penthouse and come to a nondescript place to be with like-minded individuals. People who, for the most part, had no idea who I was. People who didn't follow the tabloids or the latest gossip. The people at these retreats were introverted and quiet. Ones who avoided most real-life drama and instead, put it in their books.

Here I didn't have to feel awkward about what I was passionate about. I could be myself. I could delve into what made my heart race in a room with others who felt the same way. No board meetings, no emails, no corporate bullshit. A refreshing change of pace doing something I loved to do.

I found my love for writing in college when I had an English professor who I initially butted heads with. What I thought was a vendetta against me was instead a man who saw my potential that was being squandered in textbooks of numbers and statistics. I still remember the sound of his laughter when I said I was a business major. He pushed me to my creative limits and challenged me more than any teacher ever had.

In college, I was without my father's shadow for the first time. I did what I wanted, and took classes in what I was interested in. Despite not being able to change my major without my father finding out, I minored in professional writing to hide what I was actually doing at school. When my father found out at graduation, I explained it as a clever way to write speeches, emails, and press releases, among other things. The tenseness in his shoulders visibly relaxed and I felt like I got away with murder.

But instead of being a writer full-time, I was the newest CEO of Pennington Tech. It was the cyber security company my father started in the basement of our home decades ago. A job that my father had been training me for since his company hit the stock exchange.

I was in high school at the time. While success wasn't overnight, it was quicker than my father anticipated. He always told me that he wanted someone who he trusted to take over. Someone he could count on. Someone like *family*.

My mom guilted him into retiring early and that's where I came in. The

prodigal son to take over the family legacy. He gave me a job offer with a salary I couldn't refuse, even despite the double life I lived. On one side I was the ideal son who stepped up to keep the extremely successful family business in the family. On the other, I was secretly the award-winning, *New York Times* bestselling author, Austin Jupiter.

While in college, I let my favorite professor read my manuscript that I worked on when I couldn't sleep. He encouraged me to finish the project. When I handed it over, he read and edited the entire thing in less than a week. One of his best friends worked in publishing and he helped me navigate the query process.

It was a sci-fi book that challenged science and morals. Most agents and publishing houses didn't want to touch it with a ten-foot pole. One newer publishing house went out on a limb and gave me an offer. I thought it was too good to be true. It was their first book deal and they sunk all their money into promoting it.

Their amazing gamble paid off in spades. In ways I didn't think were possible. Aside from an astronomical amount of money that was funneled my way, I had fans, a fandom. Hell, there was even a convention for fans of my book that was still gaining traction. It was incredible to watch, but heartbreaking to view it from the sidelines and do nothing about it.

Being in my father's shadow meant that I couldn't spare a moment to write. I couldn't even write in a notebook or my phone and pretend that I was doing something work-related. My father was a bit neurotic, especially when it came to everything about his business. Over the years I unfortunately fell out of the writing habit.

Because of that, I eventually discovered writers' retreats. It was a safe escape to reconnect with my writer self. I left my work phone at home and told my assistant to leave me the fuck alone. All he knew was that it was some work-related retreat that my father favored. It was a lie, but he didn't know any better.

These retreats were the only chance I had to fully dedicate my time and attention to writing. After the success of my first book, I always had my heart set on making it a series. If only I could have followed my heart instead of my head.

My father set me up to want for nothing. A seven-figure salary was nothing to bat an eye at. I grew up humble. Sure, wealth was exciting, but I didn't go over the top with my lifestyle. I had a nice place to live, a few

decent vehicles, and partied from time to time. I was as discreet as possible. Although after the paparazzi locked their lenses on me during the handing off of the company torch, I was the occasional front-page fodder for the tabloids.

The ‘*Hottest Single CEO*’ tag followed me around like a bad nose job. I admit I’m attractive and sometimes I used it to my advantage. I couldn’t deny a beautiful woman. Especially when she said all the right things to make me forget about the soul-sucking drudgery of work. But they never lasted. Most were vapid and shallow, hungry for their next sugar daddy. The daddy kink was a hard no for me. I wasn’t even 40 yet, but too close for comfort.

With all that chaos, I relished in the peace of this specific writer's retreat. Retreats during the winter were rare, as most were canceled due to snow. But the snow and mountains brought the silence that I craved while being away from the big city.

I kept to myself and focused on my writing. Sometimes I ventured into the open mingle cocktail hour. I could always spot the fellow sci-fi writers in the crowd. Over a glass of alcohol, it was nice to shoot the shit with people who knew what the fuck I was talking about. Sure, one could talk to other writers, but I felt those in the sci-fi and fantasy (and perhaps horror and paranormal) genres had a peculiar writing curve to work around. A certain mindset.

Unfortunately, from the opening mixer yesterday, I didn’t find any fellow souls in the crowd. I think the snowy forecast must have scared a few people off from making the trek up the mountain.

This morning, I didn’t expect to see many up at the crack of dawn. But I was surprised to see the latecomer from last night seated at one of the cafe tables in the dining area set aside for the retreat. I was used to surviving on six or so hours of sleep. She on the other hand looked like she needed a week straight of some heavily medicated Zs.

The woman was slightly more put together this morning. She had on high-waisted skinny jeans and a t-shirt half-tucked into the waistband. A cardigan sweater, that looked two sizes too big, kept sliding off her shoulder as she had her face buried into a cup of coffee. But what got my attention in the first place was the two other take-out cups in front of her and no other chair. Her eyes were half-glazed over.

I was certain I interrupted her staring at me last night when she was checking in. It’s not that I wasn’t used to women giving me a once-over. It was more the fact that she was overly embarrassed that I *caught* her staring.

Every other woman who sized me up went in for the kill. With some of them, I enjoyed the attention. With others, I gave them my trademark grin and went on my way.

For the moment we were the only ones in the room. The breakfast buffet was set up and ready to go. I wanted to get an early start to the writing day anyway. Considering this was the only time in my current life that I had the freedom to write, I wanted to use every second to my advantage. I loaded up a bowl of fruit salad and grabbed a bran muffin before I sat down at the small cafe table next to her.

“Rough night?”

“Oh god you have no idea-” The moment she realized who she responded to made her choke on her coffee. “Shit! Sorry.” I couldn’t help but chuckle.

“So, are you on your third cup or are you using that one as an example for the other two?”

The cup hovered by her mouth, but I could see the subtle quirk at the corner. At least she found me amusing. Maybe the caffeine had started to kick in.

“What they don’t know is the cruel fate of the first one I devoured this morning in my room.”

“Oof. Vicious.”

That earned me an outright giggle. It was something reminiscent of a prepubescent witch cackle.

“So...uh...do you...words?” There was a strain in her voice as she tried to dispel the odd silence that settled between us. She was more sleep deprived than I initially thought.

“Do you mean, am I here with the writers’ retreat?”

She choked on her awkwardness. A slender finger jumped from the side of her cup and jabbed in my direction.

“That’s it.”

“Then yes.”

“Me too.” Well, that was a surprise. She was struggling as it was to put a coherent sentence together. Maybe she needed all that caffeine to properly function.

“Well, then I have some top-secret intel.” I leaned in towards her, closing the gap between our two seats. A flush of pink raced across her plump cheeks. “The solarium is the best place to write.”

“O-Oh-Ohhh...” She gave me a quick, awkward nod. The closeness of our bodies seemed to unnerve her.

“If you go early, you can nab a decent spot by the window overlooking the ski slopes.” I rose from my seat and watched her throat bob sharply. “Should I...save you a seat?”

“I-” The cup crinkled in her grip. “Uh, sure.”

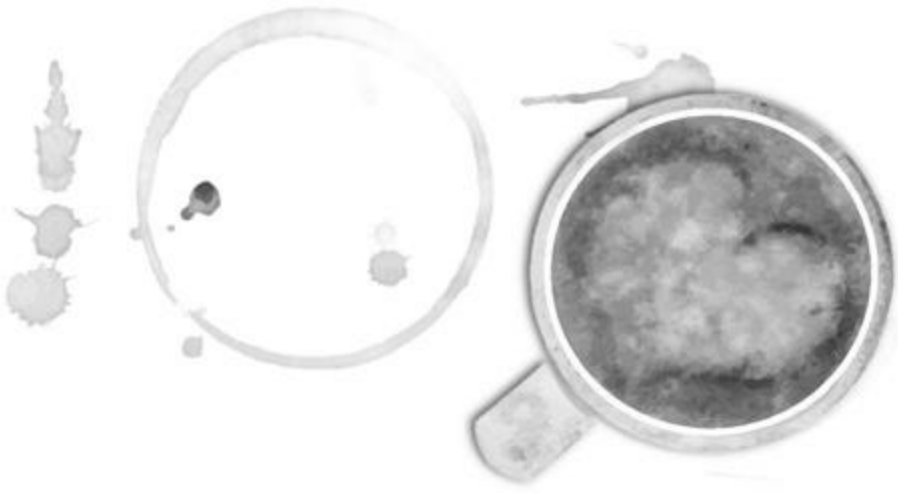
“See you in ten?” I turned back to the table to clean up my plates. “Might be nice to have an accountability buddy.” A crooked smile cracked the tight seal of her mouth. I wandered over to dispose of my dishes and grab my cup of coffee for the morning.

Buddy?

Dude, what the fuck. Are you 12?

It might be nice to have someone to talk to at one of these events for once. Being a writer was a lonely existence. Especially when no one else in my life knew I was a writer.

Despite college being some of the more stressful years of my life, I was happy. I had my professor to talk to. I spent every free moment writing. It kept my head on straight and focused on something good for me. I missed that.



Chapter 3

Paige

Oh god. The hottie from last night talked to me. As in, he didn't ask me for directions to something. He actually *talked* to me. He held an entire conversation with me and stayed actively engaged. Surprisingly, he wasn't an asshole about it either. If a hot guy ever managed to speak to me, it was to ask a question or to fuck with me. And not in the fun kind of way.

Maybe I should commemorate this moment. Maybe I was overthinking it. Maybe he was gay. Maybe he was just looking for a writer friend. That was the whole purpose of this damn retreat with other people. To write.

My experience with men was few and far between. Lately, it was only online dating apps, but even those had accumulated cobwebs. Sometimes I hit up the chat boards to find a roleplay partner. Okay, not *that* kind. It was more where you advertise a prompt on the message board, and someone responds to your post if they want to do a turn-by-turn written role play.

I found it fascinating and helpful for the days when I had a particularly bad episode of writer's block. At least then I felt like I still had my gift of writing. The most difficult part was finding a partner that wasn't in it for a sidebar chat that led to sending unwanted dick pics. For only having sex a handful of times, I'd seen enough dicks to make a urologist blush.

I guess that a female who lurked on the internet, and was halfway decent with roleplay, was a hot prospect. Sometimes it worked out. Occasionally the out-of-character chats led to something more. I even got a few long-distance boyfriends out of it. It wasn't so bad. Having them far away took away the awkward in-person nonsense that I was terrible at.

Have I gone on dates? Sure. Have I had sex? Yes. Although the last time I did either was an amount of time I'd lost track of.

Writing was my life now. Hell, I didn't even have to leave my house like...ever. In this modern world, I could even have groceries delivered to my house. I could be a quiet recluse like I always wanted. I could do my own thing whenever I wanted.

Damn, that sounded pathetic.

Perhaps I was three cats away from being a crazy cat lady. I had the recluse part down. I just needed the cats. Maybe this stupid writer's retreat

was a good thing for me. Might as well make the most of it.

Chugging the rest of my lukewarm third coffee, I gathered the other two empty cups and tossed them in the trash. Straight-up caffeine was going to wreak havoc on my system. I needed a food chaser. Something to soak up all the liquid. Shoving a croissant into my mouth, I grabbed a fourth cup of coffee. Hopefully, this buzz would keep me going until real food over lunch.

I heard the commotion of fellow writers making their way in for breakfast. I took that as my cue to exit. My churning gut wanted me to head back to my room and attempt to spend every moment that I wasn't eating, writing. But Hottie McHotterstein did invite me to write with him...

Ugh, fuck it.

I might as well write while I'm high on caffeine. I was usually a bit more inhibited when I've had this much. What I wouldn't give for an espresso machine right now. Would have saved me from drinking three additional coffees. However, if worse came to worst, I could skip out around lunch and just collapse in my room for one hell of a caffeine crash.

With a sigh, I made my way back to my room to grab my laptop, charger, and headphones. At least with headphones, people could see that I wanted to be left the fuck alone. Then I could tell my agent that I at least made the effort to take part in the actual retreat.

Shoving the rest of my pastry into my mouth, I followed the signs down to the solarium. Sexy McHotpants was right. The solarium was stunning. Despite the quick winter storm that blew in with me last night, the morning burned bright in its reflection off the snow. The room almost had a 360-degree view of the back end of the ski slopes. It was quieter on this side of the resort, a great place to sit, take in the view, and warm up after a day of skiing.

Skiing was something I would not be doing. Me and any sort of sport-related activity was like oil and water. Either I hated it, or the sport despised me. Most of the time it was both. But drinking hot drinks I had numerous gold medals in.

It was still early, so no snow bunnies were in residence. Other writers had set up shop on various pieces of furniture and cafe tables. To my dismay, there wasn't an empty seat. Dammit, I shouldn't have dawdled.

A subtle movement caught my eye. Delicious McMan was gesturing me over to him. Still unused to the attention, I looked to either side of me to see if he was motioning for anyone else. *Gulp*. All clear. Just my sorry-ass self.

I offered a shy nod as I hugged my laptop bag close to my body and did my best to hide behind my coffee cup. My feet felt like heavy irons as I timidly shuffled over to him. He must have been the first to arrive as he staked the claim to what seemed to be, the comfiest seat in the room. A deep sage green velvet couch looked better suited for a study in an old Victorian home.

Mr. Sex-On-A-Stick moved his leather messenger bag as soon as I was within a few feet. A soft smile accompanied the gesture as he made room for me. I wanted to spray my damn heart with a squirt bottle to calm the sudden flutter. It was a nice gesture, not him getting down on one knee to profess an undying love. Maybe he just thought I was a like-minded soul?

“I was wondering if the caffeine crash kicked in or not.” He teased as I unceremoniously plopped down next to him. I tried not to sit too close, but the petite sofa didn’t provide all the room in the world. A table would have been better suited for writing, but I understood his need for comfort.

“Just keepin’ it going strong.” I wiggled my cup in his direction as I dropped my bag onto my lap. “At least until I pass the fuck out later. Depends on how the writing goes.” If it was anything like the last few weeks, I didn’t have high hopes.

“These retreats are the only chance I get to write. I make the most of my time here.”

“Oh,” My voice went soft. I hadn’t considered that. Just because these people footed the bill for an expensive retreat didn’t mean they were also full-time writers. I was once just like them. The thought humbled me a bit. If they made the effort to be here, then I should be more than able to put the effort in to get some words down on my document. “Uh...well, one of my um...friends suggested that a writers’ retreat might be a good idea to dispel some of this writer’s block.”

“These are a good place for that. Most people here have shared your pain at least once in their writing.”

I offered a polite nod in agreement as I fumbled with my laptop and cords from my bag. The room was mostly quiet, save for the various keys clicking. Casting my eyes about the room, those present used some sort of laptop or tablet to write. There were a select few who went about it the old-fashioned way with a pen and paper.

Sometimes I missed those days. The days before technology was everywhere with its portability. It was so satisfying to write and fill a whole

college-lined page of notebook paper. Presently my brain worked faster than my hands could write. Not to mention I was writing two to five times more words in a sitting than I used to.

“Yeah well, hopefully they don’t also have to deal with deadlines that mean life or death.”

His reply was a closed-mouth chuckle with a shake of his head. There was something about his reaction that led me to believe that he knew what I was talking about. Well shit, was he a fellow published author as well? Not that I needed to know. I mean, I kind of wanted to know. But there was that possibility if I asked him, then the same question would come back to me. I would have to divulge my secret. Better to just play it safe. Maybe he’d give me context clues and with a quick internet search later I could sleuth him out.

“I’m sure a few know that pain as well.”

I offered some noncommittal noise as I opened and booted up my laptop. Most of the time I preferred my desk with my memory foam desk chair that I treated myself to with my first decent royalty check. Hey, a writer needed a comfortable place to sit her ass in all day. The chair was a business investment.

“The worst part about the business.” *Shit.* That might have been a bit too much information.

“The worst part about *any* business.” Delicious McMuscles cast me a side glance with a quiver of a smirk.

Down, kitty.

Good god, why was he like the epitome of every man who graced the cover of romance novels? He had effortlessly quaffed dark blonde hair, sky-blue eyes, and a jaw that looked like a marble statue’s. He wore a dress shirt tucked into his dark wash jeans with the crisp sleeves rolled up his forearms. He probably worked out and drank green smoothies.

He didn’t seem like the typical sort of writer. Most of the men in the room were older with five o’clock shadows or a few days’ worth of scruff. Maybe he was a poser? A wannabe? With the explosion of so many incredible indie authors lately, it wasn’t unheard of. Or maybe he was like, really *really* famous. The dude wore a silver Rolex watch and, what looked like, designer jeans.

Okay, just play it cool, Paige. Just do your character analysis and move on.

“That’s fair. Except healthcare. That’s more of a ‘time is of the essence’

kind of business. Those emails could actually mean life or death.” My nonsensical, and rather macabre, chatter earned me another chuckle.

“The only excuse. Honestly.” I didn’t miss my comfortable office job one bit. At home, there was no one watching my every move and I didn’t have to drag my ass to an office full of people I didn’t want to talk to day in and day out. Plus, the payout of being a successful author was a hell of a lot sweeter. “I’m Penn by the way.”

The snort that puffed its way out of my nostrils surprised even me.

“Penn? And you’re a writer?”

Goddamn, my sarcasm.

“It’s...” He bristled slightly. “...more of a nickname.” Those icy blue eyes narrowed at me as his brow cocked. “And no, technically not because of that. This is...more of a secret hobby.” Well, color me intrigued. Although now I was super reluctant to give him my name. But the only option I had was my real one. If I gave him my pen name, then there was a chance he could find out who I was. That was the last thing I wanted him to do. “And...?”

“Oh.” *I might as well get it over with.* “I’m Paige.”

“Paige, huh?” I loathed the irony in his voice. I despised the playful smirk that followed even more. Especially after I embarrassed myself earlier and gave him one of my trademark snorts with his ironic name. “And you’re a writer too, I take it?”

“I like to think of it as if I’m fulfilling my destiny.”

“That’s...very fantastical of you.”

“I like to think so. Considering I eat, sleep, and breathe the fantasy genre. Or well...I should be when these *confounded* words and ideas would just make themselves known.”

“Confounded.” He quoted back to me with an amused noise. “You’re a writer all right.” With a cock to his head, he turned his gaze back to me with sympathy swimming within the blue depths. “Writer’s block?”

“More like...I know exactly how I’m going to end it. And I have ideas on how to get there. But...the way to convey them is eluding me. For longer than I’d like to admit.”

“I know that feeling all too well.” His nondescript sigh brought the conversation to a close as he turned to his laptop. Well shit, now the *GQ* Magazine cover model knew my name. And I knew his. Even if I wasn’t sure I believed it was anything close to his real name.

A relaxed quiet settled between us as I brought up my draft on my laptop screen. The Fabio-Wannabe-without-the-Long-Hair's agile fingers clicked away at his high-end, ultra-light laptop. Perhaps the questions would stop for the time being as we found our groove.

Well, *he* found his groove. Despite the promise of a cleared writer's block from changing the setting where I conducted my writing, I found myself back in the same troubled boat. Crossing my arms, I sat back in a huff with my coffee cup. Sipping the now lukewarm contents, I reread the last chapter I wrote, trying to find the rhythm of where I left off. So far, no luck.

It was only the first few hours into this damn retreat. I was already back to my peak stress level. Perhaps the four cups of coffee all at once were a poor choice for my already anxious heart. I could almost feel it as it tried to escape the cage of my ribs. A hearty sigh escaped me as I stared at the blinking cursor. It teased me with its flickering idleness.

"Something wrong...?" *Dammit all to hell.* This was exactly why I liked to write by myself. I didn't have to deal with a peanut gallery of curious onlookers.

"Yes." I shot out in a huff and downed the rest of my coffee. With a grimace, I put my cup down on the side table. There wasn't much worse than room-temperature coffee. Except for maybe writer's block.

"Care to talk it out? That is the whole point of one of these retreats." The look he gave me was earnest. Not a drop of morbid curiosity in his tone. "Well...one of the points."

How could I word this without sounding so terrifyingly desperate? And without giving my story away. He seemed like a smart hottie. He could probably figure out who I was with context clues.

"Ever have a part in your story where your characters *really* want something to happen and either you don't want them to or are unsure on how to go about it?" The silence dragged on. I couldn't bear to look up at him to see if he even heard me. His laughter answered me.

"Yes." His answer was completely deadpan.

"Really?" I looked up at him in surprise. My face dropped as my lips pressed into a thin, condescending line. "You're lying."

"I dare you to go ask any other writer in this room the same question. I guarantee they will have the same answer as me." Holy shit, he really was serious. Okay, so maybe I was in good company. "Maybe I can help? What's your genre?"

Oh god. The ultimate test. Hopefully, he wasn't some dry non-fiction writer who wrote business books or something. I could use some decent writer-to-writer advice.

"Fantasy."

His structured shoulders visibly relaxed. "I write science fiction. Not exactly too far off from each other."

I wished I had a better poker face because I was sure it betrayed my outright surprise at his response. He seemed too uptight to be a sci-fi writer. Well, I guess the old saying went for writers as well: *You can't judge a book by its cover.*

"No, I suppose not."

"So? What's the issue?"

Therein lies the problem.

It didn't have to do with world-building, creating a new language, or naming a made-up creature. The problem was in writing basic human nature. The last thing I wanted to admit to a hot-as-fuck stranger was that my characters wanted to jump each other's bones. How the hell could I put it delicately?



Chapter 4

Penn

Paige stared at me with some sort of inner turmoil. I thought the question was innocent enough. Which, I suppose, was a rather dangerous assumption. Especially for a writer in the fantasy genre. My brain was wracked with all the possibilities that she could be stressed over. Maybe it was a plot hole she needed to close up between the characters. Maybe it was an error in her magical system. I thought I covered them all in the drawn-out seconds of silence between us.

“My characters want to do it.”

Except for that one.

I didn't think a sex question was on the table. But romantic fantasy was quickly becoming the rage on the bestseller list. Despite being a prominent CEO and with little free time, I did enjoy reading as much as writing. I got a lot less shit for reading. With all things considered, I reached for a book more often than I reached for the writing document on my laptop.

Due to the look of pure cringe on her face, she didn't want to say that. Or did she? I decided to play the innocent one. Just to see how far she would go.

“Do what? Kill each other? Cast a spell?” I wasn't sure if my innocent mocking came across, but I sure as fuck hoped it did. It might be fun to watch her fluster if my initial thought was correct. The bright pink that suddenly blossomed on her cheeks gave away that my gut feeling was indeed right.

“No... Um...” Paige's eyes avoided mine as she squirmed slightly in her seat. Damn, it was fun to put her on the spot. I didn't get to do it often. Most women who entered the initial dance of intimacy with me were nowhere near this innocent. They were calculating, even manipulative sometimes. Rarely were they this...*sweet*. Her voice dropped as she kept her eyes on her laptop screen. “You know what I mean.”

This conversation felt like something that would be done in the back of the middle school bus. A desperate attempt to get sex tips from the popular kid. I chuckled.

“Sex. Your characters want to have sex.”

There was a visible wince from her already tense shoulders. “Fine, yes.

Okay. My characters are screaming at me that they want to have sex.” Her hiss was sharp and low as she tried to keep the conversation between us. “I guess...I guess that’s where I’ve been stuck at.”

“So, are you just unsure if you want to give in to them or...?”

Paige was quiet for a long moment. “I’ve never...written anything like it before. Actual...sex on the page is all the rage now. It's what readers request all the time. ‘Fantasy with smut’. Who am I to deny that?”

“Who are you to deny them?” Okay so maybe my tone was a little bit of a mocking tease. It seemed she was dancing around a question that hadn’t been asked yet.

“I mean...sure...”

“So...?” She finally chanced a glance at me. When our eyes met, she quickly darted hers away. They were a lovely mix of blue and gray. Unusual but intriguing. She sported the girl-next-door kind of vibes. Wholesome. Innocent. “I say go for it.”

“O-Okay...” Her croaked answer sounded even more unsure. That pretty gaze went blank.

“That’s not the main issue,” I pulled my hands away from my keyboard to drape them over the back of the sofa and its arm. “...is it?”

The column of her throat bobbed nervously.

“Why the fuck am I having this conversation with you. You’re literally a complete stranger.” Her tone was an abrupt change. It was combative and harsh. I inadvertently felt myself bristle from it. Being in business, I was used to this sort of brash behavior change. Especially when some business deals went south.

“Isn’t that the ideal kind of person to have this conversation with? Someone who has no idea who you are, what your morals are, what your past is. Someone you’ll never see again.” That took some of the wind out of her tirade. It was true. That’s why one-night stands had that appeal. If you had an off night, you’d never see them again. If they were not what you thought, you kicked them out in the morning (Or that same night).

“You know...I hate that you’re right.”

I outright laughed. A few people shot me a side eye and I quickly dispelled my mirth and camouflaged it with a clearing of my throat. Despite her social discomfort, it was refreshing to have such a candid conversation with a woman. Especially a woman that I could talk shop with.

“Well? I’m all ears. Don’t let the writer's persona fool you. I’m a reader

too.”

Despite her casual appearance, her now-cocked brow was meticulously maintained. A flutter of curiosity wafted across her features. The poor woman would suck at poker.

“You read?” The surprise was thick in her voice as her lovely eyes narrowed in suspicion. “Like something other than business manuals or non-fiction?” *Touché, dear lady.* She brought wit to the table. Not to mention she was quite a judge of character. I suppose I did sort of give off that aura. I wasn’t one to lounge around in just anything. Dress shirts and dress pants were my usual uniform. But in my downtime, it was either joggers and t-shirts or less formal dress shirts and jeans.

“Yes,” I chuckled, a little disarmed with her. “I read. I’ll read just about anything. It’s a good escape at a moment’s notice.”

“That’s...rather poetic of you.”

“I have my moments.” *Wait, was that a smile I saw?* It had to be. At least I got her to relax a bit, despite the abnormal amount of caffeine coursing through her veins. “So...about your book.” Back to her deer in the headlights look again. “Are you just uncomfortable writing intimate scenes or...?”

“I mean...” Her fingers tangled together as she fidgeted in her obvious discomfort. “I...guess not.”

“Then what’s the holdup?”

The woman did her best to disappear as far as she could into the confines of the plush, velvet sofa. I didn’t want to push her too far. She was so close to opening up.

“I...” With a heavy sigh, she scrunched her eyes shut. “I...don’t have much...*expertise* on the subject.”

I had to choke back my initial reaction of laughter. *Please don’t be a virgin.* I didn’t want to be *that* person. She’s got to be what, late 20s? Maybe early 30s? It was difficult to discern with her petite figure. Maybe she was just vanilla? There was something about her that I wouldn’t mind tasting to find out just what sort of flavor she was. But that was for a different day, a different Penn.

“So...*some* knowledge...?”

“A...bit.”

“Are your characters both human?”

“W-Well...yes-”

“Did you pass biology? Health class?”

“Yes, but-”

“Then you know how the parts work.” Her mouth opened and closed like a fish gasping for air. “If not, I’m sure an internet search would suffi-”

“Okay researching *it* is one thing but...” With a grimace, her hand covered her face as she continued. “It's better when a writer writes from...*experience*.”

Why the hell my dick thought this was a good time to ready itself for potential action was beyond me. Thank god for my laptop over my crotch. I placed my hand down on the corner of the device for good measure. Just in case it wanted to give the already shy woman, a *standing* ovation.

“Fair.” I nodded as nonchalantly as possible. “You can tell when a writer fakes it.”

“Exactly! You understand my dilemma!” There was a twinkle in her eye. She was right, I did understand what she meant. I understood it all too well. And damn if I wasn’t delighted as fuck about it.

She. Understood. Me.

She understood writing. She understood the stressors and chaos that was a writer’s life. With all of the writer’s retreats I’d ever been to, I couldn’t recall ever finding someone to be this candid with. It was refreshing. Exciting. Maybe a bit of a turn-on.

This was one person, one damn person that I’d been able to be my true self with. To admit that I was a writer. To have a connection with that very few people truly comprehended. I could have kissed her.

“You have no idea how refreshing it is to hear that.”

“Wait, what?” Her face contorted into an adorable look of utter puzzlement.

“This...candor. I...don’t exactly have anyone to talk shop with. But with you...it's easy.” That delightful rosy blush was back, in abundance. “So, thank you.”

“You don’t have to thank me. I’m the one with the embarrassing...*problem*.”

I bit back another chuckle. “It's not embarrassing. It's a...research project.” She choked on her sip of coffee. “Why not make a profile on one of those dating apps? Whatever they are...Humble or Fumble or whatever it is.”

“I’ve already tried that.” With the way her tone flattened, I assumed it hadn’t gone well.

“Pick up guys at a bar? Or...a woman. I’m not one to judge.”

“Yeah, no.” She dismissed that quickly.

“Well, I guess you’re fucked then.” That pink tinge on her face was back again. “And not in the fun way.”

“Is there even a fun way anymore?” The question was rhetorical, but she was quite serious.

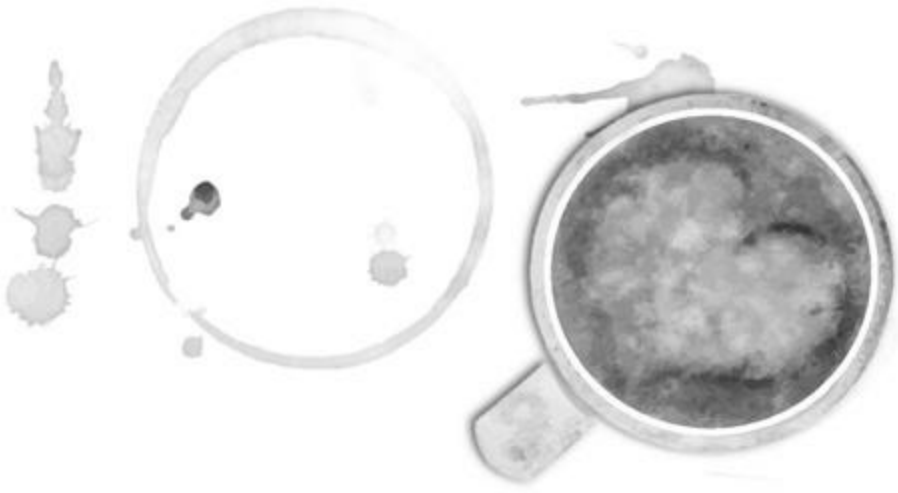
“Sure, there is. Advancements in solo pleasuring capabilities have come a long way from just your hand.”

“Jeezus. You really have no chill, do you?”

I shrugged. “Not when it comes to pleasing a woman.” With a quick smirk, my eyes caught her nails as they dug into the heft of her thigh. I’m not going to lie to say that the subtle movement didn’t affect me, because it did.

Most of the women I was intimately familiar with knew their way around a man’s body. But once you got them into bed, they became a pillow princess. Someone who just wanted to lay there and be worshipped. It was fun for a while. Those women had a body that deserved extra attention.

But a man needed a partner. Someone who gave it as well as they took it. A small part of me wondered if this lovely, shy morsel would be up for such a challenge with her innocence. It just might be fun to see how desperate she was to break that writer’s block of hers.



Chapter 5

Paige

I had no idea what in the fucking world caused me to be so uninhibited. Was it because of my desperation to get through this part of my book? Was it because he was the first guy that talked to me in public since college? He made me feel uncomfortable in all the awkward sort of ways.

Did he really just fucking say that?

I was still in disbelief that we were in the middle of having a conversation about sex of all things. A part of me was in utter denial over my body's reaction to how he admitted to knowing how to *please* a woman. Had I ever been truly pleased?

Sure, I had some mediocre sex toys that worked when I was in a desperate bind. But most of the time I did without. I missed the companionship in a relationship. To have someone to do stuff with. Anything sexual would have been just a bonus. Nowadays the guys on those asinine dating apps were about the sex first. If it was good enough, then they stuck around. The problem was, I wasn't very good.

Or I didn't think I was. None of the guys lingered. And the ones who did...they ended up being more like friends. There was no spark. No desire. No chemistry. It was like kissing my great long-dead aunt Edna. Gross.

Once in a while, I subjected myself to reading a rom-com book. Where were *those* kinds of guys? Oh, that's right. They were *fictional* boyfriends for a reason. They didn't exist.

It's not like I asked for much in a man. He should, at the very least, be accepting of my career choice. With the last few first dates, that aspect did not go over well. They either thought that it wasn't a real job or they wanted to know how famous I was. Were there any non-shallow men available?

I always thought that to date a fellow writer, or at least an avid reader, would be hot. Hell, even an English teacher or professor would be enticing enough. They would understand what it takes to write something. The hours of anguish turned into pure euphoria. Okay so maybe it was borderline bipolar in some respects. But if it got the job done...

Penn looked like someone who was picky about the women he *looked* at, let alone dated. Still, he'd been nothing but nice. Albeit a bit playful and

teasing. It was a good banter that I wouldn't mind continuing.

"Do women really fall for that or are you just full of yourself?" I shot back once I was able to regain my composure. The man was not flirting with me. As much as my body wished he was. If I let him, he would chew me up and spit me out on the curb without a second look back.

"Both."

I wanted to be aggravated at him, but the playful little grin he flashed me left me unarmed. I needed to keep my wits about me. Although if he came from money, I was sure all his women overlooked his arrogant ways just to get into his pants. And his wallet.

"Good for you." My quip back earned me another one of his warm chuckles.

"So?"

"So...what?"

"Do you want my help or not?"

Goddamn, my fucking brain for going straight to the beyond filthy gutter. I needed to lay off the spicy books. Don't let the man smell your fluster.

"H-Help...?"

Great, Paige. Fantastic. A stutter?

"Why not? I could read over where you think such a scene would work best and I could give you some suggestions. Or..." Thank goodness he said it so casually because if he broke out anything resembling a husky voice I might have combusted.

"Or, what?"

"Or...you could read what you have at one of the sharing circles this afternoon. I'm sure a lot of people would give you some feedback."

Oh god.

Receiving sexual encounter advice from a room full of strangers was like getting your toenails pulled out one by one by a chimpanzee toddler high on crack. Even worse would be if there was someone who read my books in the room and figured out who I was. Maybe it was safer to go with Penn's suggestion.

"Ah...hard pass on that one. But...I might consider your offer."

"You should. Think of me as an impartial third party." Penn's smile made me wilt a bit. It was so...kind. "Think about it. You could print me off a few chapters at the business center if you want."

That wasn't a terrible idea. At least that way if he wanted to copy my work he'd have to sit and rewrite it. I was always apprehensive about sending off PDFs due to the high rate of piracy with online books. Plus, he seemed like the kind of man that would appreciate hand-editing a manuscript.

"I...will do...that." Offering him a nod, I turned back to my laptop. Even if the words didn't want to come, the very least I could do was edit. I liked to go back and reread what I wrote in the past to avoid any repetition and get myself back in the mindset of where I was when I initially wrote it.

The times I hit my writing groove were the best. The words flowed from my fingers like the silent direction of a conductor. Keyboard keys went clickity-clack as fast as my brain could send the messages to my hand to convey what I was thinking. Watching the cursor spew forth every letter without bothering to blink was endlessly satisfying.

Gosh, I missed those times. I suppose I took them for granted. Now I was stuck and longing for five words, hell, even one word would be considered progress on this stagnant manuscript.

I cast a glance at Penn. His brow furrowed as he typed. His fingers were long and arched over the keys of his sleek keyboard as they caressed each key into submission. They knew their way without a single glance down. His blue eyes were squarely on the screen.

Could he be trusted with my work? Did he even know a lick about what women *really* want sexually? Even with all this awkward as fuck conversation he could be a complete asshole who was full of himself. If he did end up being a jerk, I could always report him to the organizers and kick his ass out of future retreats. That would show him.

Lunch came and went. As soon as my watch flashed over to the noon hour I dipped out of the room and back down to the reserved dining area. I thought I heard Penn call after me, but I decided to ignore him. I needed time to further consider his offer. Maybe I'd sleep on it. It did seem like the least painful option. I paid all of this money to be here. Perhaps he'd even be my sexy muse?

The decrease in my coffee intake after my fourth cup hit me hard after I ate a king's bounty at the lunch buffet. There was no way I'd be any good with writing or even attending the workshops without some proper shuteye after the restless night I had. A writer's body needs rest.

Just as Penn entered the dining area, I slipped out of the side exit. I had enough talk with a sexy man today. Who knew if he wanted to continue the

further probing about my story anyway? I was probably a distraction from the project he was working on. Maybe he was even using me to feel better about himself. What better way than to endlessly grill a fellow writer down on her writing luck?

Ugh. I needed to get my mind off of the man. What I really needed was a nap. Maybe I would feel better about things when I wasn't on the tail end of a caffeine hangover and running on four hours of broken sleep.

What had me all up in arms about him anyway? So what if he seemed nice? He was probably like every other hot guy around me. Only in it to boost his own ego or to mess with me for his own amusement. So what if he had a charming smile or the fact that I was pretty sure he shamelessly flirted with me?

No, no, no, Paige. This is how you get into trouble all the time. Falling for the impossible men. This one just didn't happen to be fictional for once.

There was part of me that wondered what he looked like under that crisp white shirt. He seemed to be the kind of guy that took care of himself. Either by working out or doing yoga or swimming or...*something*. You could probably see his hip divots. *Oh fuck, hip divots*. That and the dip right under a man's throat at his clavicle.

Focus, Paige. You need rest.

Right.

I managed to stumble into my room with a yawn. Leaving a trail of clothes in my wake, I stripped down to my underwear and slipped beneath the fluffy down comforter and crisp sheets. What was it about an early afternoon nap in a chilly room that hit just right? Maybe I'd wake up with a miraculous clarity towards my manuscript. Or maybe I'd wake up with enough damn balls to take Penn up on his increasingly interesting offer to read an excerpt and offer his two cents.

May the nap odds be ever in my favor.



Chapter 6

Penn

Here.”

A stack of papers hit the dining table with a muted thud. The cup of decaf stopped just shy of my lips at the sudden intrusion. To my surprise, it was Paige, and she looked more disheveled than she had earlier in the day. Her burnished honey hair was now up in a wildly messy bun that seemed to be held together with a sad elastic and a prayer.

My gaze lingered on her unique hairstyle. If I didn't know any better, I would have said that she looked deliciously fucked. But considering our earlier conversation, my sudden and unexpected rise of jealousy toward the lucky bastard who shared a bed with her was a moot point.

It took me a moment to register that she approached me with intent. Reluctantly I moved my eyes from her strained face to the papers in front of me. Did she take me up on my offer?

“Is this...?”

“My manuscript? Yes. Well...parts of it.” The words tumbled out of her all at once. Noting my still hovering cup of coffee, I took a quick sip before I lowered it to the table. A small part of me felt like a college professor with a problem student. I wondered if my old professor felt this way about me sometimes.

“Ah, so you decided to take me up on my offer.” Leaning forward, I reached for the haphazard stack.

“I figured you'd want something to bore you to sleep.” My eyes shot back up to hers. I could tell she was teasing. Surely her work wasn't *that* awful. She didn't talk about the craft like she was a novice.

“Harsh.” Business could wait. I was delighted that she decided to come back. Although she looked worse for wear. I didn't recall her eating anything for breakfast or lunch. The woman was in desperate need of a spike in blood sugar. “Have you eaten yet?”

“Eh...” Her eyes glazed over a bit more as she mentally calculated. “Not for a bit.”

“Why don't you go grab a plate? I'll save your seat.” I made sure to keep it as a demand instead of an invitation. Had I invited her to sit with me

she would have automatically declined. Thankfully she gave me a dazed nod and wandered off towards the buffet line. If she wasn't careful, she'd collapse before her next book could even be finished.

I didn't exactly have room to talk. Work consumed most of my life. To the point that I felt like I only had an unsteady but desperate hold on this sliver of my sanity while indulging in my love for writing. The last thing I wanted to turn into was my father. But apparently, that was inevitable.

Paige sat down across from me with a loaded sigh. I was pleased to see a decent array of food on her plate. Maybe she would feel a bit better if she had something else in her system aside from straight-up sugared bean water.

"Did you manage to get any work done?" A soft snort was my only answer as she shoveled food into her pretty little mouth. Despite her being a practical stranger, I was beginning to appreciate her sarcastic humor. "I'll take that as a no."

"If you consider vivid dreams about my unfinished manuscript chasing me from behind my closed eyelids, then yes I did." That quip earned a hearty chuckle.

"Do you feel a bit more human at least?"

"A little... Food is helping."

I nodded with a smile as I thumbed through the pages. When I requested to read over her work, I hoped for the entire thing. That way I could get a firm grasp on the sort of sexual tension she wanted to convey and where she could input it.

"Chapters and pages are missing."

"Oh," Mid chew, her hand shot up to cover her mouth. "Well...I just pulled some excerpts that I thought could uh..." She choked a bit in her swallow. My cock took notice. "...benefit."

"Right..." I slipped her a grin as I thumbed through the crisp, white pages. "Well, I look forward to reading it. I haven't read a fantasy book in quite some time. I can have it back to you in the morning."

"Wait, really?" With a lick of her lips, she swallowed the last bit of her food. "I mean, you don't have to get it back that fast. I know I gave you a lot-

"Ah, it's nothing. Besides, I wouldn't want you to get behind schedule this weekend. Limited time and all."

"Oh," Her lovely blue eyes dipped demurely as her shoulders drooped. That rosy, pink tinge hit her cheeks once more. "Thank you. I appreciate it."

“Like I said, that’s what these retreats are for. Your manuscript is in good hands. Maybe that will help you get a decent night of sleep tonight.”

Her blush blossomed further. “Nothing that painkillers with sleep meds won’t fix. But yeah. Hard restart. I guess today was just for me to get my bearings.”

“No fault with that. Although I’m used to...taking control of a situation. Unfortunate side effect of the job.”

“I’m glad I don’t have to work anymore. But there are some days I can’t believe that I get to do this for a living.”

I bit back my immediate reaction. So, she was a *real* writer. A published one. And from the sound of it, a rather successful one at that.

I’d been able to sweep all the earnings from my first book into an investment account. Considering that was some time ago, I had quite the little nest egg built up. Not that I needed it unless my father’s company went belly-up. Which would never happen. However, if it kept being a money-making machine, I could spend the next ten years training my replacement and retire even earlier than my father did. Now that was an idea.

“Ah, not me. Still stuck in an office.” I had to downplay my whole situation, despite the designer watch on my wrist.

“It doesn’t look like you mind it much.” She surmised as she popped the last bit of dinner roll into her mouth. “Money looks good on you.” With a smirk, she tidied her place setting. Was that a compliment? Or a snide remark?

“Do you want something to drink? I’m going to grab another cup of decaf.”

“Oh...yeah, that would be great. I’ll take a tea to go and take you up on that sleeping offer.” My brow skyrocketed up my forehead as my body immediately took the dirty path with her verbiage. Considering her sudden fluster, she must have just realized that her words could have easily been misconstrued. “I mean going to bed! Early! In my room!” With an internal chuckle, I gave her a nod and wandered off to the drink refill area.

Not that her idea sounded bad to me, not in the least bit. Work had been rather insane of late with countless business trips and meetings. I hadn’t had a free evening to peruse the local nightlife and wet my whistle. But I was not that desperate. Yet.

The candor with Paige was refreshing. No scummy pickup lines or suave moves or buying drinks. We pushed and pulled each other like we’d

been doing it all along. I suppose that's what kindred people did. This was nothing serious. It was a weekend at a writers' retreat. Not some way to scam on chicks.

I let my gaze drift over to her at the table as I fixed our drinks. She was hunched over, furiously texting someone. Maybe she had a significant other?

"Someone worried about you?" Handing over her to-go cup, I noted her furrowed brow. She barely glanced up from her messaging.

"Just my agent. I swear she's like my mom sometimes." *Agent, huh?* Now I was even more excited to read her work. If she had an agent and could live off of her writing alone, she had to be decent at what she did.

"They suck all the fun out of it sometimes. But they know the market and publishers better than we do."

She took the cup with a look of surprise as I sat down.

"You have an agent too?"

"I...did. Not sure what he's been up to lately. It's...been a bit since I sent him anything."

"Oh." Her face fell. I guess she was hoping for someone in the same boat as her. Maybe one day. Hopefully soon. If I ever worked up the courage to speak to my father about it. Every time I thought about it all I could imagine was him screaming at me at how terrible of a look for the company it would be if the CEO's head was deep in an apocalyptic galaxy.

"Disappointed?"

"A little, I'll admit. I can't complain or talk with anyone about what it's like to deal with the publishing world and the people in it. It's impossible to make them all happy at once."

"I get the feeling. Sometimes I wish I had someone to shoot the shit with about writing. No one in my life understands."

"Yes!" The pure delight that sparkled in her eyes made my body warm. "Nobody gets it! I'm so glad you do."

"I can't tell you how refreshing it is to talk about this kind of stuff to someone." I slipped her a smile. "I'm glad I met you."

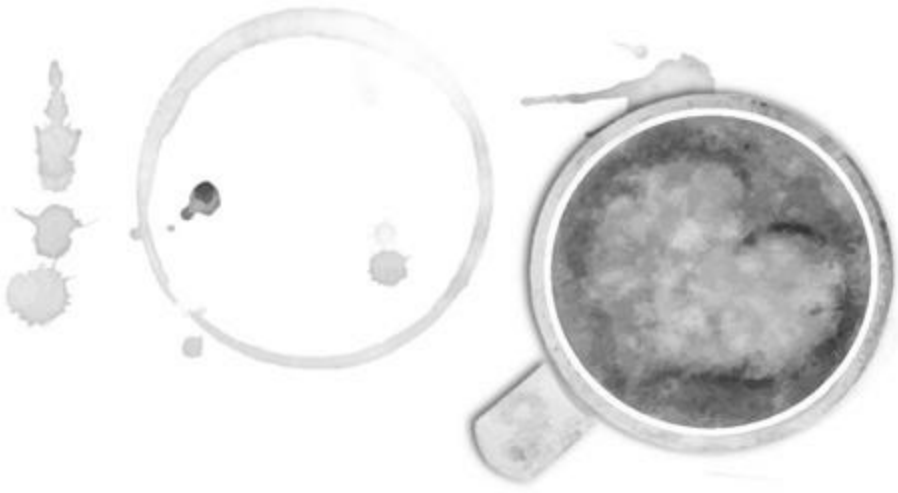
She turned sweetly bashful. "I am too. Well, until you read my manuscript and think I'm absolute trash." Apparently, she liked to smooth over her fluster with self-deprecating humor.

"Considering you write for a living, I'm not worried." I rose from my seat and slipped her papers into my bag before clearing my place. "I'm looking forward to reading what you have. Speaking of which, I should get a

move on.”

“Oh! Yes! Sorry! I-I mean, thank you for doing this.” The look in her gorgeous blue eyes was earnest. I wanted to stay and talk with her more. But if I wanted to manage sleep and write some notes on her manuscript, I needed to head out.

“You’re welcome. I’ll see you tomorrow.”



Chapter 7

Paige

You kept me up all night. Do you know that?”

I froze as my fork clattered to my half-eaten breakfast plate. With Penn’s eye on my self-care from yesterday, I went out of my way to set an alarm, shower, and eat a full and nutritious breakfast that was more food than straight-up caffeine for once. He’d been right. If I was to get any work done this weekend, I needed to take care of myself better.

After a decent night of sleep, I felt like I’d gotten off on the right foot. I was ready for whatever Penn could throw at me critique-wise, mentally solidifying my mental and emotional shields for the onslaught. I was a little disappointed when I didn’t see the early riser at breakfast or in any of the writing spaces that morning. There was no way I was going to admit to myself that I went out of the way to check.

Which was why his sudden appearance and onslaught of words were like a punch to my gut.

“Oh god, you hated it. Didn’t you?” I winced as I sat back in my chair with a heavy sigh.

“I’m going to have to take a nap halfway through the day if I’m going to make any writing progress today.” Fuck, this felt like a teacher from grade school berating me. “You and I need to talk.”

I tossed my head back to look at the ceiling. I knew it. I knew it was awful. Something just didn’t feel right about the chemistry between my characters. Maybe I was forcing it. Maybe it was too much. Maybe it was not enough.

Maybe...I just needed to hear him out.

“Whatever it is, I can take it. I put on my big girl panties this morning.”

Something questionable flashed in his blue eyes and I felt heat in the tips of my ears. The look he gave me made me increasingly more uncomfortable. How bad was it exactly?

“You can’t write intimacy.”

Well, shit.

I knew I was no expert but to get a flat-out ‘this is trash’ deflated my sails quite a bit. So much for being productive this weekend.

“Fuck, I knew it was bad.” I watched him slip down into the seat across from me with a tired noise. Damn, it must have done a number on him. I hoped to whatever higher deity that was listening that he at least had some helpful advice to accompany his harsh critique.

“Look, it’s not bad per se. It’s just...” Penn leaned forward, propping himself on one toned forearm so he could get closer to me. He cast a glance around before he dropped his voice to something quieter. “There’s no...heat. It’s like you’re holding two dolls together and you’re trying to make them kiss.”

Ouch.

My face must have betrayed my dismay. He shifted in his seat to place his hand on the back of mine. I swallowed back my initial reaction to flinch away. It was an act of comfort, but my body wanted to analyze it as anything but.

His hand was so soft. He must use more beauty products than me to accomplish such a feat. Which wasn’t very difficult. I thought using hair conditioner was fancy. But hell, I wanted him to keep his hand there. The gentleness of his touch lessened the critique blow a bit.

“Well...I knew it was bad. Just not *that* bad.”

“Have you read any books with sex on the page?” I did my best to keep my awful poker face up and tried not to think about the cover of the trashy romance novel back in my room. What made it worse was that the cover model inadvertently looked curiously close to Penn.

“A few...”

“Did you get anything from them?” I wasn’t going to dignify that with an answer. Because my answer to that question was not what he wanted to hear. Nor was it something appropriate for public conversation. “Did you do a character action study as you read them?”

“Well...kind of.” *Duh.* They called them book boyfriends for a reason.

“Come on.” He rose suddenly with a groan of his chair as he pushed it out across the floor. “Let’s take a walk.”

I looked up at him in question. We were snowed in. Where the fuck could we go? I wasn’t built to walk outside in winter.

With a subtle nod, I collected my breakfast dishes and disposed of them at the proper receptacle. He grabbed the rough pile of papers off the table. I felt his gaze on me. It caused the hairs on the back of my neck to stand up. He was curiously intense at the moment. Probably from the lack of sleep.

Maybe he was close to delirium. I knew that feeling all too well.

Penn gestured to the nearest exit and followed after me. The hallway was still quiet and deserted in the early morning hour. Despite it being in the middle of nowhere in the North Carolina mountains, I did enjoy the overall aura of the lodge. Even the hallways were lined with honeyed logs in between white guest room doors.

“Take the next left.”

I bristled a bit with the directions. Oh god, he wasn't taking me somewhere to off me, was he? Maybe he was a horror writer. There was a story similar to this, right? A murder in a hotel...

We rounded the corner to the service hallway and an exterior entrance that looked like a fire exit out to a smoking gazebo. On a nice day, it would be a decent place to sit, sans smokers. But today it was covered with a drift of a few feet of snow. *Please, no don't take us out-*

My breath caught in my throat as I felt strong fingers encircle my wrist. Just as I turned around to ask him what the fuck was going on, my entire body was shoved against the wall by Penn's deceptively hard body. In a quick move, he dropped the paper-clipped manuscript and somehow pinned both my wrists to the wall above my head.

There was a heated explosion deep within as he dipped his head down towards mine. My face was frozen with some sort of shock. My heart was in my throat and beating something between the speed of a hummingbird and a jet engine.

Those blue eyes of his darkened as he gazed down at me like I was to be his breakfast that morning. I don't think I ever wanted to emulate scrambled eggs more in my entire life. How the hell was it so hot in here? A minute ago I loathed the idea of going outside. Right now, I wanted to dive head-first into the snow bank.

Penn was close.

So close...

So close that he could...

Kiss me.

“Do you feel that?” Did his voice suddenly go all low and husky? My eyes darted to his lips as his tongue slipped out to lick the bottom one. *Jeezus.*

“F-F-Feel what?” Yeah, there was no hope to be strong in this moment. I was surprised I even managed coherent words.

His hand dropped from its hold on my wrist to join the other with a firm

grip on my hips as his own pinned my ass firmly to the wall. My breath hitched sharply with the sudden heated onslaught. What in the delicious fuck of all fucks was he playing at?

“That...*heat.*” I could feel his words against my jaw. My eyes threatened to close so I could fully absorb the current change of events. I didn’t know that my hips and waist were a fucking erogenous zone. “This desire. This...*need.*”

Oh.

I felt *something* alright.

My brain was too scrambled to fully comprehend what exactly this was. It felt something similar to when I read spicy scenes in romance novels. Except this was way, way, way more intense. Maybe I was desperate. Maybe I was broken. I don’t remember feeling anything close to this with other men. Although I couldn’t seem to think of a time that one of them pressed me up against a wall like this.

“I-I think so...”

I swallowed back the whimper that came to my throat when he suddenly pulled away. Normal Penn was now standing in front of me. The sex god that had been there a second ago disappeared as quickly as he appeared.

What.

The.

Fuck.

“That’s what you’re missing.” *Say what?* “You’re missing the part where your readers want them to fuck as much as they do, but they won’t admit it. You need that passion, that...unspeakable yearning. There’s emotion in sex. Whether it’s just to get a release or to convey love.”

I wasn’t going to lie. The second his mouth said ‘fuck’ my body just about whited out. Or maybe it was when he talked with his hands. He really was super passionate about this whole thing.

“Oh.”

“Do you understand now?” Penn’s voice went a bit softer along with his gaze on me. “Sometimes it’s easier to show rather than tell.”

“So...it works in real life too. Not just in writing.”

“Exactly!” His warm chuckle seemed as elated as his agreement. “You can only learn so much from romance novels.”

Now it clicked.

“So...I need hands-on experience.” I regretted the words as soon as I

said them out loud.

"You already said dating apps and picking someone up at a bar haven't worked. The question is how do we teach you something you've never experienced? Especially when you aren't *that* type of woman."

"Hey," My eyes narrowed at him. "What kind of woman do you think I am?" I tried to keep my voice cool, but the longer this conversation went on, the more I became aggravated. "I'm just...inexperienced. I'm not a damn prude. And I'm not a virgin if that's what you're also thinking."

"Well then."

"What?"

"Then do your in-the-field research."

"I have! This is all I came up with. It's like reading a book about brain surgery and then expecting to implement it without ever practicing on a cadaver. It's just...not how you go about it."

"Hence why I said 'in-the-field'. If you want first-hand knowledge of this kind of heat, you're going to have to put yourself out there. Be a guinea pig."

I scoffed at him. There was a moment of silence as I seethed and he schemed. Something passed across that handsome face of his. Hopefully, it wasn't another one of his hair-brained ideas like him reading over parts of my manuscript. That's what got me into this mess in the first place.

"How about this? You can say no, I won't be bothered. It's just an idea. But what if I help you experience that chemistry? A little bit of flirting. Some school-appropriate touching. Maybe a kiss if you're feeling extra feisty. I'll do my best to make you *think* you want to fuck me by the end of this weekend. Then you can write about that. Of course, I'll be doing my own writing here and there, so you won't be annoyed with me all day. But don't think that means I won't still be trying. There's plenty that can be done in...*silence*."



Chapter 8

Penn

Technically it wasn't my dumbest scheme ever. I began to regret opening my mouth in the first place and putting such a lush offer like that on the table. Paige's face was worth it. Her reaction betrayed every damn thing that ran through her brain at that very moment.

I was used to weekend quickies. Nameless flings were my middle name if the paparazzi had anything to say. They were easier. Less messy. One tabloid headline and then I got my peace for a while when they realized the faceless woman wasn't going to stick around. This offer was no different.

With the completely unhinged offer, I fully expected her to blanch at the thought. Or at the very worst, slap me across the face. It's not that I would mind getting all tangled up in whatever intriguing persona Paige was. However innocent. She had a girl-next-door attractiveness to her. Not to mention the banter between us had me intrigued. But this was between her and the private part of me. The part no one else besides me got to see. The part of me that I wish I could bring to the surface.

I knew it was forward of me. It was forward for even someone she knew to suggest. To give a woman a taste of desire only worked if there was some underlying chemistry. If not, it was like trying to make out with a door. Considering there were some erotic books on the subject, I still didn't want to force it.

The look she continued to give me was something that hovered between total disgust and utter shock. There was no way she was going to go for it.

"You know what? Fuck it. Let's do it."

That was the last thing I expected to come out of her pretty little mouth. I swallowed back my surprise. Shit, I didn't exactly have a plan to go with an agreement. But being a suave businessman, I could think quickly on my feet.

"I'll make sure to help you to the best of my capabilities. But feel free to stop me whenever you want. The point isn't to make you uncomfortable but to do the opposite. It'll be good for your writer's block." Despite her still-bristled state, I attempted to calm her with a gentle caress down her arm. My fingers slipped down to cup her palm before I brought her knuckles to my lips. "A beautiful woman like you really shouldn't have zero clue about

romance. It's a crime. I'll make up for what all of my colleagues failed to do."

Damn, if she was going to react like this to my every attempt at making her swoon, I would get addicted to the heat in her cheeks faster than I wanted to admit. Romance technically wasn't in my wheelhouse. Could I do it? Sure. I'd read enough romances written by women to know what a typical woman was after. All of which was very uncharacteristic of the glamazons I've dated.

They loved fancy dinners, fast cars, expensive gifts, and only the best roses. But the only emotion they had behind it was how big of a carat of Tiffany's engagement ring they could weasel out of me. Which was why I never let any of them stick around for long.

Paige didn't need any of that. She didn't need meaningless trinkets. What she needed was to feel a man's hands on her. To attempt to quell that unholy ache and need between her thighs to the point that she could no longer make any rational decisions. Where the only thing one could focus on was quenching that undeniable want. No matter the cost.

I couldn't just take the woman from 0 to 60 in five seconds. I'd have to slowly build up to that sort of desire. Hell, I probably *shouldn't* get her to that height of need. I doubted she wanted to sleep with a random-as-fuck stranger on her writers' retreat weekend. I knew I didn't come for that. I came to write in what little time I could manage.

I had to start from nothing beyond exterior appearances. It would be a process to figure out what made her tick, but that was part of the fun. Bring the heat to her. She needed to be inspired. From the fire that I saw in her eyes and the incredible manuscript I read, sans the lack of romantic chemistry, she had it in her. And hell if I didn't want to read her book whenever she got to publishing it.

I felt like it reminded me of something I'd read before. It wasn't a rip-off, but the flow and style were similar. For some reason, I couldn't put my finger on the title.

My one hand continued to brush the pad of my thumb against her knuckles while my other reached out and gently cupped the corner of her jaw. I was the one in charge here but the moment she wet her lips had me grasping to keep a hold of my cool. One of us had to remain the bigger person. Even if she went out of her damn mind, I had to be the sober person and not take advantage of her. This was to inspire her to write. Not to give in to temptation.

“Listen,” My voice came out a bit raspier than I meant so I cleared my throat and my head. “Here’s the plan: We’re going to sit and write today. You have an incredible story that you’re telling. I don’t want you to hold it back on account of your characters fizzling in the fireworks department. As long as you’re a willing student, we should be able to break through that block of yours.”

Her skin was so soft under my touch. This time she didn’t flinch but leaned in a bit into the caress of my hand. It would have been an incredible moment to share a kiss...

But that was too intimate. Too intimate for the whole point of this exercise.

“O-Okay...” Her answer was shaky but at least she was on board.

“I’m going to go get breakfast. Why don’t you go grab your laptop and we can meet up where we were yesterday?”

I got a timid nod in response before I managed to let her go. She grabbed the papers with my notes and left without a word or as much as a second glance in my direction. I took the moment of privacy to get my thoughts, and body, back in order.

Leaning against the wall, my head drooped towards the floor as I tried to make sense of why the fuck my body decided to enjoy Paige’s teasing. My free hand reached down to rearrange my softening cock in my jeans. If I was going to get through this without doing something stupid myself, I had to have my wits about me. Which meant telling my dick to calm the fuck down and get with the educational program.

If I was going to get any work done, I needed to eat something. And no, that didn’t involve shoving my face between Paige’s legs like my brain suggested with a rather sultry visual. God-fucking-dammit. This shit was purely business.

I chased my bran muffin down with a coffee. Not exactly the most well-rounded breakfast but it would do the trick in the meantime. Part of me was eager to get to Paige. Did that little sneaky rendezvous in the hallway offer any inspiration? I was curious to find out.

To my delight, I found her on the sofa in the solarium. There were fewer people in the room than yesterday. I stood in the doorway and watched her for a bit.

She was scrunched down on the velvet cushion with the laptop in her lap. Her nose was wrinkled from her look of concentration. I could barely

make out the smattering of freckles on it as she sat in the ray of sun from one of the expansive windows. Her dark flaxen hair was up in a ponytail. She wore fewer layers today with a slim-fitting long-sleeved ribbed shirt with a deep V-neck that was tucked into her skinny jeans.

Her fingers worked furiously across the keyboard. I hoped she was adding to her story as my marked-up notes were spread across her thigh and spilled out onto the cushion next to her. Maybe this was going to work out after all.

I made my way over and eased myself down next to her, careful to avoid her work. She didn't look up; her concentration glued to the screen. Well damn, if that little trick in the hallway was all it took, then I did a fucking good job. Maybe I could get back on track instead of being distracted by golden-haired writers.

Opening up my laptop, I set to work. It didn't take me long to get immersed back into my world. Typically, I had to ease myself back into things before I got the words flowing freely. Maybe that little interaction in the hall did something for me too. Not that my book had any romance in it. But I suppose it got the blood flowing *somewhere*.

Around lunchtime, a disgruntled huff sounded from next to me. That furrowed brow was back along with a vigorous chewing of her lower lip. I wanted to thumb it out from her worrying teeth and give her something else to suck on.

Shit, no.

Business. This was just business.

“Something wrong?”

Paige shifted in her seat with a disgruntled look. She seemed hesitant to look in my direction. I was curious as to why, since she had spent the better part of the morning typing right along with me.

“It's gone.” she reluctantly muttered.

I cocked my brow at her.

“What is?”

“Whatever...*the fuck* you did this morning.” Her hand swept in front of her dramatically. I swallowed back my chuckle as she looked perturbed. I had a feeling that she wasn't the type of person one wanted to piss off. She was little, but she was fierce. Even in the hours I'd known her, I understood that much. Although, there wasn't anything wrong with a feisty woman...

I knew exactly what she meant. But the whole point of this exercise was

for her to feel the tension, the *want*. The attentions this morning was seemingly a *rousing* success. And she was hungry for more. At least she understood the assignment.

Smiling, I slid the hand closest to her under her pile of papers strewn over her thigh. Her entire leg went rigid under my touch and I relished in it. It was like she was a cat, wound up and ready to attack. I toyed my fingers along the neutral zone, halfway up her thigh but dipped them in towards the inside. The fabric of her jeans was hot from the motor of her laptop. I only hoped to add to the uncomfortable heat.

She needed another taste.

Who was I to deny her?

“You know what one feeling of desire is?” I leaned in close and made sure that my lips were teasingly close to the curve of her ear, “It's the feeling of being unable to stop looking at a person. Stealing glances at their profile while they're hard at work. Inching closer to them on a couch for no reason other than to feel their warmth.”

I pulled away abruptly and from the corner of my gaze, watched her jaw drop. I knew this push and pull was frustrating. That was the whole point. She needed to feel it herself so, in turn, her characters could feel it. And her readers needed to feel it along with them.

“You know...things like that. Maybe keep it in mind while you're working. Don't resist whatever comes to you either. It's important to go with the flow.” My tone was nonchalant as if I was talking about the weather. I pretended to turn my attention back to my laptop, but my peripheral watched her like a hawk.

Without looking at her, I shifted in my seat a bit. The sofa was small. While our legs didn't touch yet, they were only inches away from brushing against each other. She remained quiet for some time. I tried to tell myself to continue to work instead of waiting with bated breath.

“What comes to mind...?” The words tangled with her tongue as much as her brain seemingly did around the meaning of my words.

“Well...” *Fuck, this was difficult to explain.* “You know that little voice in your head that tells you to do something but you always ignore it? Or perhaps you never take the initiative. I'm not exactly sure of your hesitation towards approaching men.” It gutted me to be brutally honest with her, but she needed to hear it. Especially if she was willing to do anything to get her book to publication. “That's the thing you should just do with me. Otherwise,

you won't experience these feelings...these urges, *properly*."

There it was. That enticing, heated blush upon her cheeks. If this woman could ever manage a stoic look, her blush would always be her tell.

Part of me wondered if this was all just an act. I've had women do worse and even more outlandish things to try to snag me. A fake pregnancy test (that one happened a few times), stole (and used) my credit card as a ruse to get me to come and find it (and her), showed up to my apartment or office in some state of undress. The list went on.

She could be playing "all innocent" just to get me to touch her. I wasn't exactly flaunting my wealth around, but it was one of the things that she zeroed in on. Or the less likely option was that she was as naïve as she admitted.

There was no way that I'd have missed the way she reacted to just my hand on her thigh. It was almost more intimate than a hand *elsewhere*, something that only a significant other would do. But it was fairly basic Flirting 101 knowledge. And she needed another lesson.

I pulled out the trusty ol' "stretch and put your arm behind her on the couch" move. Her shoulders jumped with the brushing contact of my arm. I didn't go in for the full kill, just the subtle tease. My arm wasn't super close, but she could easily feel the weight of it pressing the cushion down behind her neck. The move allowed me to lean back in and dip my mouth back in close to her.

"Kind of like this morning... When I had you pinned against the wall. Caged underneath me." I was sure to speak husky and low. "That little voice inside of me was telling me to grind my hips into yours. To hold them still as I pressed myself against you. To let you feel that *hard desire* I keep hidden away, saved for those nights I have a woman in my bed."

I gave her a moment to breathe. At least I hoped she would take a breath soon. I didn't exactly want to put a fluster death on my dating resume. Reluctantly I pulled back and immediately felt her deep inhaled breath. My eyes went to the bounce of her chest with the sudden intake. That unruly stirring between my legs threatened to firm up and make itself known.

"But I didn't. You need to take this initiative of what you want yourself. I want you to *listen* to that voice. It'll lead you in the right direction. At least, from the female perspective."

Silence lingered between us as she stared straight ahead. From my position, I could see the rapid flicker of her pulse in the column of her throat.

My mouth watered at the sudden flash of an image of me suckling that exact spot with open-mouthed kisses.

"You didn't really think that..." Her blue eyes gave me a wary side glance without her moving her head. The words were dry on her parted lips. "...did you...?"

"Maybe." I shrugged and moved back to my side of the sofa. Our bodies were still close, but I turned my attention away from Paige and back to my laptop. I felt that I made it fairly obvious that I would be game to do such things to her. Since she didn't have the experience, I had to disregard her cluelessness as not being able to read signals.

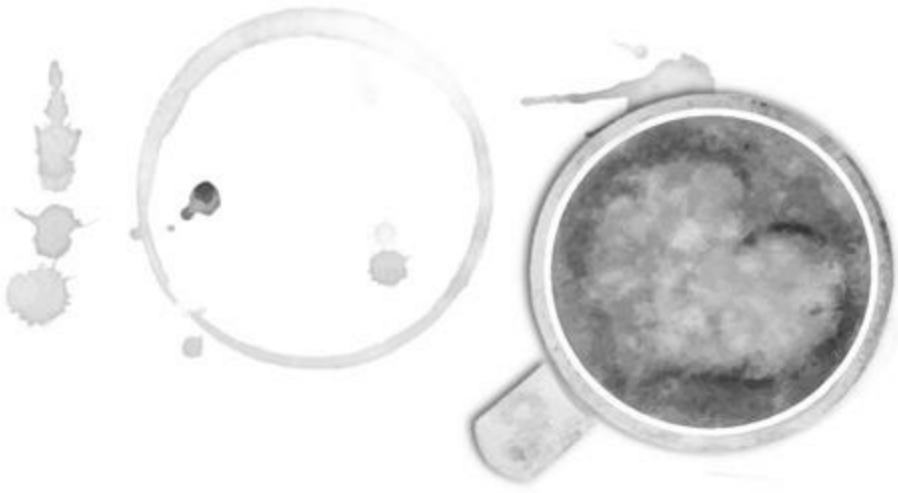
Did Paige think that I'd offer to do all this just because I was willing to help another writer? I mean, yes, I wouldn't mind helping another writer. But if she needed this whole situation dragged out even more, I wouldn't mind getting my dick wet either. I wonder what shades of pink she would blush when I'm cock-deep inside her?

We were complete opposites in this regard, as well as a few others. She didn't have the know-how or experience with others, and I spoke passion as if it were my primary language. I usually had to go out of my way to *not* flirt with women I came across.

"I'm not going to give you that answer right away. Otherwise, it'll end up just like your book: hitting the notes properly but failing on the execution. I'm going to make you think about just what's going on in my mind, just like your heroine should be thinking about what's going on with her love interest."

Minute by minute this was a lot more fun than I thought it'd be. We'd only just begun this little experiment and it was only lunch time. There was so much more fun to be had. That is...if she wanted to go all in. Then things would only get more intimate as the weekend went on.

"You don't want to just flip to the last couple of pages in the love story, right? What's the fun in that? Instead, you're going to have to peel back the layers I've hidden behind to discover just what I'm hiding from you."



Chapter 9

Paige

I could have punched him.

Every time he opened that delicious mouth of his I wanted to pound my fist into those perfectly bleached teeth. He was so full of himself. So incorrigible.

So why was this stupid experiment *working*?

I'd written over 2,000 words in just over three hours. That was almost a new record for me. Scenes were flowing much more easily. Penn wrote detailed notes and suggestions with so many good ideas. The one thing he didn't do was rewrite anything. He just gave me a hearty shove in certain directions. He seemingly opened the door to my creativity.

Between his notes and hands-on experiences, inspiration was flowing out of me faster than my fingers could scramble coherent words into the keyboard of my laptop. With each note and section of the manuscript that I fixed, the closer I got to that confounded scene. The scene where my characters wanted to, so desperately, consummate their relationship.

Over the past five years, I'd written two-and-a-half books of the most epic of slow burns in fantasy history. If I'd been reading the series myself, I would have screamed and thrown my book across the room in sheer frustration. That would be before I picked it back up, hugged it, and apologized to the inanimate, but beloved, object for the hurt I caused.

My characters adored each other. They were incredible friends who didn't want to compromise their treasured friendship. Even though their bodies and circumstances were beyond their control, they kept pulling themselves closer and closer together. To the point that it was now inevitable.

Penn's questionable...*teasing* still had my mind reeling. I never had a man come at me like that. It was weirdly *thrilling*. My heart leaped up into my throat as my body's check engine light kicked on simultaneously. The heated flashover that started from my toes before it escaped out of the top of my scalp left me breathless. My body had a similar reaction to Ewan McGregor belting out 'Your Song' in the middle of *Moulin Rouge*.

Except Penn's intensity was way more searing hot.

Like bordering on the sultry vibes of the covers of bodice-ripper romances hot.

But WHY?

Why was he so different? What made my body react to him so viscerally? Maybe all that money he quietly flaunted got him women to practice on. He could be a Hugh Hefner wannabe in the making. Maybe he had a different woman in his bed every weekend. With all that practice he would know his way around a woman's body.

The thought made me squirm in my seat. But nothing about playboy asshole men appealed to me. Except he didn't *seem* like an asshole. Womanizer sure, but not an ass. Maybe his being a connoisseur was the part that was sending my brain into constant loop-de-loops.

I shot a glance at Penn, who wasn't paying attention to me at the moment. He was engrossed in his project. His hands made quick work of his keyboard as he zoned out writing.

How could he go from something so sexually intense to looking like he was ready for a Sunday sermon? Meanwhile, it was the equivalent of the Florida Everglades in my panties. It was times like these that I was beyond giddy that I didn't have a dick. I probably would have lost all brain function just from the sheer amount of blood flowing between my legs if I had such an appendage.

Oddly enough Penn's actions did the trick. I needed that metaphorical sexy slap in the face to get my brain back on track and focused. I probably could have hired a hot escort for half the price that I paid for this trip. Then I could have at least stayed home in my pajamas.

The thing that frustrated me now was that I needed that male perspective. I needed to know what was going on in my character's head as he looked at my female lead. What he felt. Emotionally and physically. I had no experience on the matter as I already established that I was very much thankful that I didn't have a dick.

How the hell would I ask Penn such a question? *Excuse me, sir, what does it feel like when your dick gets all hard when you look at a woman?* Not exactly the most eloquent thing to bring up in conversation with a man that I'd known for less than two days. And as much as I wanted to know how his brain processed things, he said I had to *work* for it.

What the fuck did that mean? Did I have to play 20 Questions? Did I have to make a foolish attempt to sexually tease him right back? Dammit,

why were men so damn confusing. This was why I avoided the whole dating game in the first place.

Okay fine. If I wanted to hit 3,000 words before lunch, then I needed to play his game. I was fairly certain that I understood the rules enough at least.

“Penn?”

“Hmm?” His fingers flowed across the keyboard while his eyes stayed glued to the screen. I shifted my body more toward him and moved my laptop to my knee furthest from him. That way he had no obstacles to block his way. I swallowed back my trepidation and steeled my resolve.

“Touch me.” That red-hot flush returned to the extremities of my body as I saw him freeze mid-type. I had to keep my voice low so no one nearby would get wind of our questionable exercise. Maybe he wasn’t sure if he heard me correctly. “Touch me. *Again.*”

I was surprised by my firm and sure tone. How the hell did I muster up that confidence? At least it didn’t sound as desperate for his touch as my body felt. Stupid sexy man.

“Well...that’s one way to go about it, I suppose.” He chuckled as he turned his attention back to me. “But typically...you make an *action* instead of a demand.” Placing his laptop on the coffee table in front of us, he made a subtle scoot of his body toward mine. My hackles rose subconsciously but I remained still, despite my body screaming to make a run for it.

Casually, he leaned his elbow onto the plush cushion of the back of the sofa as the other slowly reached out to graze against the curve of my knee. I couldn’t help my startle, even though I knew it was coming. I couldn’t tear my eyes away from his hand. So strong and broad...

As soon as his fingertips made contact with my clothed knee, a tide of desire started to lick its way outward and deeper into my body with each passing second. I bit my bottom lip with his laugh. Now I was once again worried that I was going about this all wrong.

Despite his reprimand, he moved in to touch me. I desperately tried to choke back a small, crooning noise in the back of my throat as I felt his fingertips caress slowly up my leg. My eyes fluttered closed as I took it all in.

After the initial fluster, I attempted to concentrate on my body’s reaction. I was doing this to take notes for my novel. As distracting as this all was, I had to pay attention. I took a shaky breath and focused on the heat in my cheeks, my increased heart rate, the temperature rise, and the...*want* for

more. The weight of his hand against my body was delicious and the rabid anticipation of where it would trail next left me yearning.

I leaned in towards him, as my shoulder rested against his bicep along the back of the sofa.

"Is it supposed to feel like I'm reading one of those trashy romances?" I breathlessly whispered. I hadn't ever experienced a touch from a man that warranted a feeling other than disgust or absolutely nothing. What was it supposed to feel like? Was it supposed to feel like a five-alarm fire going off in my underwear? I was pretty sure that feeling a burning sensation there meant something bad was going on.

His hand started to move up and down my thigh slowly. No grand motions, it seemed that he was just keeping me aware of the presence and weight of his hand. It was mindless for the most part. Almost like he was petting an animal.

"I wasn't exactly going for that feeling, but it's not a bad one to be on the receiving end of. I wanted you to feel a longing sense of desire for more, but it seems like I overdid it a tad with the things I said." My brow arched in question as I reopened my eyes to look at him.

I chewed on my lower lip, flushed with some odd mixture of anxiety and want. I only meant for him to grip me for a good ten seconds to make my heart race again. Not for this deliciously slow onslaught. Although, I wasn't complaining.

"A tad?!" I squeaked out.

He leaned in even closer, his lips nearly flushed against my jaw. "You're turned on, right?" *Something like that.* "I could move my hand up ever so slightly. I'm so...*close*. Brush the tips of my fingers over your heat. No one would see what was happening. The teasing you're receiving. The anticipation for what was to come if we were alone..."

If the sofa had been a human being, I would have strangled the thing to death ten seconds ago from the sheer grip of both my hands on the cushions. I could feel the heat of his words against my prickled skin. My blood furiously flowed through my ears, almost drowning him out. It was becoming difficult to breathe. As much as I was vaguely aware of us being in a public place, I was more than willing to listen to this sensual tale play out.

"What would your characters think at this moment? Finally, they get a rest during their journey, or maybe they need to stop due to a storm. Perhaps they're sitting at a tavern table. Emotions are high, who knows if they'll see

another sunset after this night. Maybe they should finally give in. Everyone knows they are attracted to each other but neither will admit it. The reader is annoyed because they want it to happen. Their fellow party members are annoyed because they keep messing up trying to act normal. It's obvious to everyone but the main characters."

His hand started to deliberately move, higher and higher up my leg. "Wouldn't now be the perfect time to give in?"

My hand shot out to grab onto his folded knee close to my hip. I dug my nails into the fabric of his jeans in a vain effort to ground myself on this wild ride. There was the subtle flex of his hand even more toward the apex of my thighs.

I gritted my teeth and softly groaned out, "I really want to fucking throw you, or my laptop, across the damn room right now. But I can't decide which."

"You probably shouldn't do either of those." Penn leaned back away from me and stopped his hand when it was a few fingers' width away from the apex of my thigh. I had to choke back a frustrated groan. "I think you at least understand what I was going for there. You should start writing again before you forget the feeling you have right now." Pulling away fully, he shot me a disgusting wink. "I'll help you remember when you need to though."

Penn gave me a cock-eyed grin and went back to typing as he continued with the lesson. "The sexual tension should be easy to picture now. At least, I can see it in my mind. Your characters really do come to life. Their stories aligned perfectly for their romance to take form. Despite you not wanting this, you did set it up beautifully. It's the author's job to see it the rest of the way. I want to see you do it and show everyone that you're as good of a writer as they believe."

If I wasn't so damn turned on right now, I probably would have hugged him. That was an unexpectedly sweet compliment from an equally unexpected sort of man. What kind of enigma was he? It wasn't very common that I got such candid feedback from a fellow writer. I don't think I've ever had such a thing, especially notes that weren't from an editor or my agent.

Now I was even more flustered. How the hell a compliment about my writing could get me as revved up as one of Penn's touches only confused me further. Were compliments supposed to be a turn-on? Could they be? I vaguely remembered some romance trope subgenre's reference to a praise

kink.

Great.

Add that to the untouched tally board of things that unexpectedly turn me on. Although it was probably my fault for doing my sexual research with fictional books instead of men from reality. Of course, my overly visual brain took that moment to showcase a trailer for the new film of me in bed naked with Penn while he whispered compliments about my writing while I moaned excessively.

“Are you alright? I...didn’t go too far, did I?” Penn’s blue eyes looked at me with genuine concern. I pressed my hand to my cheek to almost have it sear the skin of my palm. Dammit, why did he have to have a soul behind that model body with a playboy personality?

“N-No. No. I-I’m okay.” My tongue felt like it swelled to a size three times its normal size. “Just...flustered is all.”

“Good.” The smirk that he paired with a chuckle had me overheating all over again. *Dammit, body! We are not descending into the chaos of a praise kink right now.* “I think it’s time for lunch now. Want to grab some, recharge, and see what we can get into this afternoon?” Fuck my body for thinking that the invitation included some afternoon delight. A soft pink ripened the apples of Penn’s prominent cheekbones as he closed his laptop. “Uh...sorry. Poor turn of phrase.”

“I’m not gonna lie but that’s exactly where my brain went.” *Confounded word vomit!* Despite my body having no chill with my brain, his devilish little grin made the uncomfortable awkwardness worth it.

“Maybe we can get your body there as well.”



Chapter 10

Penn

So much for getting any further work done. Paige and I wandered off to lunch and ended up getting caught up in character-building conversations. As much as I wanted to fluster her further, talking trade secrets with her was by far sexier than seeing her naked.

Ah, well... I suppose that remained to be seen.

Literally.

Not that I hadn't thought about dragging the poor woman back to my room and showing her how it's *physically* done. She was petite and a bit more filled out in the curves department than the supermodel types who would throw themselves at me. I'd been a bit curious about what she looked like under her layers.

I couldn't get distracted. This was my only chance to write without judgment or question from anyone. I could do what I love without the business getting in the way.

But Paige... Paige seemed like a fun way to unite both worlds.

Unfortunately, she was too...*innocent* to corrupt like that. The poor woman jumped every time I touched her. Except the last time when she asked for it. *Asked for it*. She wanted more.

I wasn't going to kid myself and say that it didn't affect me. Because it really fucking did. This was supposed to be an *innocent* exercise. But if my dick had anything to say about it, it was anything *but* innocent.

Thankfully the rest of the afternoon remained uneventful. I had a chance to cool down my cock and Paige had a chance to get her mojo back in line and on target. Being in Paige's presence inspired me a bit too.

This wasn't a one-sided agreement. It started that way, but Paige was more than happy to help me at every chance I got stuck. Her tongue would dart out to wet her lower lip as she finished up her typing before she answered me. There was always some shadow of a delighted smile that would flash across those kissable lips.

The mere fact that she wanted to help me gave her all the kudos in my book. She was insightful with an unmatched imagination. Her intensity about writing was a surprise as it came out in the sparkle in her eyes, the fluid

movement of her hands, and the ease of her words as she spoke.

The way she could fully understand a character from a small description, a quick backstory, and a few choices they faced was by far her most impressive talent. She even offered conversation ideas, responses, and actions. Items and quirks that I hadn't even thought of. No wonder her characters seemed so incredibly real. Despite her book being in the fantasy genre, she made every single one of her characters imperfectly human.

With our more deeply established candor, the writing hours of the afternoon flew by. Paige looked rather content with how her project was progressing. There had been barely any further noises of frustration or furrowed brows.

By the time the dinner hour rolled around, I was mentally done with writing. After almost ten hours of intense typing, one's brain just needed a break. It didn't mean that I was ready to stop spending time with Paige though.

She was difficult *not* to like. Our conversation ebbed and flowed with dizzying ease. The only other person I had this sort of candor with was my assistant. And I was pretty sure that was only because I'd been working with the man for the past 10 years. He barely tolerated my hard-ass ways and crazy schedule. But he tolerated it because I paid him well for his talents in making my life less complicated.

What was Paige? Were we dipping into friend territory? Colleagues? Considering how much I'd felt her up this weekend, we were passed that. Muses? Being a muse sounded incredibly sexy. I could see her as that. But maybe she didn't ever want to speak to me past this weekend. And it wasn't like me to get personally attached to anyone.

"I don't know about you, but I think my brain is done." Paige glanced at me mid-bite. With all the hours we'd spent together today, it almost felt odd to be outside of her presence. I wasn't exactly ready to part from her for the night. Our dinner conversation drifted between more personal tidbits, to our work, and we even touched upon some of our favorite books.

"Agreed!" She sat back with a laugh as she sipped at the remainder of her glass. "Do you think there's anything good on TV?"

"I wouldn't know. I don't watch it."

"I guess there's always reading-"

"Maybe...a walk?" I interrupted her with my suggestion. When I was home, I enjoyed my time in the gym. As much as I liked the break, I had

extra *energy* to dispel. “I think I need some fresh air after being locked in a room of stressed-out writers for two days.”

Paige snorted in amusement before it dissolved into embarrassed giggles. “Ah...sorry. Not exactly lady-like.”

“No worries.” I laughed. “It’s...cute.”

“Cute?! Now I know you’re full of it. Please don’t tell me that you say that sort of shit to your model girlfriends.”

“They don’t snort.”

“Great.” The roll of her eyes made me grin. She had such sass that paired up well with her passive-aggressive attitude. The woman had life and humor; I’ll give her that. She had more dimension in her little finger than most of the glamazons had in their entire body.

“It’s endearing.”

“You’re not helping your case.”

“You didn’t agree to take a walk with me yet.” I gave her my best manly charms as I folded my arms and leaned my elbows onto the table. The tips of her ears went red as she gave me a look reminiscent of a mouse cornered by a house cat.

“I...”

“I figured we both needed a mental break. Right...?”

“I-uh... Well...you’re not wrong.”

“Then say yes.”

There was some internal conversation behind her wild eyes. “Fine.”

“That wasn’t a yes.” I relished the sight of her as she squirmed in her seat.

“Yes, dammit.”

“Language.” I teased, just to watch her bristle.

“You’re incorrigible.”

“I try. So...a walk?” *Dammit, stop trying to sound so desperate and anxious. Get your shit together.* “I figured we could take our stuff back to our rooms and grab our coats and boots. Rendezvous in ten minutes in the lobby?”

“I...uh, sounds good.” I felt a little bad for leaving her without a choice, but hell I wanted just ten minutes alone with her. With a winning smile, I rose from the table and cleared our plates. She lingered with our stuff until I wandered back. We parted ways with a lingering glance. I couldn’t help but find myself looking forward to our after-hours wander.

The conversation over dinner was causal, lighthearted, and just so... easy. No meaningless drivel just to keep the evening going. We spoke to each other as if we'd been doing this for far longer than a good part of 48 hours.

I didn't exactly want to admit it, but pulling Paige from the eyes of the public and into something much more private was a bit enthralling. Considering what she had let me get away with on the sofa in the solarium made me wonder what exactly she'd let me do to her if we were alone. I wondered if she was having just as much fun as I was with our banter. Which was admittedly a lot.

Dropping my messenger bag in my room, I grabbed my outdoor gear and ankle snow boots and tugged them on as I headed for the door. I turned the corner and found Paige anxiously awaiting me in the lobby by the door. She was decked out from head to toe in winter gear. Duck boots, gloves, a puffy coat, and a matching heavy knit scarf and hat with a puff ball on the top. Of course, each piece was coordinated. She had impeccable taste in her casual wardrobe.

Paige shoved her hands into the pockets of her coat as she headed out the door. The look on her face read something along the lines of reluctance and anxiety. Maybe she wasn't much of an outdoorsy person. Considering the air temp, I didn't think we'd be outside for very long.

Her stride had a purpose to it as snow drifted on the front sidewalk under her stomping feet. I used my longer legs to keep up with her brisk pace. And just in the nick of time. A hidden hazard of black ice sent her reeling back towards me.

I reacted in the blink of an eye and caught her before she even knew what happened. Her earnest blue eyes sparkled up at me in the dim moonlight. From some unknown power I felt myself leaning in closer...and closer...

"Y-You don't have to keep trying to seduce me." Her words hit me like a slap to my face as she scrambled out of my arms. "W-We aren't even writing now. I'm...good." I closed the gap between us that she had firmly set.

"Maybe I like doing it."

"You are so full of shit." Her laughter pierced the quiet and she abruptly turned to keep walking. I only let her get a few steps before I grabbed onto her wrist and spun her around. Her breasts hit my chest with a swish of our coats' fabric. My hands shot to her waist and I kept her pinned against me. Paige struggled but it only made this little cat-and-mouse game ever more

enticing.

“What if I’m not?” My breathy words caused her entire body to freeze, and not from the cold. “You’re an excellent judge of character... Analyze me.” I could see the inner workings of her brain as it ran complex calculations. Shifting my hands, I let them slip up under the bottom hem of her coat as I kept a firm grip on her. An aggressive puff of condensation escaped her lips as her breath caught.

“I-”

“I told you that you need to peel back the layers,” I whispered to her as my nose brushed hers. “Find out what makes a man tick.”

“T-That’s easy...” My brow rose in silent question. “Y-Y-You think with your dick.” I could tell she was trying so hard to be a smart ass, but it was a struggle.

“Some do.” With a soft shuffle forward, my hands slowly slid from their hold on her waist down the curve of her ass. Her back went board-straight as her eyes went wide. “And yet, maybe... I crave intelligence, banter... Maybe...a writer like me.” My lips were so close to hers. After all the teasing I did to her today, I wanted nothing more than to bend her over and take her from behind in the cold shadows. She needed to be on board to take this experiment further. I had to go in for the kill.

In one fell swoop, I took a hearty step back and released her from my hold. She caught herself from crumbling at my feet as she had placed all her weight into me. I let her stumble and catch her breath.

“But I guess you’ll just have to figure out the coupling logistics for your characters.” I shrugged and turned to continue on the barely cleared path around the hotel.

“Wait.” Her voice was soft, unsure but there was something behind it that made me pause. “Were you...serious...? With what you said...” I came to a stop and glanced back over my shoulder at her as she fidgeted on the sidewalk. “...about me...?”

“Why do you ask?” My feet stilled, and the eerie quiet of the winter snow surrounded us. It was almost deafening. I could feel the rapid beating of my heart in my throat. Was she about to ask...?

“I... Okay. Fuck.” Her eyes clamped shut. “Because the bullshit you pulled today really...*worked*. And I’m still stressed out about them... consummating *things*. I...want to know what it...*feels like*. That passion... that heat.” Her voice softened from her anxiety-riddled tirade. “You gave me

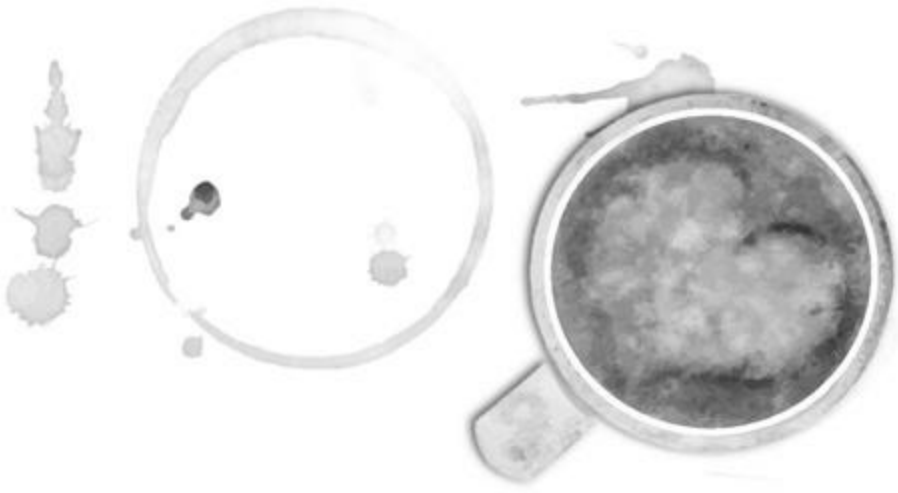
a taste of it today.” My eyes watched the strain on her face as she slowly admitted her sins to me. There was a visual bob in her throat as she swallowed back enough of that anxiety to finish her speech. “But...I think...I need the *whole thing*.”

Shit, she was so sweetly innocent in going about this. Fuck if it didn't make my cock twitch to life. As much as I wanted to follow its lead, I needed that full, concrete form of consent from her. Playboy cunt-lover or not, I never took a woman without her permission first.

“What are you asking, Paige?” I let my lips and tongue curl around her name just to watch her face shift from the unexpected personalization. It threw her off and the silence carried with her hesitation. “I can't give it to you if you don't ask for it. I need to know what you want.”

“I...I...” Her shoulders shuddered with each uneasy breath. “I want you to kiss me.” The words tumbled out all at once in one seemly short puff of air. It wasn't exactly what I thought she was after. *Thanks, dick*. But I'd take it.

“One of these days...” I stalked her frozen form from down the sidewalk. Despite her looking like some mix of excitement and terror, she stayed completely still as my hands found their place in a possessive hold on her hips. “You're just going to need to take what you want.” I pulled her hips tight against mine before my hand shot up and cupped her jaw. My fingers tangled into the hair that tumbled out of her beanie before I pulled her in for a kiss.



Chapter 11

Paige

If someone had told me that I'd kiss a hot-as-fuck stranger before this stupid writers' retreat was through, I would have laughed in their face. Yet here I was, in the silence of the winter's night, under the glow of the moonlight, in the shadow of a ski lodge, with my lips intimately locked with a man who *knew* how to fucking kiss.

Like...goddamn, what the fuck? How could I *feel* such a simple touch? A touch that ran a heated onslaught straight down to my frozen toes. My body came alive with a desperate electricity that thawed me from the inside out. How was it so...*good*? I was this close to climbing onto his body like a damn spider monkey, just to keep him glued there so I could drink in my fill.

What started as a chaste attachment quickly turned into him slanting his mouth against mine as he pulled me in deeper. There was an entanglement of lips and tongue. I was pretty sure that my life flashed before my eyes at one point. It felt like I was watching a pot of water as it came to a boiling point.

Penn's hands unexpectedly wandered, stalking over my body to stake their claim. I heard the subtle thrum of a zipper before I felt the chill against the bare skin of my sternum. That fucker unzipped my coa-

Oh fuck.

His touch was hungry as it palmed over my breast. First, it was teasing until I made some sort of whining noise in his mouth. Then it went into a full-out groping massage. My body subconsciously arched into his touch, craving more. So much more.

Answering my body's call, his left hand moved down to cradle the small of my back as his other worked its magic under my coat. I couldn't help the full-body shudder of delight. For the moment, I didn't care that we were in full view of several first-floor hotel rooms. I didn't care that I was subconsciously making questionable noises in my delight. All I could focus on was how incredible his touch made me feel. How it left me craving...*more*.

Just as I thought I was about to run out of oxygen, Penn's lips left mine. I gasped out into the night, drawing a stinging breath of icy air into my overheated lungs. The pain of the chilly inhale was masked by the feeling of

his mouth as it traced along my jaw. My hips writhed from the attention and bumped into a questionable hardness.

The thought of him being aroused by me made me whimper into the night. How was this sex god of a man, aching for *me*? The thought scrambled my brain into an uncontrollable need. My hands shot out to grip his coat, pulling him against me as firmly as he held me against him. I needed to hold on for dear life, lest I collapse straight onto the sidewalk.

Penn's mouth suckled on my pulse point and my eyes rolled back into my head. This was all going sideways in an unexpected way.

"Oh god, Penn...don't stop..." I almost didn't recognize my voice as it begged in a sultry whine.

"I don't think...you want to say that..." His words were searing hot against my collarbone. "Unless...you're an exhibitionist..." I could hear the smirk in his tone, even though I couldn't see it.

"N-No..."

"Then maybe...we should get inside..."

"In-Inside...?"

"My room, or yours?" Penn pulled away with some reluctance, but he seemed determined to see the look in my eyes. My heart was pounding furiously. Did I want this? As much as my body screamed yes, my brain hesitated.

It was uninhibited sex with an almost stranger. An extremely hot, and passionate stranger. And yet he had a kindness about him that left me in a quandary in the first place. He should have just been the asshole, snooty, playboy. But now that I'd gotten to know him... My body was doing everything in its power to persuade my brain to join "Team Sexy Weekend".

"Mine." I don't know how I managed to form words as my brain swam in some sort of sex-fueled delirium. The only reasoning I could manage in one hot second was if he came to my room, I could kick him out if it went sideways. On the other hand, if it went well, I wouldn't be the one doing the walk of shame in the morning.

Penn gave me one more hearty kiss before he threaded my arm around his. I was thankful for that as due to the pure shock of agreeing to such a thing, I wasn't exactly sure if I could walk and not look like a drunken idiot. Oh hell, why was I doing this?

"Room?"

"Uh...1225." I barely paid attention to the smooth grin he flashed me as

we slipped into an awaiting elevator. The moment the doors closed; Penn pulled the same move from yesterday. I felt the chill of the metal walls of the elevator through my coat against my back. Without wasting a second, his mouth was back on mine.

Oh, right. This was why I did something completely out of character for me. His incredible kisses had me convinced all over again that this was the correct idea.

There was also the little thing about writing my book.

This whole idea started because of my hang-up about writing a sex scene and having it be convincing. It's been god only knows how long since I had sex with an actual human being and not some battery-powered, disembodied appendage. I hadn't primped and preened or had a chance to groom to impress. Thankfully I shaved my legs within the last 24 hours, so I didn't have to contend with that embarrassment. Just the embarrassment of how awkward I was going to be.

Did the elevator ding? I'd lost track of where we were going with the power of Penn's mouth on mine. His hand just managed to tug my shirt out from its tuck into my jeans when the doors opened. I made an immediate beeline out before we got locked in the elevator for all eternity. Not that it would have been too terrible, it was just the fact that having sex in a bed sounded much more appealing. That was...if I didn't chicken out first.

I managed to get a far enough lead ahead of Penn so that I got my door unlocked without the distraction of him. Stumbling into my room, he was nipping at my heels. I froze right inside the foyer of my room, unsure of what to do.

"You can change your mind." Penn's soft voice jarred me back to the present as he tenderly helped me out of my coat and accessories. *Wait, say what?* A man was giving me an out? As tempted as my brain was...

"No. N-No. I-I *need* to do this." A smile quirked at the corner of his mouth as he slipped off his coat. "For my book." I was sure to remind him of that. This wasn't going to be something that involved emotions. Or well, not real ones.

This was research. Which made it slightly more agreeable to the fact that I invited a sort of stranger to my hotel room. I needed to take mental notes for my book. I needed to delve into every aspect of our interaction, physical and communication-wise.

I must have been lost in thought again. Penn's hand caressed my jaw,

jarring me back to the present.

“I think ‘need’ might be your favorite word...” The tease was thick in his sultry tone. His other hand found the untucked hem of my shirt and he slipped his fingertips up inside. My breath caught with the feel of his chilly fingers against my searing hot abdomen. “Just tell me if any of this is too much. Or if we need a safe word.”

Safe word?! How kinky was this going to get? I didn’t think I had it in me to be kinky on the first go with a man. Let alone a man I was very excited to see naked. Even with my cursed apprehension.

Millions of people had one-night stands. Carefree sex with a stranger. I had to stop being such a wuss.

“Um...maybe...go easy on me?” Gosh, that sounded so stupid and desperate. “It’s...been a while.” Fuck, that was even worse. *Brain, why can’t you be as sultry as my body right now?*

Penn chuckled as he slowly graced my chin and jaw with kisses. “I’ll start slow. Maybe work your body into a frenzy...”

My brain got on board with those promises. I gave him a subtle nod. With my unspoken agreement, he stooped down and placed his hands on the back of my thighs. Spikes of electricity shot up my back as he hefted me up into his arms. I let out a sharp noise in surprise and wrapped my arms around his neck for dear life. The man looked strong and due to my petite figure; I probably looked a hell of a lot less dense.

The man didn’t even take a rough breath. It was as if he threw around my weight regularly. Once I was sure that he wouldn’t drop me, I relaxed into the alluring position and timidly stole a kiss as he stalked across the room. Penn answered back with a hungry caress of his mouth as his hands mirrored his lips but over the plump heft of my ass.

He moved quickly and deposited me on the bed with a soft bounce. His eyes drifted to my breasts as they moved. There was a delicious fire behind those eyes. Which continued to burn as he slowly knelt in front of me.

I swear my body went into full-on freak-out mode. Who knew it was so hot to see a man on his knees in between your legs? Instead of something overtly sexual, he moved to unlacing my ankle boots, still damp with the melted snow. He was slow and deliberate, his gaze steady on mine the entire time. It was oddly erotic. Or maybe it was sweet? Gosh, my love life expectations were fucked up.

“Are you still alright?”

I swallowed dryly with a nod and croaked out, “Yep.”

“Good.” He grinned as he kicked off his boots. “This is where the fun begins.” Those blessed hands of his started at the inside of my knees and slowly caressed their way up to the apex of my thighs, nudging them apart as he went. I stopped breathing. My eyes were glued to his every move, unsure as to where he was going next.

Just as his fingertips were about to grace the junction of my thighs, they parted ways, moving up and over the tops of my legs. But his thumbs lingered, gently rubbing up and down the deep crease. He was aggravatingly close to where my body was screaming for him to touch.

“Paige...relax.” Why did he have to say my name in such a sultry manner *every* fucking time? There was a bit of a frustrated craze to my laughter.

“How can I relax? You’re literally a millimeter away from touching my vagina.”

“Would you relax more...if I touched it?” Without waiting for my answer, his thumb swiped one firm stripe up the crotch seam of my jeans. My sharp inhalation was audible. In that one fell swoop it was like he struck a match to my fuse of dynamite. My hands shot out to grab ahold of his shoulders.

Before I could comprehend just what exactly he made me do, I used the handle on his shoulders to pull him in close. I kissed him. Hard. Hard and devouring as my whole body arched forward, beckoning him in.

The move pulled Penn’s hands from their mark. My brows furrowed for a hot second before my body went back to melting under his touch. His hands found their way under the edge of my shirt. They timidly made their way up, cupping my lace-covered breasts. His hands were still chilled and caused my skin to erupt into goosebumps.

Penn leaned back slightly and in one swift tug, he had my shirt up and over my head. I stilled in surprise and had to remind myself that this was the whole point of this exercise. To get naked and fuck. All while trying to study how his and my bodies reacted to one another as we danced in this timeless coupling.

“You’re incredible.” Penn breathed out, almost under his breath. I wasn’t sure if that was a knee-jerk reaction or just another way to reassure me. He didn’t offer me much time to ruminate on the subject as his mouth was back on mine.

Now it was his turn to dive into the kiss, hungry and seemingly desperate. In the next moment, he shifted and rose to his feet, all without breaking the contact of our lips. He didn't fully stand, instead he leaned forward and pressed me back onto the bed. I was only subconsciously aware to make room for him. I scooted back awkwardly until I was somewhere in the middle of my king-sized bed.

With each move, his body shadowed over mine. The shimmy caused the straps of my bra to work their way down over my shoulders. As if he had a sexual sixth sense, Penn moved his attention to the newly revealed sliver of skin. My breasts were making me question the dexterity of my bra as they threatened to pop out of the askew cups.

Dispensing of the front clasp, he set my girls free. I squirmed uncomfortably under his scrutiny. It only lasted the briefest of moments as his mouth dove down to take a pink, stiff peak into his mouth. The man kissed me unlike any man I've ever experienced, and he made out with my breast in the same toe-curling way. Who the fuck cared that I was topless. I sure didn't anymore.

"You're a beautiful woman, Paige," Penn murmured against my breast before moving on to lavish the same attention to the other. The words left me stunned for a moment. I expected the man to be good, but I didn't expect him to woo me in the process.

"Y-You're just...saying that..." I panted out as I attempted to bite back a moan. The pressure of his suckling against my nipple was obscene. He paired it with a flick of his tongue and a scrape of his teeth. My back arched with a gasp.

Penn pulled away in question and caught my hooded gaze. "Why would I lie to you?"

I was taken aback. He made a good point. Why would he lie to me? What would he gain from lying to me? I was already ready and willing to sleep with him. He didn't have to butter me up further.

"You haven't received compliments much. Have you?" My sheepish look must have given me away. Penn kept his gaze on mine as he slowly leaned back down to press teasingly slow, open-mouthed kisses along my chest. "You *are* beautiful, Paige. And fuck if I'll ever get enough of these." He hungrily massaged my breast that was aching for attention while he lavished the other with his mouth.

It was almost painful in a way, but I could feel his touch deep into my

bones. It was so needy, all-encompassing. Without thinking, my hips bucked up against his. A wordless beckoning of my body.

“Someone is getting ahead of themselves...” His tone toyed with me as he rose onto all fours. Shifting his weight onto one hand, his other pinched my nipple between his pointer knuckle and the pad of his thumb. The pain was sharp, but not completely unpleasant. It sent a jolt of electricity straight to my vagina. “You know you can tell me if anything is too much.”

I shook my head probably a bit more vigorously than I meant as I suddenly felt dizzy. “No! I mean, no.” Tossing my head back I couldn’t help but moan as he continued more vigorously. “Fuck...it feels...*good*.”

His honeyed chuckle slipped past my ears as he leaned in close. “Let’s see what else feels good.”

I didn’t know if I should take it as a warning or a promise. My body very much wanted both for some unknown reason. I was fairly certain that my panties had melted into a molten pile of elastic goo from the sheer amount of heat radiating out between my legs.

Neither of us had to wait to figure that out as Penn moved his attention to the button and fly of my jeans. He made quick work of both before I could be embarrassed about the thought of what lay hidden beneath. I opened my mouth to warn him, but the teamwork between his mouth and tongue against my bare abdomen hushed all coherent thought.

He was teasingly slow as he slid both garments down over the jut of my hips. I felt every fiber scrape against my skin. It was agonizing but sweet torture. How the hell did people survive this? And multiple times in one day? They all had to be nuts.

“Paige,” The soft utterance of my name brought me back to the present and I glanced down at him, perched over my almost-naked body. “Relax. Enjoy this. Trust me...it’s a struggle to take it slow. Especially when I’m dying to devour you...” With his eyes still locked on mine, his mouth made contact with the skin right above my southern hairline. “Taste every inch...” A rough tug took both pieces of clothing down past my knees. “*Inside...and out.*”

In one fell swoop, he parted my knees and graced my lower lips with the same kind of mind-melting kiss he bestowed upon the lips of my mouth. My fingers curled into the bedding for dear life. It was like he attached my womanly parts to a car battery. The jolt shot up my body and shot straight out of my mouth with a shuddering moan.

It was as if he answered my body's craving and made it scream out for more all at once. My feet furiously shifted, scrambling to shove the rest of my clothes off. Penn took the freedom of my legs to benefit him. His hands cupped the underside of my thighs and shoved them apart and back towards me, opening me up to his ablutions.

Being exposed like this was unnerving. But having a gorgeous man worshiping me between my legs was something beyond my wildest dreams. The breadth of his tongue lapped at my slick entrance, easing me into his attentions. I tried to relax and enjoy myself, but he had me writhing.

His tongue moved from long laps to something that resembled Morse code that I couldn't decipher. If he meant to roll my eyes back in my head and mumble incoherently, then he unlocked the cheat code. He didn't stop there. My clit was next.

I was certain that I took out his entire front row of teeth with how hard I bucked up when he latched on to my pleasure center. It was a shock of the strongest sensation.

"Easy girl," The heat of his words traveled across my moist center. "You don't want to take me out before the real fun begins." Wait, this wasn't real fun? What the hell was it? A tea party? If he continued any longer, I'd die during my orgasm.

No man had ever taken this kind of care and attention during oral before. Sure, they attempted it, and it was okay, but Penn ate me out like he was going for a gold medal. There was finesse and hunger with every move. There wasn't a repeat move in his playbook.

With a jut of his chin, his tongue dove inside me. The vibration of his murmured approval against my highly sensitive folds caused me to whimper. His smaller, wet appendage slipped in and out of me and was sure to give my clit a resounding flick or suck with almost every withdrawal.

Just when I thought I was going to lose it, he slipped a finger inside. His groan was audible as I felt myself clutch onto the intrusion. The thrusts started gently as his mouth worked my clit. But as my hips started to follow each rock of his hand, it only encouraged him further.

Another finger slipped inside of me, stretching me out a little bit more. I was verging on the edge of chaos now. With all the sensations overwhelming each of my senses, I'd forgotten about the sheer awkwardness of the entire situation. All I could focus on was the delicious delirium that Penn was bestowing upon me.

His thumb joined his mouth and tongue against my clit, changing up the sensations as his digits inside me curled upward. My head and shoulders shot up off the bed as the pads of his fingers pressed deep into my G-spot. Over. And over. *And over again.*

My hands left their strangle of the duvet to dive straight into his perfectly styled head of hair. Tangling within the strands, I held onto him as if they were reins attached to an unhinged stallion. He needed to continue what he was doing. I was so fucking close.

Something within my taut-as-a-bowstring body must have tipped him off. I'd have to ask him later. If I remembered. But the moment he added a third finger, I tumbled over the edge with a scream that was far louder than I meant. He might also have a few new bald spots.

My back arched clear off the bed as he continued the sensations to keep my body suspended within my orgasm. I didn't know a prolonged orgasm was possible to this kind of magnitude. I felt every wave, every pulse, every mind-mumbling moment as he continued, unceasingly.

It wasn't until my body started to go limp that he gently eased off the pressure and attention. His fingers slowed their thrusting as his tongue turned to gentle, long laps and soft kisses. My body shivered from the soft jolts that still ran through my veins every few seconds as I lay panting on the mussed bedding.

"That..." I shouldn't have opened my mouth without a thought beyond a single word. What was it exactly? Stupendous? Incredible? Unforgettable? "...wow."

Real smooth, Paige. Real smooth. Maybe when I got the rest of my brain back online, I could figure out how to convey exactly what 'wow' entailed.



Chapter 12

Penn

Paige was something. I couldn't remember the last time a woman had been that responsive under my attentions. She was loud and a bit crass, but the way her body reacted to what I did to it was fucking phenomenal. I was hard enough to hang a fucking wool coat from my dick without it dipping even a fraction of an inch.

Her curves were mouth-watering. I was more than willing to spend the rest of the damn weekend learning every millimeter with my mouth and body. She tasted sweet, hot, and savory. Something a man could get addicted to. I wouldn't mind burying myself between those thighs of hers every damn day of the week.

I had a feeling she would find the wow in the moment. More so than the other women I'd been with who just wanted to butter me up to give them what they wanted. But not Paige. She knew me as a writer and nothing else. She knew the *real* me.

Maybe that's what made her so sexy. Because I told her the truth about me, and she never shied away. Not once. Instead, our conversations warmed and grew into a more complex, yet shallow, entanglement. That was all she wanted. That was all she needed.

I was fine with that. That's what every other relationship in my life had been up until this point. It's what I was used to. Relationships in my position were messy. Most men in my shoes were on their second or third marriage or trying to hide their mistress from their wives. My work was stressful enough without adding that chaotic entanglement to it.

Paige surprised me a bit. I didn't go full kink on her, but I didn't go straight-up vanilla either. She melted into my touch, a sweet, delicious nectar in my mouth.

"Ready to call it a night?" I crawled my way back up her body as she mentally floated back to earth. She was delightfully flushed and dewy with her tresses strewn about from her pleasures. She looked rightfully confused. I was fairly certain that I finger-fucked the brains out of her.

"I...w-what?"

"Should I go or...?" I did my best to keep a straight face with my

serious tease. She did look delightfully content. I was glad she forgot she was naked. In the quiet interlude, I took my time admiring her all laid out for me.

“What? The fuck you will.” If looks could kill, I would have been dead in an instant. She still wanted more. Which was good news for my dick.

Just as I was about to laugh at her sudden reaction, she had me on my back. Her fingers gripped into my shirt for dear life. The move took me by surprise. I didn’t think my cock could get any harder, but the naked woman on top of me proved me wrong.

I didn’t know Paige all that well, but from what I gathered she wasn’t exactly an outgoing woman who took life by the horns. Maybe she was full of surprises. And right now, I was ready to see what else she had in store for me. God help me if she chickened out all of a sudden. I didn’t think my hand would do my desire justice tonight. But if that’s what she wanted, I would manage.

“I didn’t even get to see you naked yet.” I couldn’t help but laugh. I had a feeling this woman wouldn’t stop surprising me if I gave her the comfortable space to do so.

“So, you aren’t ready to kick me out yet?”

“Hell no. Off with it, playboy.” With a grin, I obliged. Damn, how did her being demanding make her even hotter?

I barely started undressing before her overly eager hands assisted me. The noise I was rewarded with after I tossed my shirt aside gave her away.

“Damn, you’re pretty.” Hot? Yes, I’ve heard that one plenty. Pretty? That was a new one. The hungry look in her eyes almost had me squirming.

Paige continued to stare. I was only slightly worried that my dick was going to poke a new fly hole into my jeans if we didn’t get this evening moving along. My hands reached down and fumbled with my belt. The new look on her face was something reminiscent of her winning the damn lottery.

I slowed my haste, watching every twitch and curl of her lips as her eyes watched me finger the belt out of the buckle. She wasn’t paying attention to me; she was staring at the one thing standing at full attention between my legs. Once I managed to get my belt and jeans loose, her hands shot forward to ease them down over my hips.

I wanted to make an audible sigh of relief as my cock sprang free from its stiff cotton confines. There was an oddly strangled noise from Paige and my stiff length bobbed in response. The noises this woman made were going to drive me crazy.

“I...I haven’t thanked you properly,” My eyes looked back up to hers as she tossed my jeans over the edge of the bed. “For doing this.” Her voice was soft as she dipped back to her usual shy self.

Propping myself up on an elbow, I reached out towards her. “Hey, I offered. I’m into this just as much as you are. Maybe more, considering your apprehension.” Paige snorted.

“Yeah well...for some reason you have me doing a lot more outside my comfort zone.”

“It’s research.”

“Research. Right...” Her shoulders dipped bashfully. “At least the FBI won’t be coming after me for questionable search results.” I fell back to the bed with laughter. Considering how much research my science fiction novels needed, there were certainly some odd internet searches in my past.

I was distracted by her playful humor. She managed to take me by surprise with a timid caress of my balls and shaft. That was exactly what I fucking needed. What exactly was up this timid woman’s non-existent sleeve?

Her eyes moved to fully take in the tent in my black boxer briefs. The fingers that had been caressing the laptop keys all day now grazed across my tip with the same grace. It was such a damn tease, but it prolonged the fun. I was ready to flip her over and fuck her with my boxers on.

Despite the tease, I remained still and let her explore. The more I gave her free rein, the more at ease she was. Or maybe it was the orgasm I started her out with. Maybe that was the trick to unlock all her secrets.

Now in her own little world, Paige wriggled her fingers under the waistband of my boxers before she gently eased them out and around my cock. I let a soft sigh escape as my length finally had free reign to stretch. I didn’t miss the sharp intake of breath as she studied me for a moment.

Her hand reached up to gather up her hair and toss it over her shoulder. My dick and brain had the same thought: *Blow job*.

“You’re clean, right?” Paige’s question pulled me from my tunnel vision and the thought of her mouth on my cock.

“Wha-Yeah...yeah I am.” Shit, I guess I should have asked her the same question before I went face-first into her cunt. Although considering her lack of suitors, which got her into this predicament in the first place, I didn’t have anything to worry about.

“Good. I want to try something...” She gave me a curt nod as her hand

knotted around the hair at the nape of her neck. In one swift move, she stretched out beside my hip. Her face dipped in close, so close that the heat of her breath made my cock twitch. My head hit the mattress as I dug my fingers into the bedding instead of tangling them in her hair.

The moment her hand fully encircled my dick felt like utter relief. Her touch was inquisitive as it traced every vein along the velvety skin. I was so engrossed in her caresses that I didn't see her mouth descend onto me.

"Fuck!" The pressure of her sudden suction took the breath right out of my lungs. All I could manage was a hoarse curse. For a woman who met more dicks of a man than actual dicks, she was pretty damn good. Although it was only the first few seconds of her with me in her mouth.

"Sorry!" I had to grit my teeth as she pulled off me suddenly. Her voice sounded pitiful. "I-I've only ever watched videos and I wanted to see-"

"Paige, no holy shit. That was fine." I lifted my head off the bed a bit to look at her. "Hell, that was more than fine."

"Oh...okay." She gave me a quick nod, still unsure. But bless her, she was determined to see this through. Something in the back of my mind wondered if she was planning a scene similar to this in her book. Who didn't love a good cock sucking scene?

Settling back in, she resumed the position. Damn, it felt good. I could feel her lips and tongue shifting against the skin, gauging the layout. Even her timid movements sent shivers up my spine. The woman was incredible. How was she untapped potential?

I let a few noises of delight break through to encourage her along. She dipped her mouth down further, taking the tip deeper into her throat. The muscles flexed around my sensitive tip and my toes curled. Her hand awkwardly added a few strokes, it took her a bit to get the rhythm to match.

Once she did, oh fuck was it divine. She changed out the positioning of her tongue and the pressure of her suction just to see what would make me squirm. The fact that she was willing to experiment instead of just doing a piss-poor porno blow job, made this woman someone to keep an eye on.

She was willing to work for it, to try new things. Well, once her inhibitions were put to rest. Maybe she really was kinky. That would be a conversation for later. But fuck, a whole night of this? It'd been a while since I had a woman who could match my dexterity. I was in the mood to go a few rounds. Especially with someone like Paige.

The woman was blowing my mind as much as she was blowing my

dick. I cast a glance down to watch her head slowly bob up and down as she gave me a proper sucking. She was deliberate in her movements, nothing she did was mindless or quick.

I was all set to lay back and enjoy the view of this foreplay. That was until she did this incredible thing with her tongue and the roof of her mouth. She cupped her tongue around my dick, coaxing it up along the top of her mouth and down her throat. It applied a unique blend of pressures and textures. Fuck if I wasn't two seconds away from losing it.

Normally I could draw this out and focus on not blowing my load so quickly. Maybe it was because of the hours of prior teasing. Maybe she was just really fucking good at this. Or maybe there was something different about her that had my mind and body all discombobulated.

“Paige-fuck... I'm-goddammit...” I couldn't string two coherent words together. She was ruthless in her motions, keeping me in pleasurable suspend. Part of me didn't want to stop her and part of me wanted to fuck her senseless.

My hands reached down to pull her head away from me. I was a breath away from cumming. We hadn't even discussed what to do in this situation. Would she spit or swallow? Would she pull away in disgust? Was she comfortable doing either one?

She ignored my pleading tug of her hair. There was no way I could speak anymore to warn her. She massaged my balls as she picked up the pace. I guess she was just going to get a throat full of my release.

“Ohfuckyes!” My words sputtered out in one breath as I gritted my teeth. This wasn't the ideal way to waste a perfectly good cumshot, but I wasn't going to complain. Turnabout was fair play after all. It was a sweet relief to let go and pump her throat full of all the hours of inspiring her. All those flirtatious and handsy moments between us had driven me crazy.

The woman didn't even flinch. She held fast and swallowed down every last drop with only the softest gag. *Damn*. For being such a self-proclaimed novice, she did oral sex like a goddamn pro. Sure there were aspects to be improved upon but damn if I hadn't had that satisfying of a throat fuck in a long time. Most of the women I took home were too much of a priss to bother. Paige was quickly becoming a force to be reckoned with.

“Was it okay...?” Her question took me aback. Those blue eyes glanced up at me as she thumbed away something at the corner of her mouth. Hell, if that wasn't the hottest damn thing.

“Okay? I’m pretty damn certain at this point that you were lying about being rusty.” That delightful pink blush rose back to her cheeks as she timidly stretched out beside me. She laid out on her stomach, hiding her voluptuous curves from my view. It did leave a teasing peek of her plump ass at least.

“Oh, you’re so full of it.”

“I’m being serious. A guy just doesn’t go off just because you put your mouth on him. Trust me. I’ve had shitty blow jobs before. That was not shitty.” I couldn’t bring myself to look into her eyes because I was afraid that I’d pull her into a kiss and never let go. Instead, I spoke to the ceiling as my heart settled back down to a normal rhythm.

“Really? Interesting...”

“I told you... Men are more complicated than you think. At least, adult men. Teenage guys are very much boobs and jacking off.” Paige snorted again and I found myself smiling from her reaction. I didn’t know why this woman’s damn nasal reactions affected me so.

“But seriously... It was...decent?”

“Considering I lost the ability to speak coherently, yeah I would say so.” I chanced a glance at her and shot her a grin. A bashful smile greeted me back.

Fuck this. We were both adults, completely naked, and fresh off some killer orgasms. If I wanted to kiss and touch her, this was the opportunity to do so.

Rolling over onto my side, I reached out and cupped her jaw. Her gaze softened before going back to surprise as I slid my body up against hers. The near-constant change of expression on her face was something that I was continually intrigued by. But that’s what made it so fun to tease her so relentlessly.

Paige was timid with her initial kisses. It was as if she needed my mouth to coax her into relaxing and enjoying it. I could feel her melt against my body.

“If you still want to go for the main event, you’re gonna have to give me a few minutes.” Her brows knitted together in question. “A man has to build up reserves for round two.” If she kept sucking in and biting on that lower lip, it wasn’t going to take me very long to get back to full strength. That mouth of hers had me transfixed now.

“So...what do we do?”

I chuckled. “Well...we can talk. Lay here. Take a nap. Get handsy. You name it.”

“What do you usually do?” Now she was catching on.

“It depends. Sometimes I go for another round. Sometimes I kick her out.” Paige scoffed at me. “You asked.” I shrugged.

“You actually kick women out of your place?”

“I call my car service to take them home at least.” The tenseness in her shoulders relaxed some. “I don’t have a girlfriend if that’s your next question. I have no interest in one.”

“We’re overrated.” I couldn’t help but laugh. That wasn’t exactly the sort of thing I thought would come out of her mouth. She seemed like the type to want to snag a boyfriend but had just been unwilling to put the legwork in.

“No interest in a relationship?”

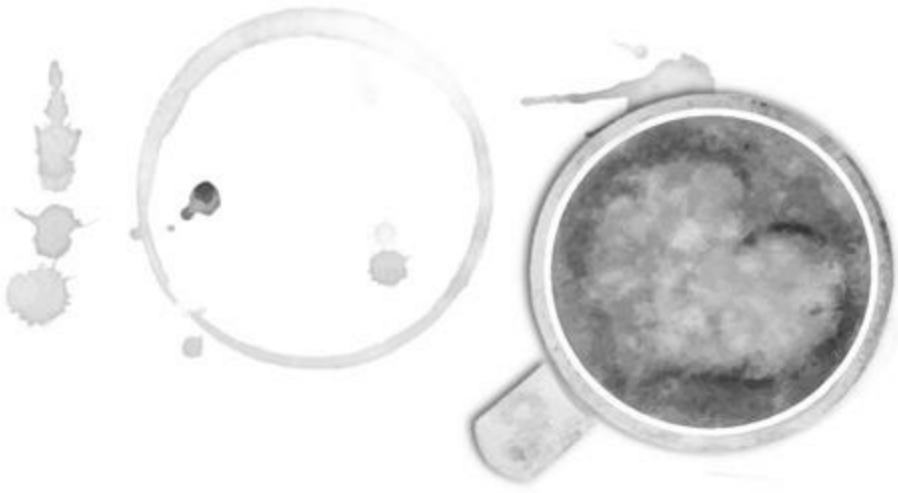
“Well...I wouldn’t say that.” Her eyes shied away from mine as her fingers lightly danced across my bare chest. “Disillusioned is more like it.”

“Too high of expectations?” That was the usual culprit.

“There are no good men out there. Especially at my age. They’re all either taken, divorced, or...*questionable*.”

“Well, I’m neither of the first two. So does that make me, *questionable*?” I teased.

“Definitely.”



Chapter 13

Paige

I was still dizzy with the thought of how the entire evening transpired up to this point. It was just some innocent teasing, an exercise in passion and desire with a borderline stranger. Since then, we moved onto a fully naked and extremely heated make-out session. Technically it was the third in only a few hours.

It started with a whirlwind of touches to a heated kiss in the snow, to mutual oral sex, to oddly delightful banter, to an extremely torrid repeat make-out session that had my head spinning. Despite the awkwardness of the entire situation, Penn made me feel at ease.

My anxiety was always in full swing with a man. It was a swirling chaos of thoughts on how my body looked. I had to sit a certain way so I didn't have a stomach pooch and be mindful not to say anything stupid. Maybe the difference in those situations was the fact that I was actively trying to impress or seduce my date. This time I didn't have to.

This time the endgame was mutually agreed upon, although not exactly in the most ideal way. Part of it felt coerced between him and that damn mouth of his. It wasn't fair that he was such a fantastic kisser. Among some of the other things he could do with that mouth. Of which I now had first-hand knowledge and couldn't stop thinking about.

Our light-hearted post-orgasm conversation tapered off into soft touches and increased kissing without any prompting or asking. Almost as if it was completely organic and natural. Something that was the perfect kind of fodder for my novel.

Penn barely left me a moment to ruminate over the infatuation. His hands and mouth once again left me breathless and begging for more. With all the fun I had giving and receiving oral sex, I was more than ready to combine in the full joining of our bodies. All of my earlier hesitations had flown the coop.

Despite getting lost in his kisses, I did my best to feel where his hands went. To take note of what his body did as it hovered above mine before it pressed my curves into the plush bedding. Something about all this felt oddly natural. Maybe because I focused more on the touch than what the other

person was thinking and how badly I was fucking up.

Tasting kisses rained down the column of my throat, suckling and nipping their way along my collarbone. I felt like every inch of skin Penn graced with his attentions elevated my delights to a whole new level. More than anyone had ever done before. Kudos to the women before me who were his guinea pigs. This man knew how to drive me to sexual delirium without even touching me anywhere intimate.

I felt as if I couldn't get enough of touching him. He wasn't overly muscular, but toned and lean, something closer to a swimmer's body. Each trace of muscle was delicious to touch and taste.

There was no time or breath for words. Only the quenching of desires. A strong hand palmed against my breast as I sighed into his mouth. His touches were so heady, so powerful. Sure, there were soft caresses and teases. But it was the times that he clutched onto me in the throes of his delight that had me in a chokehold.

Without a word he made me feel desired. Wanted. This was what I needed. I didn't need another second-hand account of a sexual situation in a novel or to watch yet another porn video. I needed to feel a man's hands on me, his mouth along my skin, his penis in my vagina. Pelvis-to-pelvis. To have his body thrust so deep into mine that I could taste it. That last one is what I needed. *Right now.*

"Please tell me you have a condom." I gasped out in between kisses and rough caresses. There was no way I was going to go anywhere with a strange man's jizz up my cooch. If it meant he had to go bare-assed down to the hotel's sundries shop, then so be it.

"A gentleman is always prepared." Penn flashed me a heated smirk before he slid off to find where his pants ended up. Breathless, I sat up and admired the view. His very fine ass was highlighted in the dim light of the room as he bent down to dig into his pants pocket. Although I had to stifle a laugh at the sight of his dick that stood out loud and proud. It resoundingly bounced with each step. Men looked so weird naked.

"So sure that you were gonna get lucky, huh?"

"Old habit." He shrugged as he dropped his clothing back to the floor. I didn't think that watching a man tear open a condom and roll it on would be such a turn-on. Hell, I didn't think half the stuff I tried with Penn so far would be a turn-on, but it was. Maybe I needed some kind of sex bucket list. He seemed like the kind of man that would be into that sort of thing.

“At least you’re responsible...” I mumbled as he climbed back on the bed and picked up where our mouths left off. His returning warmth was welcomed as the snowy chill seeped into my room. I didn’t want to think about the implications of his words. Exactly how many women had he slept with?

That fact wasn’t important right now. What was important was the fact that his mouth moved back down between my thighs once again. This time I didn’t keep quiet, and I was rewarded with a more vigorous twist of his tongue and suck of his mouth, with each whining moan that slipped past my lips.

“Dammit, are you always this wet?” Penn gasped out and left me hanging on the precipice of another orgasm as his body slid up mine. Those piercing blue eyes of his stared me down with such a heated fire. His lips glistened from his southern endeavors. I shivered.

“Uh...yes?” Sometimes I took note of how turned on I was. All I knew was that I never required lube when I masturbated. I had a surplus of the all-natural goodness. Which I always thought was weird and not normal.

“*Fucking hell.*” He gritted out with some sort of restraint before he dipped down to give me a soul-sucking kiss. “I usually have to add a bit of... moisture.” Another searing kiss. “But you...*fuck.*”

“Is that...is that good...?”

“It’s fucking hot is what it is.” I felt the heat in my cheeks. There wasn’t one time that I could recall that anything I did was referred to as ‘fucking hot’. “Are you ready...?”

His tone went soft as his eyes searched my face. Something inside me hesitated and oddly enough it was my common sense that made me slide my thighs further apart to accommodate him. We were both already naked and had gotten this far. It was stupid to waste a perfectly good condom.

Not able to find my voice, I gave him a quick bob of my head. A gentle smile curled the corners of his mouth before he ushered in one last kiss.

“Tell me if it's too much or you need to stop. This is supposed to be pleasurable.” All I could offer was a blink of agreement. Dammit, I hoped this was going to be the kind of sexy fun that all those romance novels talked about to no end. The blather about the ‘throes of passion’ and unbelievable shit like that. “I want you to enjoy yourself.”

Penn’s words took me by surprise. A man that didn’t chase the pleasures of his dick first? Dammit, now I really hoped I didn’t suck at this. He said I

was decent at oral, but we were still seconds away from having actual sex. There was still time for disappointment.

The next kiss silenced my inner dialogue. It was soft and sweet, something unexpected for such a heated moment. It made my brain's thought process come to a screeching halt.

I barely registered the feeling of Penn's hand against my outer thigh as he held me steady before he pressed inside. My breath caught in my throat as I felt the intrusion. Despite his notable girth, he slid in with ease. Centimeter by centimeter I felt myself stretch around him. With Penn taking his time, I could enjoy every damn second.

My eyes were shut tight as my hands shot up to wrap around his rib cage. I could feel his shaky breath against my cheek as he sheathed himself to the hilt. There was nothing but the sound of our breathing in the room. I popped one eye open just to see if he was disgusted with me.

What I didn't expect was a hazy look in his eyes. It was wildly intense. I felt a bit taken aback.

"A-Are you good...?" Penn gritted out as he kept himself propped up over me. His stare continued. It was unnerving in its intensity.

"Yeah..." I breathed out as I got caught up in his gaze. What the hell else do you say to a hot-as-fuck man while he's balls-deep into your vagina? It was the most eloquent thing I could think of with my brain scrambled.

"Good." He dipped back down to recapture my mouth. I considered kissing during sex something more intimate and reserved for more established couples. Not some random hookup at writers' retreats. Despite that, it helped me feel at ease. As if this was something more natural and a regular occurrence that happened between us.

With my reassurance, the slow thrusts began. My lips broke the seal of our embrace with a shaky whimper. Fuck, how did this feel so good? We weren't even twenty seconds into this escapade and I was already a quivering mess.

There was always something more satisfying about having an actual body connected to a dick instead of a silicone-encased, vibrating battery pack. Sure, I got bigger Os with my dildos and sex toys, and they scratched an itch, but they always left me wanting something more. Maybe I needed that sensory input of a heady weight above me. Maybe I needed someone else who put in the thrusting effort. Even if the sex part sucked, it felt so damn good to have a body rocking against mine.

Penn did not suck. Not even in the least bit. Each thrust curled my toes. So much so that I was worried I'd have a cramp any second up my calves. The poor man was going to end up looking like he got into a back alley fight with a few stray cats with how much my nails dug into his back.

He didn't seem to mind. He didn't tell me to stop. The sounds he emitted were the hottest fucking thing I'd ever heard. Most men didn't make noise during sex. At least not in my experience. Some did when they orgasmed, but never during the act. I always wondered if they needed to concentrate that hard to pat their head and rub their tummy with all the kissing, groping, and thrusting.

Sex seemed like second nature to Penn. Despite his heavy breath, his hands caressed effortlessly over my curves. My breasts received special attention between his fingers and mouth before they parted ways and traveled elsewhere. The man could multitask like it was nobody's business.

His first guttural moan sent my hips bucking sky-high which was rewarded with a deep thrust of his hips. It sent us both into a deliciously vicious cycle of noises and wild thrusts. Delirium had to be settling in. The world melted away. The hotel room didn't exist anymore. It was just myself and this delicious hunk of a man bestowing some sort of unheard-of pleasure that I was still trying to comprehend.

I could feel him withdraw and press in deep with each movement. I didn't want him to stop. I wanted him to keep going until I passed out. Could a person die during sex? If it was sex with Penn, I'd die one happy fucking lady.

Penn snapped his hips against mine before his mouth latched onto my neck. Heated wet kisses trickled down onto my collarbone. I couldn't help but let out an embarrassingly loud and large amount of questionable noises. Everything felt good. Hell, everything felt amazing. Who the hell knew all those damn romance novels could be right and not some author's wet dream?

Strong fingers blazed a trail down between my breasts, over my navel, and dipped between my legs. Penn's body arched away from mine. I whimpered from the loss of his body tight against mine. But the moment his fingers danced across my clit; my head hit the pillow with a resounding poof from the feathered mound.

"That's it..." The words tickled hotly against my jaw as the rhythm of his hips quickened. I could feel the sparks igniting deep within my body. Oh fuck, I was so damn close. Another few seconds of him working his magic on

my clit and I was done for. “You feel so fucking good, Paige. So, fucking good. You’re so tight...grasping onto my hard cock...” The heated words unlocked something deep within and I felt my body begin to tremble. “*Cum for me. Cum for me, beautiful...*”

White light covered my vision as my body arched hard off the bed and into his body. Penn didn’t stop his attentions as I launched straight into orbit. Everything vibrated out from the epicenter between my legs.

I writhed beneath him, unsure of what to do with myself as the waves of ecstasy rolled off my body. My hands clutched at his back, his hair. They even shot down to grip the sheets for dear life as he made one last harsh thrust with a grit of his teeth.

Some of the romance novels I’d read had this obsession over a man growling. I’d never heard it up until this exact moment when Penn went rock-hard inside me. There was this intense, teeth-gritting growl of a desperate sound against my ear as he found his release. The feeling of him so taut inside me almost sent me into another full-blown orgasm.

His mouth, his body, and now his damn cock was utter perfection. Maybe I was dead. I could have died in a car accident on the snowy roads on the way up to the retreat. This could be heaven. Or limbo. It was probably limbo. Heaven would surely have Henry Cavill walking around naked all the damn time.

The white of the ceiling slowly came back into focus as I blinked from pure reflex alone. Penn’s body blanketed me as I felt the rhythm of his breathing. There was no rush to sever our connection. My body appreciated the warmth of his as it still covered my own. I chalked my random thoughts of how good his body felt on top of and in mine to how well he scrambled my brains.

“Feeling inspired now...?” Penn’s warm murmur tickled the skin of my neck as he adjusted himself out of his recovery splat. All I could do was laugh at the sheer lunacy of it all.

There was so much coursing through my veins. Pure adrenaline. Heat. Desire. The yearning for more. I felt like I could write an entire novel before the sun rose. But did I convey that to him? Nope.

“Yeah,” I answered simply. Penn pulled away to roll off of me. I had to choke back a whine from the loss of him.

“Do you want me to leave so you can write?”

“No!” *Dammit, Paige. Don’t sound so desperate.* “I-I mean...I need to

write about...uh, the after part too, right?" Penn's body relaxed from its poise to shift off my body. I was rewarded with an amused smirk. The sheer sexiness of it caused my vagina to flex and his breath to hitch.

"As much as I want to stay cock-deep in you all night, I do have to take care of some necessary business." The strained grit in his voice was evident even though he seemed determined to remain the cool and collected one in this situation. A pout made itself known as my legs and arms went slack around him so he could do as he asked. I only hoped that he would come straight back.

A gasp choked out of my throat as I felt him slide out of me. I felt oddly empty. Like some part of me was missing.

Yeah, the part that gives me fuck-all orgasms.

Thankfully Penn came back to bed after tidying himself up in the bathroom. I couldn't help but watch him stalk through the room and back over to me. He seemed to have the same idea as his intense eyes stared me down with each step closer. It made my body squirm from the implications, almost as if his heated gaze was as intense as his hands on my body.

"Do you always sweet talk your sex dates?" My words broke the crackling sexual tension in the air. The sheer amount of it that had accumulated so swiftly after our orgasms unnerved me. I hadn't ever experienced anything like it. Penn answered with a high arch of his brow as he slid back into bed next to me.

"Not always."

"You're a Rubik's Cube of a person."

A warm chuckle encircled me right along with his arms after he pulled the mussed bedding over us.

"If I spilled all my secrets at once, then what fun would that be? Besides, you need to discover the layers of the sexual aspects of your male character. One by one."

He wasn't wrong, but it didn't make it any less frustrating. Although it wasn't like I was being completely honest myself. As long as he didn't figure out what my pen name was and the prestige that currently followed it. This whole anonymous dynamic was actually a little intriguing. It made this sexy tryst all the more easy for me to talk myself into.



Chapter 14

Penn

I hadn't planned on falling asleep in Paige's room. All I offered was to give her some inspiration to help her work her way through the sexual tension of the characters in her book. To show her how it's done with a man who knows what he is doing. It wasn't meant for us to get caught up in pillow talk, all tangled up in each other's arms as we drifted off from the warm comforts the other body provided.

I never physically slept with a woman in the non-sexual way. In her bed or mine. That was how trouble happened. And right now, I was in a whole heap of trouble.

The woman in my arms looked so lovely, lost in her bliss of sleep. I couldn't help but relish in the feel of her curves as my body curled around them without a second thought.

Everything about this situation was unusual. I hadn't been Christopher the aloof, confident man who took what he wanted when he wanted or Mr. Pennington the hard-ass workaholic CEO of Pennington Tech. No, with this woman I was just Penn.

I earned the light-hearted nickname from my friends in high school when they made the connection between my last name and how I always carried a pen and notebook with me to jot down story notes. Here I was the person I was behind closed doors with no one else around. The person that I was with my family. I'd never been this true to myself in front of anyone outside of decades-long friendships or family members. To be honest, it was freaking me out a little bit.

I had to keep reminding myself that this was a short weekend. A weekend where we started and ended as strangers before going our separate ways. It was just like every other hook-up I've done since college. No entanglements. My life didn't allow for anything of the sort.

So why couldn't I get this woman out of my head? Or my arms for that matter? Every part of my body begged me to stay put. And right now it was winning the argument against the common sense in my brain.

Paige's body felt so right in my arms. Hell, her body also felt perfect surrounding my cock as I thrust into her just hours ago. Don't even get me

fucking started on her magically talented mouth. No other woman had left me wanting like this. Especially not after I had a few orgasms under my belt.

Maybe this was just an infatuation. I'd never met a woman who was as bookish as me. One who understood the quandaries that accompany the chaos that was being a writer. Maybe I just needed a like-minded soul to fill some void that I had no idea I'd had.

What if I couldn't ever get enough of her? What if I couldn't stop thinking about her? What would the harm in it be if we continued beyond this?

I couldn't tell if I was completely off my rocker or if it was because all my blood filled my dick once again instead of filtering through my brain like it was supposed to. *For fucks sake*. Sometimes I had to deal with a hard-on in the morning but never in the middle of the night. Especially not after two breathtaking orgasms in a matter of an hour of each other.

It's not like I hadn't had sex in a while either. I usually managed a feisty night out a few times a month just to keep my head clear and rid myself of some of the stress from work. I wasn't a desperately thirsty teenager when it came to having my sexual needs met. I took good care of those.

So, what the fuck.

If I was going to get out of this situation without staying the entire night, I had to take care of something. I only hoped that the naked woman in front of me could be of help. That is, with a little encouragement.

Timid and careful with my movements, I slowly shimmied myself down towards the foot of the bed. I couldn't help myself and tasted her sweet skin along the way. With a scrape of my teeth against the plump ridge of her ass, my hands lifted her one thigh off of the other.

Immediately I was met with her scent of desire. *For fucking fucks sake*. Her sex was glistening in invitation. I laid there for a moment with her one leg draped over my shoulder. I couldn't help but just drink in the sight of her. Spread open, naked, and innocent in sleep. What wasn't innocent was what the sight of her body did to mine.

I had to have her again.

If she would allow it.

Paige's body stirred slightly. The side of her body nestled into the plush bedding. Her skin bloomed with goosebumps as I eased the sheets down enough so I could breathe before I dipped my head down for another taste of her temptation.

The fact that she was sound asleep only excited me further. Paige hadn't even opened her mouth or touched me to get me all riled up like this. Right now I was aching as badly as I would have been if she was in on the foreplay as well. It drove me to some kind of needy delirium.

Dipping my head in, I spread my tongue in one long, firm lap up her slit. How was she as wet as before? After sex, we'd done nothing but talk and unexpectedly drifted off to sleep. Her body confounded me in ways I couldn't comprehend. My tongue worked her slit as if it was a double scoop furiously melting on a summer day. Broad, sweeping, careful, and deep strokes. Lapping up every bit of her essence only to beckon more forth.

I could easily get drunk on her. On every aspect that made up Paige. She was so warm, so sweet, so intoxicating.

It wasn't long before I was rewarded with a whimpering stir. Her hips subtly moved against my open mouth as I memorized her cunt to my heart's content. I was going to have wet dreams for the rest of eternity with images of her spread open and eager for me.

Her sleepy noises of want only made me hunger for more. If I could swallow her whole, I would have. My hips subconsciously went through the motions, rocking through the folds of the sheets. Wishing with every fiber of my being that the fabric was her wet cunt. In due time. If she woke up that is. Even if it killed me, I wasn't going to take her without her consent.

My eyes closed with my bliss as my fingers dug into the heft of her thighs. The pads of my thumbs moved closer to her slit, now thoroughly moist with my saliva and her slick. Maybe if I slipped my fingers inside of her, that would give her just enough of a jolt to ease sleeping beauty from her slumber.

I slipped my pointer finger in, just under my bottom lip as my mouth moved to latch onto her clit. Her hips jerked up with a surprised cry. My eyes shot open in hope with the sound. But to my dismay, she seemed to still be asleep. Now I was more determined than ever to ease her into wakefulness. No matter how pissed she might get.

My thumb took over for my mouth and worked together with my pointer finger to keep up the pace. Stretching over the side of the bed, I blindly reached for my discarded pants. Luckily my back pocket was ass up and I pulled out the last condom. Just in case.

With the treasure procured, my mouth went back to where I left off. With the few seconds apart from her, the second taste of her was just as sweet

as the first. I fell back under her delicious spell.

So mesmerized by the scent and taste of her, I missed her sharp intake of breath. It wasn't until I felt her fingers tangle in my hair that I knew I had successfully roused her. Heat instantly flooded my veins with my victory.

“Oh, fuck yes...Penn...”

In quick succession, I managed to tear open the condom and roll it on. Her mouth seemingly opened in protest at the severing of our connection, but I instantly silenced her with a sharp thrust of my dick into her. Her words tangled up inside her mouth and instead turned into the hottest fucking sound I ever heard a woman utter.

It was a wild mix of relief, begging, and thanks all at once as her arms wrapped around me. Paige's eyes betrayed every damn thing. There was an unspoken and dark desperation there, even in her haze of sleep.

The way she clutched onto me, as if I was the only thing left on this planet to keep her anchored in place, made my hips buck to bury myself as deep as possible within her. I never had a woman want me with such uncontrollable need. Her body arched against mine, a desperate maneuver to clutch herself closer to me. It was as if her entire body wanted to absorb me all at once, instead of just her cunt.

Fuck me.

I wanted this to last. I wanted this to get her out of my system for longer than a few hours. This was supposed to be me who took her by surprise, the one who gave her fodder for her novel. Instead, she took my breath away as she held onto me for dear life.

Paige had me thrusting into her relentlessly. I felt unhinged, a need to be buried so deep in her that you couldn't tell where I ended and she began. We were a tangle of limbs as her heels dug into my thrusting ass.

“Penn...” The last thing I needed was her raspy beg, hot and breathy against my ear. There wasn't a sliver of air between us as our bodies rocked together. At this point, I'd be content with becoming a permanent part of her body.

That was the only warning I had before her body went arched and taut. Her lips parted and released a cry that made me follow her into the beyond. I was certain that I stopped breathing for a moment as I emptied my balls into the condom with such force, I was sure it took some of my brain cells with it.

I lost track of how much time had passed between our mutual climax and when I finally regained some sort of consciousness. It felt like I'd fallen

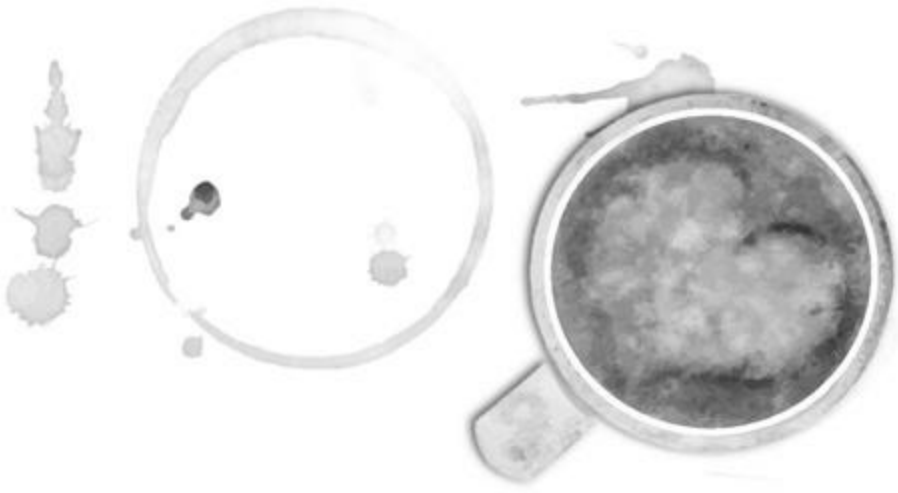
asleep once again, but I couldn't be sure. Propping myself up slowly, I noticed the gray sliver of dawn between the curtains and the window frame. *Shit.*

She gave me one sleepy smile before her eyes fluttered closed. Her breathing slowly evened back out as she fell back asleep. The only noise I got from Paige was a soft little snore. Gazing down at her I couldn't help the quirk at the corner of my mouth. The noise might have been just as adorable as the subconscious snorts she did.

She looked so deliciously wrecked with her earthy brunette hair all tangled against the rumpled pillow. As I shifted, her fierce grip against my back loosened as her hands slipped to the bed. Technically if she didn't wake up and find me in her bed then it didn't count that I spent the night.

Right?

It took every ounce of my will and remaining strength to timidly ease myself off of her. She only stirred a bit, rolling onto her side as she curled back up into a ball. Something inside of me was disappointed that she didn't reach out to find me. But fuck, if she had, I didn't think I would have had the strength to head back to my room.



Chapter 15

Paige

Did last night really happen?

I woke up groggy and stiff from the chill in the room. Penn was nowhere to be found. Not even a trace of him was left in the room. Well, maybe he used condoms, but I wasn't going to go digging through the trash at this hellish hour just to see if I was going senile before I hit 40 or not.

As I flopped onto my back, I was suddenly aware that I was still naked. I never slept naked. Sleeping naked was too hypersensitive for my body to have a decent enough sleep. Plus, I'd read one too many articles about the incredible amount of germs you slather all over your bed when you're bare-assed. Thank god it was a hotel room and not my bed at home because there was now double the amount of ass germs after last night.

Why the fuck was my brain obsessing over ass germs? I should be ruminating over the fact that I saw every damn inch of Penn's glorious body multiple times last night. And topped it off with multiple orgasms from the both of us. Or maybe this was a bad thought tangent. I could already feel my vaginal muscles flexing in anticipation for more.

The only times I ever managed to have orgasms, like the ones Penn bestowed upon me, were when I was so worked up after reading porn or watching porn and then had a little extra fun with some buzzing things. I think I saw more of the back of my skull last night than I'd like to admit.

This was supposed to be just a learning exercise. Technically a writing exercise. Or well, to inspire writing something worthwhile. It was supposed to be about the passion, the desire, the want, the need. Fuck if Penn didn't tick all those boxes and then some. He ticked boxes that I didn't even know existed. Which only led to the thought process of even more check boxes that were begging to be ticked.

No, this was silly. He was a random guy that offered me his dick to pay me a random favor. While it was a really, *really* fucking nice dick that wasn't attached to a walking asshole, I couldn't get attached to something that was only short-term. Which is what I was afraid of in the first place. Give a girl a good dicking and she's ready to propose marriage or have his babies, despite the man being a walking red flag.

Ugh, no. No, Paige. Bad Paige.

I needed to just take it as a really good sex session and leave it at that. A very, extremely overdue sex session. A sex session that couldn't even come close to the O from the damn toy I spent a fortune on that did the thrusting, sucking, and licking all at once. Penn was free, and he managed all three at once. *Multiple times.*

Dammit.

It was safer for everyone that he left sometime in the night. Speaking of which, did I have a wild fucking dream, or did we have sex twice? Maybe that was the part that I was in stunned disbelief over. Multiple orgasms for me were rare. I could count the amount of times I'd experienced them on one hand. And that was only after being fucking horny and using at least two toys: One for the thrusting/girth and one for the buzzing.

Fuck.

Things were going to be weird, weren't they? I wasn't looking forward to making my way back down to the retreat in case I would run into him. He wanted to leave things in the bedroom and not have them trickle out amongst the retreat. Or beyond that.

I could feel inspiration pumping through my blood. Everything Penn and I did the night before helped knock my writer's block loose. There was no way I was going to let this time go to waste. Especially not after how much I paid for this damn trip. Maybe I'll just wear my earbuds and listen to music. Ignore the world. And Penn.

Today was the last day and it concluded with a formal dinner send-off with speakers and whatnot. As much as I loathed public settings, including sitting at a table with a bunch of strangers for an unforeseeable amount of time, there were a few speakers that I wanted to listen to. At least it gave me the excuse to dress up. I could wear high heels for once and walk back to my room when I'd had enough of the festivities. Why couldn't all formal events be at a hotel?

Bracing myself against the chill of the room, I slipped out from the sheets and scampered over to my suitcase to pull out a thick sweatshirt and skinny jeans. Comfort and layers were needed. Especially if I was going to bunker down and do my best to avoid Penn.

As much as I just wanted to stay in my room all day, I focused better when I wrote in a public setting. I don't know if it was because it was less comfortable or if I felt less inclined to surf the internet or endlessly scroll

through my phone. Whatever it was, it worked. Usually, a coffee shop was my preferred haunt as there was an endless trickle in and out of people throughout the day, so it was never droning in quiet.

At least the coffee here was somewhat decent. I was going to need a whole heap of it today if I was to survive until the banquet. And food. I could smother some of these awkward stressors of what happened overnight with carbs.

It was a more reasonable hour by the time I made my way down to the breakfast area, my laptop bag in tow. I tossed my wet hair, fresh from my shower, up in a loose braid. My mind oddly drifted to the thought that maybe Penn found me at least somewhat attractive. Even in my stressed-out, disgruntled writer state he still wanted to sleep with me. Normally I would say that he was just desperate, but the man gloated about his conquests. So he wasn't short on the sexual prospects. What made me special? What made him say yes?

Paige, get your shit in the game. The man was a one-night stand to help you write. Nothing more.

Ugh, right. I shouldn't let this inspiration go to waste.

But first, food.

The dining area was quiet with only a few random early birds. I only hoped that the rumbling in my gut didn't disturb the silence. I guess that was what I got for participating in a month's worth of cardio in one night. Maybe I needed more of an advanced warning before a night of marathon sex so I could accurately carb-load.

I plopped down into a seat with my hands laden with a little bit of everything. They must have rolled out all the stops for the last day's breakfast samplings. My weakness was definitely the delicious array of pastries.

"You look like you need this."

The hair on the back of my neck prickled as warmth flooded throughout my body, despite the chill in the large room. The voice was the one I wanted to avoid, due to the potential for pure, awkward, after-sex cringe.

"Yep." I nodded, not meeting his gaze as I reached out and grasped onto the cup of liquid, sugary gold. Not bothering to test the temperature first, I took a swallow, hoping the coffee would sear away the mushy thoughts of his sweet gesture. It was only coffee, not aftercare.

I thought I was being obvious enough for him to move along and do his own thing. Instead, he sat down across from me. Oh god, why was this man

following me? I'd gotten what I needed to write. I had my fill.

But fuck I could go for another round.

Or two.

Or ten.

"Did you get some sleep?"

"I...did."

"You're cute when you snore." That asshole move got my attention and my eyes shot up to his. Why did the smirk on his handsome face have to be so gosh darn smartassy and sexy?

"I don't snore." I scoffed and buried my face back in my coffee cup as I slouched down in my seat.

"Should I record it next time?"

I choked on a hot mouthful of coffee.

Who the fuck did he thi-

Wait... Next time?!

"Whoa, slow your roll, Romeo. That wasn't in the agreement."

"Hmm...you're right." His stupid smirk grew to a full, playful grin as he leaned forward onto the table. "How is your inspiration doing today? Thoroughly...*inspired?*"

"Yes, thank you." I was surprised I was able to keep my cool. What the fuck was this dude playing at?

"I was thinking..." *Oh boy. What now?* "If you were interested...I wouldn't mind reading what you come up with today. To see if we need to research anything *further.*"

Wait, was this his not-so-subtle way of wanting...more? Was this normal? Was I going about this all wrong? Maybe I needed to hit the hate brakes a bit. Because if he was going to be game for more sex, then I think I would be too.

As long as you leave the relationship aspect out of it, Paige.

Ugh, right. Mr. Red Flag over here was not relationship material. Nor did he seem like the type to have a girlfriend. He had multiple. As much as I randomly toyed with the idea of sleeping with a woman (Come on, who doesn't enjoy a nice set of titties and an ass to match?) I didn't exactly want to share the man. On the other hand, two men at once...

Not like I'd ever have the metaphorical balls to attempt that. It was difficult enough to nail one man, let alone two. I'll save that for my late-night fantasies and porn-watching/reading.

“Um...sure.” I shrugged and slouched back into my chair. What I wouldn’t do to have Penn’s kind of cool confidence. Maybe then I’d have the balls to attempt an in-person book signing.

“Excellent.” For fucks sake, what woman wouldn’t melt under these pretenses? Penn’s smile had me rethinking my distance and cold shoulder.

He made a move to rise from his chair and I felt myself let out a breath of relief. That was until he sat that very fine ass back down almost immediately.

“Are you planning to go to the send-off tonight?”

“Uh...yes.”

“Good. I’ll save you a seat.” My mouth hung open as he rose from the chair. “Maybe I’ll see you around today. I’m looking forward to reading what you come up with.”

My jaw unhinged. The audacity of this man. Like, really? He automatically assumed that I would just go sit next to him at the event. He was entirely too cocky and too used to getting his way.

I wanted to show him up, just to spite him. But as much as I was looking forward to it, I didn’t want to sit with just anyone either.

Damn him. Damn him all to hell.

I took my leisurely time finishing breakfast. Maybe after a long expanse of time, he would forget about me. I didn’t know what kind of game he was playing, but I wasn’t a fan. His dick on the other hand? I was very much a fan of that.

Maybe I could get him back later at the banquet for those snide comments.



Chapter 16

Penn

What was happening to me?

First, I stayed almost the entire night in Paige's room, and this morning it was weirdly off-putting idealistic rom-com banter, with me as the star.

Normally I avoided a repeat of women. One night was always more than enough. Well, if they were a decent enough lay, I may have called up a few of them for a repeat performance. But never in rapid succession like this. And especially not two days in a row.

Why did I seek her out again this morning? Maybe I had a terrible night of sleep, despite feeling well-rested. I wasn't thinking clearly. That had to be it. Because obviously, I was losing my mind.

Not only did I hunt her down, but I brought her a coffee, and may or may not have kind of sort of asked her out to the banquet tonight. Despite all my cringe this morning, it was worth it to see her squirm.

This was all unusual for me.

I couldn't get Paige out of my mind. Or seemingly out of my system.

Writing didn't go well because I fretted over what the actual fuck was going on. Which infuriated me further. It was my last day to be productive before heading back to work. I should have been focused. I even kept my distance from the woman since her greeting this morning seemed icier than usual.

Instead, my brain kept playing the events of last night and all our conversations in one continuous heated, and awkward loop. Why was I so flustered over her? Maybe I'd been lonelier than I'd realized. Which was impossible. I enjoyed my solitude entirely too much. I didn't even bother with any pets. I only wanted to be responsible for myself and not have anyone else dependent on me.

Despite the hours with no interruptions, my eyes kept drifting over to Paige. She must have taken a shower that morning. Her usually shimmery, brunette hair was dark and pulled back in a braid down her back. Even though she was fully clothed, my thoughts went to images of her washing those sensual curves of hers in the shower.

A good shower fuck sounded ideal right about now. The weather was

colder than yesterday and didn't bode well for the trip home in the morning either. I was even dressed in layers of a Henley and an oversized cardigan, and I still felt the chill. A hot shower with my dick balls-deep in Paige would be a great way to warm up from the chill of the lodge.

At least my laptop covered the more obvious evidence of my desire. I felt like I was in high school again, desperately trying to hide awkward boners.

Focus, Penn. Seriously. Who knows when you'll be able to sneak away from work again?

But that was the problem. I couldn't focus on what mattered. All I could focus on was Paige. And it was beyond fucking frustrating.

Unlike Paige, I didn't have deadlines to deal with. The only person breathing down the back of my neck to get shit done was me. It'd been almost ten years since I released the first book in my planned five-book series. I still had a dedicated fan base lingering on the depths of the internet. There were so many conspiracy theories that dropped in the years since. For the most part, people believed me to be just like George R.R. Martin with his *Game of Thrones* series. Will he finish it before he dies? The world may never know.

At least I had my somewhat youth in my favor. What was working against me was the fact that I needed to keep my CEO hat on during the week and even sometimes on the weekend. Work never seemed to take a break, no matter if we were ahead of the game or not. Not to mention that even though Dad retired from the company, he was still a constant shadow in my office or on my phone checking in.

He was the last person on this planet who needed to know I was a writer. I had to be just like him, hyper-focused on the business. To stay on top of the tech game to offer our clients only the newest and the best cybersecurity technology. I couldn't have writing be a distraction, nor could I have a woman occupy my mind.

My parents often mentioned something to me about finding a good, supportive partner. Thankfully it was only awkwardly brought up during the holidays. Mom usually made some mention of women's biological clocks and I always turned out the rest. She wanted grandchildren. Kids weren't even on my fucking radar, let alone in the solar system that was my life.

I couldn't help but sigh as I looked down at my laptop. I had to wake it up over a dozen times already with nothing to show for it. My brain was all

over the place and I couldn't focus long enough to write even one word down. Maybe it was a lost cause for the weekend. Or I just needed to step back for a breather and then come back to it later tonight.

That is if I wasn't all tangled up with Paige all night again like I wanted to be. And fuck, I wanted to be.

"Here."

I'd been so absorbed in my inner turmoil that I hadn't noticed Paige leave the room. My eyes had been on her all day, except for apparently the last few minutes. Her curves broke up the fading sunlight that came in through the expansive windows as she waved a pile of paper in front of me. My fingers flexed uncomfortably around the edges of my laptop. I had to refrain from grabbing ahold of her hips and pulling her to me to bury my face right back between her thighs.

"All done?" I managed to keep my cool as I took her offering.

"Well...just the part I was having trouble with."

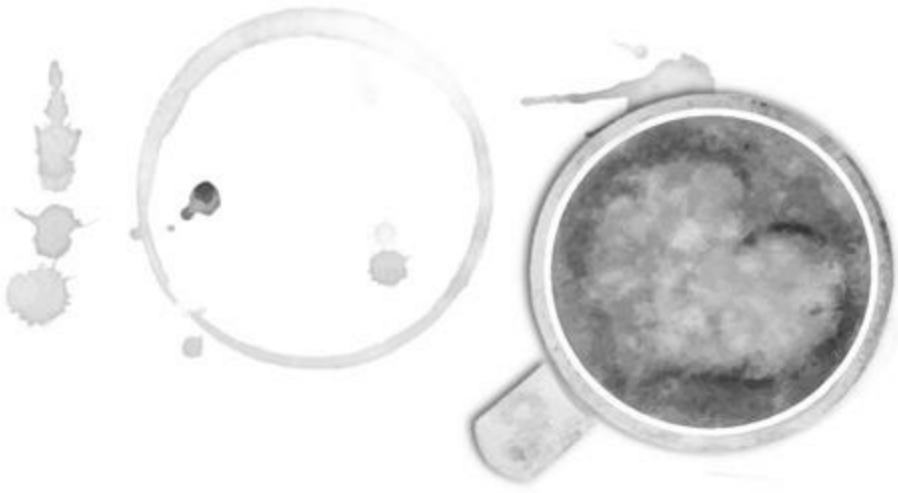
Oh, so this was the good stuff.

Or at least, I hoped it was. Last night was fun but considering that I hadn't seen the fruits of our labors myself, I was curious to see how well our outrageous experiment worked regarding her writing and writer's block.

"I'm excited to read it. Hopefully, I can read over it before the banquet so we have something to chat about over dinner."

"I...right." She nodded awkwardly as she adjusted the strap of her laptop back on her shoulder. Her pretty blue eyes darted away as my gaze searched hers. "Well...I-uh guess I...I should go get ready and turn this swamp witch into something reasonable for the public. See you later."

She was gone before I could get any words out.



Chapter 17

Paige

I managed to scramble away from Penn before I said anything embarrassing or stupid. Wait, scratch that. I think the swamp witch comment ticked off both. I didn't hang around to see if he thought it was humorous either.

The swamp witch vibe was very present. Fresh from my shower this morning, I dressed for ease and comfort so I could churn out an obscene number of words and make up for lost time. Of which I did accomplish. Pretty handily too. I wasn't going to win any beauty pageants but the over 4,000 words I managed to write were nothing to snuff at.

I walked away feeling great with what I'd accomplished. My only hang-up now was what my volunteer beta reader, Penn, would think about it. He claimed that the scenes beforehand weren't terrible, but they lacked *sexual* chemistry. Which made it difficult for readers to believe that my two main characters were fighting against their feelings and their obvious urge to consummate it.

Today I not only poured a lot of steamy emotion into it, but I wrote my first sex scene. Shocking, I know. It freaked me out.

I'll admit I found it helpful to have Penn close by but not sitting right next to me like before. Especially after what transpired last night. If he'd been within arm's reach, I would have probably done something awkward or had been too distracted to write as much as I did. Every time I felt stuck, I shot him a glance because, fuck, he was so damn pretty to look at.

Unlike before, Penn seemed to be absorbed in some sort of inner turmoil. His brow was furrowed for most of the day as he stared intensely at his computer screen. At one point he draped himself so sexily on the armchair that I was tempted to replace his laptop with myself. Except he looked rather defeated. Maybe even a bit angry. Despite him looking sexy, I left him alone.

The snoring comment at breakfast still irked me. I did not snore. Not one bit. An observation like that was better suited for someone in a more intimate relationship. That was something a boyfriend would say to his girlfriend. Well, if he didn't mind getting pummeled for it. Why would he say something like that? Did he just want to irk me? Did he just want to be a

bully? I wasn't into that bully romance trope bullshit. I had plenty of that in high school and it was the biggest turn-off on the planet.

Did he pick on me though? He said that my snores were 'cute'. Not annoying, not loud...*cute*. Why were men so utterly complicated? They needed to stop throwing this kind of weird and confusing bullshit our way and just outwardly say what they want. At least it would be easier to weed out the losers and timewasters.

As for cute...I'll show him cute.



The banquet room, which had been housing all of our meals for the retreat, was transformed into something that resembled a wedding reception

on a budget. They invited a well-known local author to speak. I was such a whore for meeting fellow authors. Especially one that lived somewhat close to me. It was the one thing I looked forward to when I booked my weekend last minute. It would have given me something positive to end on, especially if I hadn't been able to get any writing done.

Thanks to Penn, I got a lot more writing done than I expected. *A whole fucking lot more.* Now I had to face him one last time before we went our separate ways.

I regretted the heels as soon as I put them on. But they were too pretty to just languish in my closet at home. I had to wear them at least once. My black cocktail dress accentuated my curves without putting them on outlandish display. It was a bit more risqué than a typical dress I'd wear out. I bought it on a whim since it was on clearance and it did make me look good, although a bit self-conscious. It was off my shoulders so I couldn't wear a bra with it that didn't involve duct tape and a prayer to stay on. My breasts were somewhat average and not in danger of popping out but going braless made my body retreat to pajama mode. Of which a cocktail dress and heels did not mesh with.

I told myself that it was just for a little while. That I needed to stay long enough to sit through dinner and a speaker or two. There was an open bar and a DJ later but that wasn't my scene at all. I was surprised that the retreat offered this type of ending event because the people attending didn't seem like the type to enjoy that sort of thing.

Food, the author speaker, then leave. The sooner I could get my heels and dress off and be in bed, the better. But there was the little fact that Penn subtly made it known that he was looking forward to seeing me there and he wanted to talk about what I'd written. I hoped he had time to read it all before the event. It was a decent bit.

Maybe that's why I didn't spot him right away when I walked into the ballroom. There was a dull buzz of chatter throughout the room as people trickled in slowly and enjoyed the opening cocktail hour. Perhaps one drink wouldn't hurt. At least then I could loosen my anxiety levels to somewhat of a dull roar. I wandered over to the bar and sized up a seasonal hard cider that they had by the bottle.

"Fancy seeing you here..." A sexy-as-hell masculine voice murmured against the lobe of my ear. I'd just begun to relax my walls of anxiety, so it took me by surprise. I ended up lurching my body forward and sloshing my

drink. A delicious sip of hard cider hit the floor with a wet slap after it coated the back of my hand on its way down.

“Penn!” I gasped as I turned around. My heart was in my throat and beating a fierce conga beat. “Fuck...” My words came out a bit harsher than I meant but I wasn’t exactly mentally ready to get sexually accosted verbally in public. Nor was I ready to share my desperately needed alcoholic form of bravery with the floor.

I shot him an annoyed look as I addressed the sticky, wet mess on the back of my hand. There was a playful grin on his face as I dipped down to clean the alcohol off my skin. Without thinking, I used my tongue to lap it up. I was a classy as fuck lady after all. No use in wasting any more alcohol than necessary.

There was a strangled rumble that piqued my interest. It most definitely came from the man standing barely a foot away from me. His eyes went decidedly dark. I smirked. *Ha! That’s what you get for that ‘cute snore’ nonsense from earlier.*

“So,” Penn cleared his throat as he shuffled his weight to the other foot. “Did you find us a seat?” Gosh, it was so fun to watch a put-together and sexy-as-hell man fluster. He kept it dressed up but classy. His crisp white dress shirt was paired with charcoal pleated front dress pants. There was an extra gloss to his hair so either he took a shower or added product to it, or both.

“Not yet.” I waved my half-full bottle of cider in front of his face. “I needed to loosen up first.” With a sharp tip back of the bottle, I took a deep swig. “Speaking of which. Is this some sort of a date?” At this point I had enough alcohol on an empty stomach to loosen my tongue, but nowhere near enough for me to not remember the awkward shit that was bound to come out of my mouth.

That delicious smirk found its way back to his mouth again as his hands slid down into his pant pockets.

“I didn’t think it was *that* kind of arrangement.”

“That’s right. *You* were supposed to save me a seat.” I jabbed my finger in his direction with a sly grin. His statuesque jaw dropped with a retort, but the words died on his parted lips. I had him.

“I...you got me there.”

“Of course I do.” I took another swig and promptly emptied the rest of the bottle. Which, disappointedly, wasn’t much. Penn took a step closer, right

into my personal space. I could feel the heat of his body, his breath on my cheek. In that moment, I found it impossible to breathe.

“How about I make you a deal?” The way his voice went all rough and husky had me in a chokehold. Maybe the alcohol was a terrible idea. I needed my wits about me around this man. “You grab us a pair of seats in the back, I’ll get you another drink and explain how much I *fucking loved* what you did to your manuscript.”

I felt like everything went off at once. My brain was on high alert with his proximity, my heart was screeching with delight that he liked what I wrote, and my body betrayed me like the thirsty bitch she was. It intensely focused on how Penn said ‘fucking’ and ‘loved’ with such passionate intention.

On second thought, I needed that alcohol.

With a dry swallow, I nodded. There was no way that I was going to attempt words. It wasn’t worth the embarrassment, especially when I could still hold my head high at this moment. Penn took my empty bottle as I spun on my heel. I needed to sit down before I fell over.



Chapter 18

Penn

The fact that a woman could spar with me with such intelligent and intriguing banter took me aback. No woman I've ever known gave me this delightfully fun and witty back and forth. Not to mention she was incredibly talented. Beyond talented. She had a wonderful gift for writing. She just needed that little extra encouragement to unlock what was already inside her.

But I liked being inside her.

I liked being inside her so fucking much.

All afternoon was spent tangled up in the magical world of her manuscript. I devoured it in no time, eating up every delicious word that she'd rewoven since our night together. It now had the emotion and heady tension that she was after. It was portrayed in such a way it even had me hot around the collar.

Or was it the fact that I knew the woman behind those words?

Intimately.

Why was it that the more I got to know Paige, the more I wanted a repeat performance of last night? But that wasn't me. That wasn't me in the least bit. I was the epitome of 'wham, bam, thank you, ma'am'. With Paige, I was 'Please miss, can I have some more?'.

She seemed icy today. Maybe she didn't have as good of a time as I thought. Perhaps my play for round two was all for naught.

Wait, why was I even considering a round two? That was the major question here. Was she just a shiny new toy that I needed to play with a few times to get out of my system? Maybe it was because she wasn't like the other women I'd slept with. The only way to figure this out was to sleep with her again.

Sleep with her or give her my number.

Or both.

Jeezus fucking hell.

I double-fisted the two bottles of hard cider from the bar as I turned to take in the banquet hall. My eyes roamed the bustling room. More and more writers had seemingly come out of the woodwork as Paige and I were talking.

It took me a moment, but I found her caramel tresses in a far corner. The back of the room was just the place in case she'd let me make another move on her. I just needed that opening that she was into continuing this dynamic as much as I was. That perhaps we had one more chance to have a little more fun before we parted ways.

"Good choice of table." Her eyes darted up to mine with annoyance. I couldn't tell if she was playing me or truly was indifferent.

"It's quiet." She noted as I placed a bottle in front of her on the table. "But I won't be able to see the speaker all that well."

"Are you a fan of their work?"

"Actually," My eyes flickered down to her fingers as they reached out to stroke the condensation off the neck of the amber bottle. "I haven't read anything she's done...yet. I just really like to hear fellow authors talk. Its...I don't know. Like a reassurance thing? That all this chaos that I mentally suffer from daily is something that someone else deals with. That someone else understands this nonsense and it's not just me."

I couldn't help but stare at her for a few quiet moments as she drank back her second hard cider. She could have pulled the exact words right out of my mouth. I haven't had someone like Paige in my life since college. And even then, it was an older male professor. Not a beautiful and hilariously witty woman, who I just so happened to sleep with, and couldn't stop thinking about her naked body.

Maybe it was a bonus?

"I can't say that I've ever been to an author talk before. Or a book signing."

"Really?" Her surprise was vibrant on her face. "My publisher keeps urging me to go to a variety of them so I can get a feel for what's expected." Her lovely blue eyes dipped sheepishly. "It keeps my anxiety on the down low if I know what to expect. You know...for whenever I manage to bite the bullet and just say yes to a book tour. They really want me to do one for this next book." A sigh made her shoulders sag as she slouched down in her chair, blankly staring at her bottle.

"What are you afraid of? After reading what I did, I can see why fans adore you so much." Her cheeks went delightfully rosy as she shifted in her seat.

"Crowds. Judgement. Disappointment." Another sigh fell from her lips as she avoided my gaze. "I don't look like a popular fantasy author."

“Well...what the hell is a fantasy author supposed to look like? A two-ton bearded man who lives alone in some remote cabin and writes by hand and by candlelight?” I was rewarded with her famously awkward snort that seemed to make me smile every time.

“I don’t know... Not this.” Paige gestured down at herself. All I saw was a woman that I couldn’t seem to get enough of.

My hand reached out just to reassure her, but I couldn’t help but give her thigh a lingering caress. Blue eyes flickered up sharply to meet mine as my palm cupped over her bare knee. Leaning in slowly, the tips of my fingers found their way under the hemline of her dress. I could feel her tense beneath my touch as her tongue unconsciously darted out to wet her lips.

“I happen to think that you’re incredible...” My lips were just a breath away from her cheek as she froze with bated breath. “And the mere fact that I can’t stop thinking about you and your...*talents*...” I felt her shift and the warmth of her breath hit my lips. *If only...*

“Are these seats taken?”

Fuck.

Paige sat back with a start, but I took my time sitting back and away from her. I glanced up at the fellow writers who looked rather hopeful for a place to sit down.

“Help yourself.” They all tipped their head in a grateful nod. Thankfully as they sat they turned to each other to continue their conversation. I felt comfortable enough to readdress Paige. “Paige, seriously. You have nothing to worry about. If say, me, a total stranger, can like you after one conversation, I don’t think you’ll have a problem enchanting the masses. Besides...they’ll be there for you because they love what you do. They love the worlds you take them to. And I know that they’re going to go fucking crazy over this dynamic that finally happened between your main characters.”

She was quiet for a moment. A part of me was afraid that I scared her with my dump of emotions and compliments all at once.

“You...*like* me?” Her question was full of caution as she leaned back towards me.

“Who wouldn’t?” A tick of a smile quirked at the corner of her mouth.

“You’re so full of it.”

“I’ve already slept with you. So, it’s not like I’m blowing smoke up your ass just to get you into bed. All these compliments are genuine, I assure you.” I flashed her a radiant grin as the hotel staff placed our dinner plates down in

front of us. The distraction of food was welcomed and yet couldn't have come at a worse time.

Paige's chilly exterior melted almost instantly as our conversation continued over dinner. Our *personal* sultry subject matter sat by the wayside as we discussed the manuscript passages that she allowed me to read. Something still tugged in my brain on the fact that it felt like I read her style or something similar to her story before.

Dessert arrived along with the guest speaker. Her sweet treat was left half-eaten as she turned in her seat to hang on the speaker's every word. While I was interested in hearing what the author had to say, I was thoroughly distracted by the brunette beauty sitting next to me.

The others seated at our table had turned their chairs fully around to face the front of the room as Paige and I sat with our backs to the corner. As much as I wanted Paige to enjoy the one thing she had looked forward to, I couldn't help the itch in my fingertips to touch her. Her body was finally relaxed and taking in the speaker's every word.

One knee touch wouldn't hurt.

I reached out and casually placed my palm on the creamy swath of the skin of her thigh, right above her knee and just below the hem of her dress. It had ridden up slightly when she shifted in her seat to listen to the speaker. There was a sharp rise to her shoulders with her quick intake of breath. Yet her eyes stayed glued on the podium at the front of the room.

I knew I shouldn't bother her. We moved from acquaintances to lovers to acquaintances in less than a day. It was only a business arrangement. Those I was incredibly familiar with. It was an arrangement to further her success. Once it was done, it was done.

Why didn't I want to be done with Paige?

My hand drifted north of its own accord. Her inner thigh was so warm and silky. There were no stockings or tights to hinder my caresses. Every inch of her was bare and inviting. Just like last night.

With my eyes glued to her profile, I watched for any betrayal of a reaction as my fingertips strayed into forbidden territory. Not one soul looked in our direction. I could have my fingers knuckle-deep in her cunt without anyone being the wiser. As amorous as I was, I hadn't attempted any sexual fun in public. Too many eyes on me and too many whispers. Even a paparazzi camera or two. Here, no one knew who the hell I was. And I wanted to keep it that way.

I could feel her thigh tense beneath my touch as I strayed even further. Her breaths came quickly and yet she remained with her gaze on the speaker. Although her eyes seemed a bit glazed over. How much of the speaker's words she actually heard I was unsure.

Paige made no move to remove my hand which only encouraged me further. We'd been sitting with a barrier between us this evening for too long. If she was going to let me do what I liked, then I was going to fucking take it for all its worth.

I shifted in my seat which allowed me to dip in and taste the curve of her neck. A hot sigh left her lips as I felt her go a bit slack underneath my attention. With a smile against her skin, I closed my lips around the column of her throat as my fingertips reached the apex of her thighs and...

What in the ever-loving fucking fuck.

I was painfully hard in an instant with the realization that she was *not wearing any panties*.

My fingers grazed against her searing hot mound with nothing to stop me. Nothing to deter me. She decided to go panty-less *on purpose*. Which meant...

She was ready for another round as much as I was.

I had to suppress a groan as my teeth scraped across her collarbone. My body instinctively arched towards her as the tip of my middle finger caressed up and down her slit. I could hear her shaky inhale. She was impressively impassive. Or perhaps she was just frozen to the spot as I toyed with her in a public place?

"Was this...*for me?*" I purred into her ear as my hungry mouth traced slow and meandering kisses across her ear and down her neck. My finger parted her lower lips to find her delightfully sodden. My dick was straining against the metal zipper of my dress pants to the point that it was becoming uncomfortable. I wanted to take her right against the wall in the back of the banquet hall.

"Technically..." Her soft voice trembled slightly as my fingers worked between her now parted thighs. "Yes." I had to swallow back my groan. A woman that did something for me? It was unexpectedly the biggest fucking turn-on. "T-To get you back for that snoring comment..."

I chuckled darkly. "You're a sadist."

"I am not-oh! *Oh...*" My cock twitched with the noise she made as my finger slowly slipped inside her mid-sentence and broke her train of thought.

“Penn...” Her voice warned in a raspy whisper, “We can’t do this here...”

“You’re the one who showed up without panties. No one is watching.” My lips found her jaw as I murmured back to her. “Besides...if you can stay quiet, no one will be the wiser.” I was desperate to see just how much she could take before she would give us away.

Paige made no move to still my advances, so I continued with more vigor. She bit down on her lower lip, making it turn white from the low blood circulation under her lipstick. My free hand reached out to forcibly shove her one knee off to the side. The skirt of her dress strained against the wedge of her parted thighs as it hiked further up her legs.

My finger slid in and out of her with ease. If I went any faster the unknowing people on the other side of the table would be able to hear the wet squelching from her excess desire. With a curl of my finger, the softest hint of a whimper slipped through her parted lips. I was enjoying this entirely too much to get caught now. I captured her mouth with mine. A grateful tumble of muffled noises was emptied into me. I swallowed them as quickly as she produced them.

A roar of applause infiltrated across the room and I groaned. The fun was over as people began to shuffle about between the staff collecting dessert plates and those who got up to go back to their rooms or the dance party. Reluctantly I relinquished my hold on Paige and settled back into my seat.

She looked delightfully flushed and still sat with her thighs to either side of her seat as her hands gripped the back of the chair. Perhaps she was still in shock.

Her slick on my finger caught the light in the banquet room. I couldn’t let such a delicacy go to waste. Lifting my fingers to my mouth, I let the digit disappear up to my last knuckle. I relished her sweet flavor. It wasn’t until I had a good suck that my eyes met hers. They were fiery in their silence as she watched me enjoy her essence.

The lighting dimmed in the room as the DJ stepped up for the dance party. I wasn’t enthralled with the idea of dancing but the thought of grinding my hard dick up against her in a public place swayed me in that direction. Paige remained in her seat in a vain attempt to catch her breath.

Maybe she needed a bit more tease if I was going to get her to follow me. Her eyes finally focused and drifted to the dance floor. I suspected as much. Perhaps one dance wouldn’t hurt.

“Would you like to dance?” I asked her with a cocked brow and offered

her my hand. Her face shifted to delighted surprise as her back straightened up and off the chair. Without hesitation, her hand slipped into mine.

“I’d love to.”

Thankfully enough time had passed since I was giving her a vaginal exam, so my dick wasn’t as loud and proud as before. At least I could walk through the room without a raging hard-on. Although I still needed to adjust some things down under. Which I managed to do subtly as I led Paige over to the DJ.

As soon as we found our spot on the dance floor, I pulled her in tight against me. It sent the wisps of her hair fluttering about her face as we ceased to have even a fraction of a millimeter of air between us. My hands latched onto hers, drawing them up to assume the position.

The look of delight that infiltrated her features warmed my heart. So maybe dancing with her wasn’t so bad. She answered each sway of mine with ease. It was a treat to be this close to her without one, or both of us, naked.

“I don’t think I’ve ever been asked to dance before.”

“That’s a shame. You are an...enticing dancer.” The effortless way her hips swayed against mine did not go unnoticed.

“Well...I was a dancer. But...never really had the opportunity to dance with...someone.”

“What about prom? Homecoming?” She shot me a look.

“Do I look like a woman who had a date to prom?”

“I would have asked you.”

“You’re just saying that.”

“Like I said. Why would I need to lie to you?” I pulled away from her to give her a dizzying twirl before I drew her back in tight. There was a breathless smile on her lips that perhaps only I noticed.

The change in music genre brought a heart-thumping beat that I was after. Music that I could mold my hard body to her soft curves. The tempo urged my hips to grind against hers. I swallowed down her gasp as I caught her mouth with mine. My dick was hard and aching for her all over again with the smallest of temptations.

“Where did you learn to dance?” Paige whispered breathlessly against my mouth as my hands eased their way down over her curves.

“Whiny girlfriends.” Her snort returned with a vengeance but quickly turned into a sharp noise as I gripped her ass.

“What the hell does that mean?”

“They wanted to dance. I didn’t. So, I danced.”

“At least you learned a thing or two.”

“Or three.” My hands swiftly turned her around so her back was to me. I shaped my body along the line of her back, nestling her bottom right against my hard dick. It was a tease but damn it felt incredible. My hands slid around to latch onto her hips as I gave her a roll of my own. Despite her apparent shock at our still-clothed intimacy, Paige fell right in line.

It was mere seconds after that when I regretted the dancing suggestion. With a grinding swirl of her ass against my dick, I was a breadth away from splitting open a new fly in my pants. I held onto her hips for dear life as I let her have her way with me. The moment her hands combed back through my hair and gave it a swift tug, I was done for.

My hands moved up the front of her body in opposing directions. Two could play this delectable teasing game. One hand descended to the junction of her thighs while the other coyly reached up to cup her breast. A sultry croon rumbled deep in her throat. I could feel the vibration through her back against my chest.

“If you keep this up, I just might bend you over and take you right on this dance floor for all to see...” I growled low in her ear before I sucked her earlobe into my mouth. The sway of her body only hiccupped for a moment before she continued with her mesmerizing movements against me.

“I mean... it's on my Sex Bucket List...” She whispered breathily. The music was so loud it almost took her words with it.

“Your...*what?*”

“Sex Bucket List.” Paige spun in my arms and made sure to not lose one inch of contact between our bodies. “You’ve made me realize that I’ve been too chicken and missed out on a whole lot.” I was speechless during her little sultry tirade. “Going panty-less in public?” Her palms slid across my chest to meet in the middle and began fumbling with my buttons. “That was one.” Jeezus, maybe I should have cut her alcohol consumption off at one.

“And...the others...?”

“Sex in public. Probably not ready for that one anytime soon.” I couldn’t help but laugh at her audacity. Where the hell did this Paige come from? “Damn, you feel good. Why do you feel good?” Come to think of it, her words were a bit crazed. Was she tipsy?

“Did you grab another drink when I wasn’t looking?”

“I uh...maybe have had a sip or two of yours.”

Come to think of it, I think she may have downed the entire thing. I didn't remember taking a single sip. I was too engrossed with her. I laughed. But damn if I didn't want to devour every inch of this woman right this second. But first, we needed to dance off some more alcohol before she made an inebriated decision she'd regret later.

"What am I going to do with you?"

"I can think of a few things." I had to swallow back my groan. "Namely with this." Her hand slithered down between us and cupped my raging erection. My fingers curled into the sides of her dress. I was a breadth away from tearing it to shreds right off of her. "Seems like you're having fun."

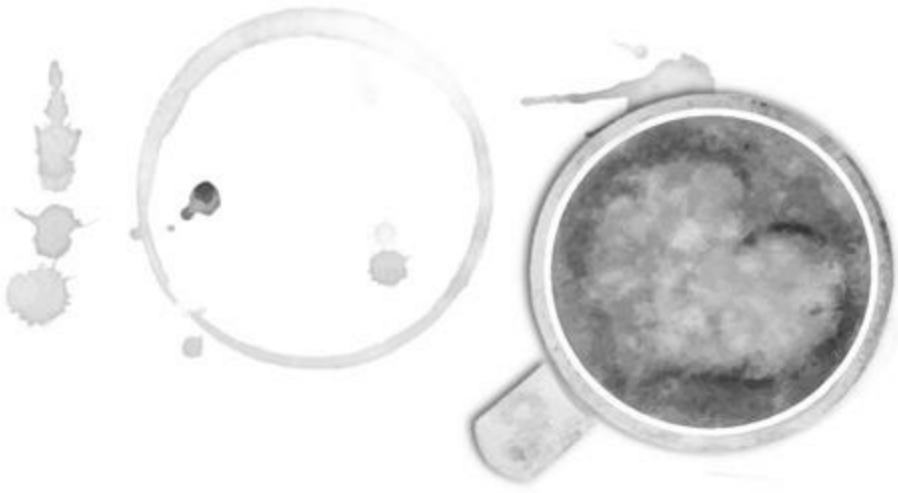
"You're a good dancer." Now it was her turn to laugh. Her fingers continued to stroke my now-raging hard-on. I had to grit my teeth to keep my wits about me. "If you keep that up, I'll hold you to cleaning up the mess."

Something dangerous sparkled in her blue eyes before she unexpectedly started her descent. Fuck, I could go for another blow job of hers and not give a damn that it was in public. Everyone in the damn room would know that she was mine and only mine.

Thankfully but disappointedly, she dropped low enough for me to feel the heat of her breath through my pants against my dick for a few beats. She didn't linger but the ascent was almost worse of a tease. Her eyes locked onto mine as her hands followed the scrape of her breasts from my knees to my thighs, to my dick that was ready to burst.

My hand shot down and grabbed a fistful of her hair along the back of her neck. I didn't pull hard enough to hurt, just enough to encourage her back to her feet.

"What were you saying about that Sex Bucket List of yours?"



Chapter 19

Paige

This was my last chance for another mind-blowing night of sexy banter and delights. So what if I needed a bit of liquid courage to help me along? It got the job done. It broke through my usual hurdle of crippling shyness to this apparent sexual vixen, hiding beneath the surface.

With Penn, I felt accepted. Encouraged even. Not just sexually, but career-wise. Then he had to go and lay on the compliments, and I was ready to jump his bones on the dance floor.

I wasn't even mad at him for interrupting me in the middle of the author's talk. He'd taken the bait I set for him. It turned out a whole lot better than I could have even imagined. I only had minimal hopes that he'd find the treat I'd laid bare for him. The moment that he almost dragged me out of the banquet hall caveman-style, I knew I'd done it.

As soon as we were clear of the exit, he slammed my body up against the wall for a searing kiss. It was one, that even if we had managed on the dance floor, a few questionable looks would have been cast in our direction with obscene hand placements and body movements. Now I understood why people made *really* stupid decisions in the heat of the moment.

With one last heady suckle on my neck, Penn pulled me from our terrible hiding spot when some of the other guests drifted into the hallway. How did people manage to have sex in public? Did they accomplish such a feat or was it something made up in books and movies?

Closets were a fairly popular pastime. How does one have sex in closets? Utility closets were gross and full of mop buckets and cleaning supplies. Penn made a sharp turn down a side hallway on the other side of the banquet hall. With the way we were both tugging at each other's clothes and stealing searing kisses, we weren't going to make it much longer without making a scene or collapsing to the carpeted floor in a tangle of questionably dressed limbs.

I saw it only a half second after Penn did. A public bathroom down the hallway of the main exterior entrance to the banquet hall. The access was probably used for weddings and other events that didn't involve the resort. Even better was the fact that there was a family restroom.

With a tug of my hand, I slipped in next to Penn as he opened the door. I let out a sigh of relief before my heart jumped from my stomach to my throat in an ugly churn of excitement and apprehension. His free hand shoved the door closed and latched the 'occupied' lock.

He turned to me with a sly grin of victory as he pressed me up against the chill of the artfully tiled wall. With a searing hot kiss, he dropped down to a knee as his hands roughly pulled the skirt of my dress upward, completely exposing my surprise for him to admire. A resounding groan hit the walls of the bathroom before he dove in for a four-course meal.

I knew we were off and away from the majority of people but there was still a chance that someone might wander, unsuspecting. As much as I wanted to shout and scream from the rigors of his tongue and lips, I gritted my teeth and tangled my fingers into his hair. He worked me like a man starved for the elixir of life and the only answer was between my legs. Thank god he held onto my thighs because my knees would have for sure buckled under his ministrations.

Penn drove me to the brink before he pulled away and stood. He spun my body around to face the wall as his hands reached down with a rough grab of my ass. His mouth found the naked skin along the nape of the back of my neck.

"Ready to check off another Bucket List item?" His voice was coarse in my ear, hot and needy. I heard the jingle of his belt and my body immediately went into Pavlov's dog's response of salivating. Only it wasn't my mouth doing it. "Yes, or no?" His pants hit the floor and I heard the rustle of a condom wrapper, but the noises paused as he awaited my answer.

"Penn, I..." My mind raced with a dozen different outcomes, but I reassured myself. While we were in a public restroom, it was behind a locked door with a man that I, oddly enough, trusted enough to fuck me in a bathroom. "Fuck yes." *You only live once.*

There was some rumbling noise of approval from him as the wrapper was torn open. His hand pressed me forward to present my ass to him and spread my thighs. The knuckles of his other hand brushed against the curve of my bottom as he rolled the protection on his hard dick.

Probing fingers grazed between my thighs, spreading my slick along the outside of my folds as his hips met up with my ass. My hands slapped against the tiled wall to brace myself. This was yet another position I never attempted with anyone. Although it was one that I enjoyed watching in certain videos. It

was something I always wanted to try, and Penn was the perfect height to fulfill that fantasy.

The mutual groan of relief was loud as his cock penetrated me. His noise of delight shadowed over mine and I choked back the rest of my voiced pleasure. The stupid acoustics in this room were going to make each and every sound twenty times louder.

There was no way I could describe the feeling of being fulfilled by a cock that ached for you. It satisfied everything all at once. Yet there was an unyielding need to consume. Touching, thrusting, kisses, anything and everything, all at the same time.

I was in desperate need of something to hold onto. A towel rack, an ADA bar, anything. Instead, my nails bent backward as they dug into the tile wall. Penn was hungry for this. I could feel it in every quick rock of his hips.

“Fuck... You were all I could think about all fucking day.” The words were husky with a thick grit as he continued with his onslaught. “I could barely get a damn word written. My body wanted to be all wrapped up with yours.”

The whimper escaped me before I even knew it was coming. Me? The man fantasized about me? As freaking incredible as the sex last night was, not one part of me assumed that he’d ever reflect back on it.

Using the brace of my hands against the wall, I thrust my hips back into his, adding my own voracious chaos to the mix. I was rewarded with a primal sort of noise as teeth sunk into my shoulder. Penn’s hands moved from their vice grip on my hips and trailed touches of fire up under my dress and across my abdomen. His touch pulled my back towards him, arching my ribcage out before his hands grasped onto my breasts.

My dress was all scrunched up around my armpits as his fingers pinched and played with my nipples. My hands left the wall as he drew me back to him. My knees shook slightly at the change of position and my fingers shot up to tangle in his hair just to keep myself steady. Penn wanted nothing of the sort. One hand remained on my breast while the other snaked down between my thighs and found my clit. Two fingers massaged the swollen bud, swirling it in time with his thrusts, which had to become shallower due to the somewhat awkward positioning.

I was so sure that I was going to faint or already had. My world upended as I felt myself falling forward for a brief second before being spun around. I was able to recenter myself as Penn’s mouth was suddenly hard and hot

against mine. It felt like he wanted to suck my soul clear out of my heels. Which I suppose he did as he picked me up and they clattered to the floor. He dropped me on the cold composite stone of the sink.

All air left my lungs when my ass felt the icy chill of the sink. It sent a shock through my overheated skin. Penn practically bent me in half as he penetrated me again. I choked on nothing, desperate for oxygen.

“Oh, *fuck yes...* That’s it. Damn, you feel so good, Paige...” Penn growled out, tipping his body forward with a vigorous slap of his hips against my thighs. He coaxed my calves up to his shoulders. My ankles bobbed next to his ears as he thrust into me with abandon. I had to lean back on my hands and my head hit the mirror behind me. I was going to regret these body-twisting positions tomorrow, but right now it felt like the pearly gates of heaven were beckoning me in.

This whole situation was out of the pages of some smutty book, and I was here for it. Penn’s body was a dream, a dream that was ready to take me to the edge of oblivion. I gasped as I felt the tingles of orgasm begin to infiltrate my body.

My arms moved quickly to tangle around his neck. I needed that closeness, to feel his body rock against mine. Penn answered with an approving noise as his hands slid from pushing my thighs apart to settle on my lower back. My ass made a squeak against the counter as he scooted me closer to the edge. His pelvic bone hit against my clit and I was done for.

The noise I made was probably a whole hell of a lot louder than I meant, but my orgasm hit me like a tidal wave. It wracked through my entire body as I clutched onto Penn. I wasn’t being fucked in a public bathroom; I was floating in a whole other galaxy.

My vaginal muscles spasmed with reckless abandon. If we kept up this kind of pace, I was going to have an eight-pack by next week. His fingers dug into my lower back. I was only slightly afraid that he was going to leave bruises or break the skin with his death grip. Penn lavished my neck with breathless, open-mouthed kisses as his hips kept up their wicked pace.

Within a few rapid thrusts a delectable, heady groan caressed the moist skin of my throat as he emptied himself inside of me. His hips continued to move slower with each follow-up thrust as the intensity of our peaks eased.

There was quiet as we each caught our breath. We managed a wildly reckless sexual rendezvous in a public bathroom. Having sex in a public bathroom was fairly low on my sexual Bucket List. Yet here I was, with my

legs draped over Penn's forearms, the skirt of my dress shoved up to my breasts, one of them hanging out. I probably looked like a mess.

As Penn came back to earth, he gave me one look before stealing a searing kiss that stole my precious breath away. Despite being delightfully spent, that kiss could have easily convinced me into another round. Although if I wanted to drive home tomorrow without a pharmacy of painkillers in my system, a bed was going to be needed for round two.

If there was a round two.

"Your room or mine?"

"...Mine."

Round two it is.



Chapter 20

Penn

It was only the second night and Paige already had me breaking my own rule: To never sleep over. After that delectable tryst in the bathroom, there was no way in fucking hell I was going to let her out of my sight as long as we were in the same hotel. The woman already had a habit of draining my balls and making me ache for more without a second thought.

My head was still swimming with her little surprise of not wearing panties. Or a bra for that matter. The way my dick responded to her was as if she had been training the damn thing for years. I'd been in this woman's presence for barely four days, and I couldn't get enough of her body.

Or her.

What the fuck were we going to do when we had to check out tomorrow? Despite being half tempted to stay a few more days, the office would probably send out a search party, even if I did alert them of my extended absence. That sort of behavior was completely unlike me.

Besides, I didn't even know what sort of life Paige had beyond being a writer. Maybe she had a part-time job or other responsibilities? Maybe this was just an incredibly successful hobby and she was some CEO mogul herself? As much as I wanted to be selfish, I couldn't bring myself to suggest such a thing.

This shouldn't be so complicated. It was just sleeping in her room at the hotel. Not leaving a spare toothbrush at her place for me to use when I came over. A stray thought did wander in as to what it would be like if we did make this a regular thing. Would Paige be for that idea? Would she think this was a relationship? Hell, I didn't even know what *this* was.

I took a quick shower. The moves on the dance floor and sex in the bathroom didn't do me any favors. If we ended up getting all sweaty again then we could shower together. Now there's a thought.

With teeth brushed and dressed down in my comfort clothes, I made my way to Paige's room. A part of me worried that maybe she would be pissed I took so long or maybe she fell asleep. I was surprised to see her door propped open with the door lock. With a subtle knock, I slipped inside.

The gas fireplace she had in her upgraded suite was on and the room

was delightfully cozy in the dim light of the tableside lamp. Paige sat up in bed with a start but instantly relaxed when she saw it was me.

Oh, fuck me.

From what I could tell she was freshly showered as well and *completely naked* in the sheets. What a good girl she was.

“Looks like you had the same idea I did.” An amused smirk curled at her flushed lips as her eyes darted up to my damp hair.

“Yeah well, you molested me pretty good on the dance floor.” Her laughter was warm as she leaned forward, but not enough for the sheets to uncover her breasts that I enjoyed worshipping.

“Ah, excuse me, sir. I believe that was a *mutual* molesting.” I had to chuckle at that. If I came here for the reasons I thought, there was going to be a whole hell of a lot more molesting going on beneath the sheets. Maybe against the wall, on the floor in front of the fire, in the shower...

“That it was.” My voice went a bit honey and whiskey as I stalked closer to her with a grin. Without breaking eye contact, I slipped my hand into my pocket and deposited the dozen or so condoms on the nightstand. There was a nervous chuckle from Paige as she eyed the pile.

“Ambitious, are we?”

“After that stunt on the dance floor and in the bathroom...? You fucking bet.” I hastily dropped my pants and shirt into a heap on the floor before crawling atop her. My eyes followed the nervous swallow down her throat as she slowly laid back on the pillow. As much as I wanted to rip the sheets off of her, I had time to savor her. I was going to do just that.

A bubbly giggle broke the heated silence between us as I stole a quick kiss. I relished in the jolt that even a brush of our lips sent down my spine. This sort of chemistry and connection was something that I didn't want to admit that I was getting addicted to.

“I can feel why you put the fireplace on. Holy shit it's cold.” With a roll off of her, I slipped under the sheets. Her naked body made the layers warm and inviting. Her body being the best part of the bedding sandwich. Paige laughed with a screech as I pulled her into my arms.

“Oh my god, you really should wear more clothes when you go stalking around a hotel.”

“Why? I was coming for the sole purpose of your naked body warming me up.” The hot air of her snort hit my chest. Why the fuck was a snort now turning me on?

“I can see that the cold didn’t affect everything...” My hardening dick pressed against the side of her thigh. She shifted her hips to test just how well her body was already *warming* mine up.

“No, it was your snort that did it.” She gave me a good swat against my shoulder with a laugh.

In a split second, I had her flat on her back with her hands cuffed together in a strong grip of my fingers above her head. My body straddled hers. As much as I wanted to be in control of this smartass beneath me, my body was a half-second away from betraying me. Her mouth dropped open to a soft O in surprise and she stared up at me wide-eyed.

“So...about that Bucket List of yours...”

“W-What about it...?”

“I was curious as to what else is on it.”

“Oh...” She squirmed nervously as she avoided my eyes. I had to swallow back my groan as she tried to get free of my grasp. But she was right where I wanted her. “Um...well...”

“We are literally both naked in bed and I was cock-deep in you barely an hour ago. I think we are past any pretenses.”

“Uh...right.”

“Besides...we have all night. I could help you check a few more off.”

“Easy there, tiger. These were kind of *lifetime* wants of mine.”

“And? The good ones you just repeat. Half the fun is finding out which ones you enjoy the most. Or well...improve upon them until they’re fucking amazing.” Her sudden scoff was adorable.

“You’re crazy. You know that?”

“It’s normal. Humans are sexual creatures. It’s not completely your fault that you missed out on this kind of fun and couldn’t write a book.”

“You’re an ass.”

“But you think this ass is hot.”

“Stop being right.”

“Stop being a prude.” That finally earned me a huff as she struggled once more against my hold on her wrists. The banter was dizzying. It was fun to egg her on. I liked watching her squirm, but I liked feeling her squirm beneath me even more. “So?”

“Fine.” She grumbled somewhat reluctantly before her list came tumbling out of her mouth all at once. “Sex on a desk or table, sex in a shower, sex in front of the fire, maybe camping sex or better yet glamping,

maybe out under the stars, toys with a partner, sixty-nine, sex in a car I'm still considering, and..."

"And...?"

Her eyes squinted shut as she winced. "Maybe...anal."

Well, I sure as fuck wasn't expecting that.

"That's all?"

Her eyes flashed back open at me in surprise. "What do you mean, 'that's all'? Don't tell me you've done all of those!"

"Most of them." I shrugged. It wasn't exactly a big deal. I didn't participate in anything particularly dangerous and was always adequately protected.

"Even...?" Her voice went quiet as she shyly eyed me up.

"Even that." I laughed. "Don't worry, I won't ever attempt that unless you give permission and are prepared for such a feat. You don't exactly do anal for shits and giggles." I regretted my word choice immediately. At least it got Paige to dissolve into a rather raucous fit of laughter.

"Duly noted." She managed to squeak out despite the tears of mirth in her eyes.

"What about any other sexual positions?"

"Oh well...I-"

"Are you open to suggestions?"

"...Probably?"

I let out a huff of laughter and shook my head. "Maybe I should send you a copy of the Kama Sutra and have you flag pages that look like fun." Paige's cheeks went delightfully pink. "I'll take that as a yes." I leaned down to relish the surprise in her eyes. My lips met hers and I drank her in slowly. The more times I kissed her, the more I couldn't understand how she tasted better with each one. A spicy jolt shivered down my spine and it left me aching for more.

Women before Paige were in my life to satisfy a need. Whether it be a night of companionship and conversation or just a release of sexual frustrations. With Paige, it felt like I achieved complete satisfaction, and yet it left me hungry for more. It was a connoisseur. And a perplexing one at that.

"Fireplace or desk?"

"I-" Her eyes were still glazed over from the kiss.

"Both it is."

"Penn, what-" Paige's eyes went wide as my hands freed her wrists and

moved to wrap her legs around my waist. I couldn't help my wicked grin as I felt her moist heat against my hard dick. She looked surprised and innocent when I did shit like this, but deep down, she fucking loved it.

"Hold onto me." I urged as my hands gripped her ass while I sat up. Quickly she obeyed and wrapped her arms tightly around my neck. "Grab a few condoms." I urged as I eased the both of us off the bed. Paige looked shell-shocked but obeyed. My cock swelled with approval. I stepped over to the table/desk along the wall by the window.

I placed her bottom on the wood surface as my foot shoved the desk chair out of the way. My goal was to pull one quick orgasm out of her and then take my time with her in front of the fire. A bed was always fun, but trying a new place added some excitement.

Her jaw dropped to make some sort of smartass remark, but my mouth was on hers, silencing all efforts. It only took a moment before I felt her body relax fully into the kiss. Without moving her lips from mine, she dropped the pile of condoms on the desk next to her as her fingers tangled in my hair.

Despite our discussion, I needed to make sure that she was wet enough to handle the surprise change in position. If our bathroom tryst was anything to gauge by, I'd say there was a very good chance she was more than ready.

In one fell swoop, I dropped to my knees. My hands kept her thighs apart to allow my body to slide down and give her yet another taste. The scent of her desire was heady and vibrant, even a good distance away. My mouth instantly watered. I latched onto her lower lips, not wanting any of my excess saliva to go to waste.

The sound of her delight pierced the quiet of the room. *Fuck yes.* I hoped she'd stay loud. I didn't care if we had a noise complaint every five minutes. I wanted to drive her wild and make her go hoarse from all the screaming in pleasure.

My mouth went in with hungry abandon. A delectable mix of lapping tongue and suckling lips against her slit and clit. Her legs collapsed atop my shoulders as I added two fingers into her wet confines. This was utter bliss. From the near-constant sounds out of her mouth, I was sure that the feeling was mutual.

I started slowly with my fingers, coaxing her slick desire out onto my lips and tongue. She was getting wetter by the second and I became even more insatiable. Her nails dug into my skull as her trembling whimpers were practically begging for me to send her right over the edge.

With a curl of my fingers up into the rough spongy spot, I quickened my thrusting pace. The creamy thighs to either side of my face began to tremble, and I knew she was there.

“Fuck! Penn!” Paige hissed out as she tossed her head back. There was a subtle burst of wetness against my palm that caught me by surprise. I pulled my mouth away. My eyes were transfixed on her cunt as I propelled my fingers into her even faster. With a high shrill, a more noticeable gush coated clear down my wrist.

Paige’s hotness level just rose a bajillion degrees.

The flutter of her walls slowly eased, and I slipped my fingers out of her to let her catch her breath. I wasn’t going to let her sweet cum go to waste. Standing up, I used my wet palm to coat my dick in her warm essence. Her natural lube was currently the closest I’d ever get to feeling that tight, wet cunt on my cock without a condom in the way.

“Goddammit, Paige.” I huffed out as my hand pumped my hard dick. Her eyes lazily opened, still fresh in her post-orgasmic haze. “You can...*squirt?*”

She sat up straight as her eyes flashed open wide in surprise. “Oh my god, *what?*”

“You know...a femal-”

“I fucking know what squirting is, Penn.” She snapped at me as her hand reached down between her legs to feel what the hell was going on. I took a quick mental note that I wanted to watch her pleasure herself sometime in the future. The moment her fingers felt her desire coating her mound and inner thighs, her eyes went wide. *“Holy shit.”*

“Holy shit is right.” I stole a quick kiss from her shocked face. “It wasn’t much but...*damn.*”

“I mean...the last few times I uh...went solo...it was, uh... *Very wet.*”

“You’ve been holding out on me.”

“I had no idea!”

“Sure, right.” Fuck, I loved watching her bristle. “One orgasm down. A few dozen more to go.” Her blue eyes caught the firelight as they widened. “Put the condom on me, Paige.” With a purse of her lips, she hesitated. “Just roll it on,” I added softly before I wrapped my fingers around her wrist and guided her.

Her bright gaze dropped down to my cock as she timidly rolled the protection down over the length. With my dick this hard it was easy work. I

relished the feel of her fingertips sliding down against the overheated skin. What I wouldn't do at this point to have those hands or cunt wrapped around me every damn day.

I took one step closer to her and slid her ass to the edge of the piece of furniture. A soft gasp quickly turned into a moan as I rubbed my swollen head up and down her slit. It was so easy with all of her slick still present. My hands found the jut of her hips and I thrust into her.

The cry of delight was mutual as we fulfilled one another. I gave her a moment to acclimate before I gave her the fucking of her life. Hard and fast right now before I changed it up with something deep and slow. Edging myself was a cruel bitch but damn the orgasm at the end was worth it.

Paige held onto me for dear life as I continued my ruthless onslaught. I needed to build up that heated delight before I eased off the throttle and rode the waves slowly out into oblivion. The desk rocked hard against the wall. Fuck it all if I had to pay to fix the drywall. I couldn't give two shits right now. Not when I was deep in her body and could still taste her on my lips. Not when I could easily afford to destroy the entire hotel room while I claimed her.

I felt her clench tightly around me as she moaned out my name. Another orgasm ripped through her out of the blue. I had to change up our position now, lest I blow my load earlier than I wanted. Gripping the globes of her ass, I lifted her clear off the desk, still deep inside her. She wasn't the lightest thing, but having her weight against me as I shuffled us over to the fireplace made my muscles burn in all the right ways. Maybe throwing her around could be an interesting new part of my workout routine.

It took a little bit of effort, but I eased us both down onto the rug. This was going to feel like fucking on a cloud. Did we both have to go home tomorrow? There were at least half a dozen other surfaces I could fuck her on.

"That was so fucking hot." Paige breathed out as her hands caressed down my chest.

"The desk part?"

"Well that but...you carrying me while, uh..."

"Mmm...that was rather fun. Now I'm debating making your naked body part of my gym rotation." I snatched another kiss. My hips shifted, nestling deeper into the V of her thighs. Her whimper slipped right through her lips and into my mouth.

“Sex in a gym...that’s a new one.”

“Should we add it to your list?”

“We?” Her smartass came right back out to play as she shot me a look. I reminded her who was on top with a subtle thrust of my hips. A sexy little noise shot from her lips as her back arched. Her hands latched onto my propped-up forearms for dear life.

“I kind of like the idea of helping you check off your Sex Bucket List.”

“*Penn...*” Paige’s voice dropped a bit in warning. I knew I was treading on dangerous ground but damn if I wasn’t going to shoot my shot. I gave her another smooth jolt of my hips before answering her.

“I want your number. Or email. Or whatever.” Another thrust.

“You...w-what...?”

“I don’t want this to end tonight.” I made her breasts bounce again with the force of my hips.

“*Penn...*”

I didn’t give her a chance to argue further. I covered her mouth with mine before I eased slowly into a gentle rock of our bodies. My hands slid over her curves, wanting to commit each one to memory to last me until the next time we could be together after this. I had to be losing my mind. I was sex-drunk over this woman. This woman was still practically a stranger.

And damn if I’d ever be able to get enough of her. At least not tonight.

There were no further arguments from her as I kept up the languid but steady pace. I felt the graze of her fingertips as they followed the flex of my muscles as I moved above her. Her legs wrapped around my hips as her heels dug into my ass. She wanted me to be as deep as possible and I did everything to oblige her.

It was uncomfortably intimate but just what was needed after the fiery evening. I wasn’t used to intimacy but for some reason it was easy with Paige. Maybe because she answered my beck and call so effortlessly. She was becoming an obsession. An endless desire.

Maybe I needed to go back home and fuck a few other women. Maybe she just got my engines revved up for no reason. Or maybe it was just because she was a like-minded soul and that was a new kink for me. I had to put it to the test and see. Time would tell. Either way, I still needed her number. I wasn’t going to leave his hotel without it.

Her lips were needy for mine as our tongues danced while our bodies rocked together. The warmth of the fire licked over our naked forms as I

drove her deeper into the plush carpet. I drank in every wild whimper, every cry. Her body enveloped me like a warm blanket of comfort and pleasure. I tried to savor everything about the woman spread out below me, but it was the most delicious kind of torture to hold myself back any longer. Not when her ankles were locked behind my back in a desperate attempt to ride me into the beyond.

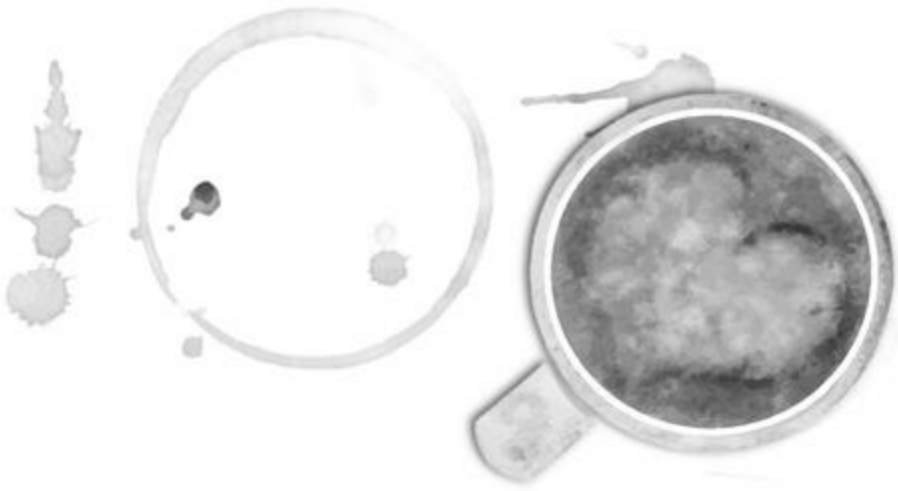
“Oh god, Penn...I’m so close...” The whisper was mumbled against my mouth. She didn’t even want to stop our kisses long enough to urge me over that final hurdle. My hands shot out to cup her jaw and hold her still as I bucked my hips with a fierce rhythm.

Oh, fuck yes. This was fucking it. I felt her wet walls clamp down like a vice around my dick. She surrounded me and didn’t let go as her lower lip broke our intense kiss to scream out.

With a grit to my teeth, and one last swirl of my hips, I joined her with my orgasm. Normally if I had two orgasms close together, the second one was miniscule and barely a blip. This one? This one was for the record books.

It was my turn to be unable to keep quiet as I drained even the dark recesses of my balls into the condom that separated me from utter perfection. What the hell is wrong with me? The intensity of these thoughts scared me a bit. If I wasn’t careful, I might catch a feeling.

Or two.



Chapter 21
Paige

One month later...

Of course.

The asshole ghosted me.

All that talk, right in the middle of the most mind-blowing sex of my life, was fucking baloney. His insistence on wanting to see me again was just another lie to another woman he's bedded. We traded numbers before he left that morning, and I hadn't heard one damn peep out of the sexy asshole since.

The physical contact was just *supposed* to be about book research. Then it mysteriously went to the hottest sex I'd ever had and was *supposed* to stay that way until he opened his damn mouth. Everything about it was going so well. I even managed to keep feelings out of it, which was rare for me. I didn't want this bullshit of pretenses of a weird ass relationship in the first place. There was no fucking way I was going to be the first to text him.

As much as it was killing me not to.

Despite the broken promises of texting me, I hadn't had time to dwell on that aspect. Every day since the writers' retreat was spent finishing up my book manuscript. It took almost night and day writing sessions, but I managed to finish it in time for my extended deadline.

Maybe I used my project to distract myself away from the fact that Penn hadn't contacted me. It's not like I had high hopes that he would. Okay, fuck. Maybe I did. I was at least a *little* hopeful. That man was entirely too pretty to be with the likes of me. But the sex...oh holy fuck the sex was phenomenal.

It didn't help that the most god-awful romantic holiday was just around the corner. As much as I didn't want to admit it, my mind drifted here and there to searing hot fantasies of Penn and I all tangled up in satin sheets in some trashy, themed motel for an entire weekend. I enjoyed romance, but with a man as artful in sex as Penn was, I could take it or leave it. His dick was too incredible to want anything else. Maybe that was why I felt like I had no emotional attachment to the man. If he was that great at sex *and* a hopeless romantic, then I would have been on his doorstep looking like a lost puppy four weeks ago.

Valentine's Day always gave me that twitch that maybe I should find someone. A weird desire to line up a date instead of being miserable at home,

watching shitty romcoms, and ordering takeout. As desperate as my body was, my brain was not that desperate. If I was that desperate, that meant a skeezy man out there was twice as desperate. I did not deserve to date a sad excuse for a middle-aged man who was alone for Valentine's Day. I deserved better. However, at this rate, being alone was seemingly the only safe and less miserable alternative.

At least I managed to fuel my cravings for Penn and my self-pity into an almost non-stop writing marathon. Some would say that I was borderline bipolar and in my manic stage when I went on my writing binges. I survived on coffee and an endless playlist. I covered my windows and clocks, so I lost track of time.

I may have been a little more than sleep deprived when I sent off my manuscript to my agent to funnel to the publisher. It was weird to say I was 'done'. While I felt fulfilled and accomplished, it felt so lackluster. Like, that was it? It's done? No pomp and circumstance? No parade? Aside from reviewing the edits in a few weeks, I found myself with nothing to do for the first time in over five years.

On the other hand, my agent, Faith Wild, was beyond stoked when she called me. She managed to keep everything cool between me and the publishing house by extending the deadline with the promise of me going to a writers' retreat to get the rest of the book churned out. Since the holidays were thrown in there, one month ended up being three.

"I take it the writers' retreat was successful?" Her voice oozed smugness. She was the one who suggested the stupid thing in the first place. I was still bitter with how she lit a fire under my ass about going. "Or am I hallucinating that this manuscript for your next book is in my inbox?"

"No...you're right."

"I'm sorry, what? I think you said that I was *right*." She was lucky we were on the phone or else I would have punched her.

"Yes." I didn't want to give any more satisfaction than necessary.

"Close enough. So...anything you need to warn me about? Or drop any *coughspoilercough*."

Faith was a huge fan of my work. She was the one who fought to get me this contract with one of the big five publishing houses. Fantasy was her favorite genre. I wasn't sure if it was a good thing or a bad thing she was a fan. Not only did I have my agent hounding me, but she was a fan chomping at the bit for the next book.

“I mean...”

“Oh, fuck yes! Please tell me that they kiss. PLEASE TELL ME ANJA AND CASPIAN FINALLY KISS.”

I felt a vibrant heat rise to my cheeks as the entire sexual tryst of the weekend with Penn flashed before my eyes. He was the sole reason why my books went from a normal PG rating to an NC-17. I hadn't planned on open-door sex scenes in my book but Penn...*inspired* me.

It's not like I made it straight-up erotica. It was...tasteful. Passionate. Something that two people who had the slowest of slow burns in the history of mankind, that spanned over three lengthy books, were worthy of.

“Uh...well...”

“Oh. My. God. There's *more*?”

Damn, my poker face/tone sucked.

“Um...y-you could say that.”

“How much more?! Paige...*tell me!*”

“Let's just say that it's not a Disney movie anymore...”

“Oh, fuck yes! So...are we talking porno or...?”

“No, no. Not porn level.” I laughed. “It's well...*perfect.*”

“Well shit, now I'm going to have to clear my schedule and just read the damn thing. I've been dying to read your spice. I didn't think you had it in you.”

“Well...I didn't.”

“What changed?”

Fuck. Why did I have to open my big mouth? Faith was the closest thing I had to a friend. Ever since I was able to quit my job, I didn't venture out of the house much. Thank god for grocery delivery.

“Like you said. The...uh writers' retreat was just what I needed.”

“You mean you got out of your recluse cave.” There was a pregnant pause and I started to sweat. “Yeah, but just going off to a writers' retreat isn't going to make you magically write sex scenes overnight. Especially when you outright refused to *ever* write one. And there were no classes with this one, just silent writing time except for the afterparty. So...” There was a moment of quiet as Faith made some quick mental gymnastics. “*Oh my god, you met someone there.*”

“Uh...”

“Come on, Paige. Between you and Mari being my biggest headaches, I'm also living vicariously through both of you and your romantic dramas.

Although yours has been non-existent of late.”

Mari Quay was one of Write Type Publishing’s other bestselling authors and a client of Faith’s. She was well known for her women’s fiction and young adult fantasy series. But thanks to Mari’s new husband, Ben, she recently ventured into romance. Her first romance book ended up being her biggest seller. Ever. I only managed to meet the fellow author once or twice. She was sweet, just as crass as me, albeit a bit awkward.

“I’ve said nothing about romantic drama.”

“Oh yeah? When’s the last time you had sex before the writers’ retreat?”

“I don’t remem-*hey wait!*” *Oh, that was sneaky.*

“I KNEW IT! You met a guy! Or a woman. I won’t judge. I really don’t care. I just need details. What or who the hell fueled this fire?”

I huffed. “A ghosting asshole is who.”

Faith laughed for a moment before dishing for the rest of the juicy details. “Okay, but the sex...? Please tell me you had sex. I need something to look forward to in this brick of a manuscript.”

I sighed.

The woman was not going to let up until I unloaded the tea.

“He was literally the epitome of every smutty book boyfriend outside of dark romance.”

A long, low whistle pierced my ear through the phone. “That good, huh?”

“You have no idea.” I breathed out. The sex was amazing. Here it was a month later and I was still fantasizing about it. “The man sleeps with women every weekend. He’s an asshole who’s good in bed.”

“Wait, did you both trade numbers?”

“Well...yeah. He insisted.”

“He...*did?*”

“Yeah, I was shocked too. He didn’t seem like the type to save a woman’s number. And apparently, he’s not the one to call it either.”

“Maybe you should call him?”

“Hell no! He asked for *my* number. He should call me.”

“Maybe you should just send him a topless photo.”

“Uh...how about *no.*”

“Works for me.” I snorted. Faith was leggy and gorgeous. Of course, she looked good enough to send not-safe-for-work photos to anyone.

“Yeah, but you’re you.”

“Oh, come on, Paige.”

I opened my mouth to retort, yet again, but it started to buzz in my hand. Pulling the phone from my ear I glanced down and nearly threw my phone straight across the room.

Penn?!

“Uh...Faith...”

“Got another call?”

“Yeah... It's *the guy*.”

“Holy shit, answer it!”

“But...”

“Just answer it! I'm hanging up.”

With that, I was left with the seconds-only decision to pick up the phone or let it go to voicemail. I cursed out loud.

“...Hello?”

“Hey Paige, this is Penn.”

I could hear the smile in his voice, but I was still real fucking salty about the long wait for any form of contact.

“Who?” I asked tartly. *That'll show him.*

“Penn. From the writers' retreat.” There was a slight tinge of worry in his tone. Maybe he thought I gave him the wrong number.

“Oh. *That Penn.*”

“How many Penn's do you know?”

“Ones who actually call or text when they ask for a woman's number.”

Damn, go me.

“Ouch.” There was a prolonged silence and I imagined him licking his wounds. I half-expected him to hang up. “But I deserve that. Work has been shit lately. But that's no excuse. I apologize.”

I sat in bed with my mouth agape. Wait, he actually *apologized* for not contacting me? What kind of man was this? As much as I wanted to remain icy and just hang up on the asshole, him taking the full blame deflated my hate a bit.

“It's okay.” *It wasn't.* “I've had my hands full getting my manuscript done anyway. I've barely had time to focus on anything else.” *Which was partly true.*

“So...are you done?” The hopeful upswing in his tone made my heart flutter. I wanted to metaphorically squash it like a bug.

“I just sent it to my agent yesterday. She's going to read it over before

passing it along to the editor and publisher.”

“Wow, Paige. That’s incredible. Congratulations!” *Dammit, he really needed to stop with the genuine praise.*

“Oh...uh, thank you.”

“So...what are you going to do with yourself?”

“Uh...sleep? Which I was doing before you called.” Technically. I was only awake because Faith called me.

“Isn’t it the middle of the afternoon?”

“And? If you weren’t aware, deadlines and sleep don’t make very good bedfellows. Hence why I’m now in mine.”

“You’re in *bed*...?” It was more of a breathy rumination than a question, as if he was currently imagining the sight. There was an unexpected flush of heat that went straight between my thighs.

Wait no, this was not fair. There was no way that just his words could have this effect on me. He went an entire month without contacting me after he *begged* me, in the middle of sex, for my number. Penn was supposed to be every bit the asshole I thought he was.

My own body betrayed me as I wanted to fall right back into the banter we had at the writers' retreat. What was it about this man that completely disarmed me? Why could I talk to him as if he were my best friend? I was supposed to be incredibly pissed at him for ignoring me after the greatest sex of my entire life.

“Yes...” I said slowly, cautiously. Meanwhile, my panties were itching to come off just from hearing his voice.

“I could really go for *you* in bed right now.” There was a subtle, needy growl in his voice as it drifted off in thought. As much as I wanted the same fucking thing, I had to remind myself, *yet again*, that he was the one who ghosted me for an entire month. I should be pissed at him. Not overly willing to jump through the damn phone just to sit in his lap.

“Well...I’m here.” I stated as nonchalantly as possible. There was no way that I was going to tell him that I was barely dressed at the moment in only a sports bra and panties.

It was as if the world had it out for me. My phone suddenly started to buzz from the alert of a *VIDEO CALL* from Penn. I nearly jumped out of my skin and lost control of my phone as I fumbled with it in my hands.

At least twenty unique swear words spilled from my lips as I desperately tried to get ahold of my phone. Despite the vain incantation, I heard the

dreaded sound of the acknowledgment of the video call. My blood turned to ice in my veins.

Shit. Shit. Shit.

“Paige...wow.”

I was still trying to figure out the right way up on my phone as Penn got an eye full. As if I had no idea what I had worn before my nap, I looked down at my exposed chest. It was one of my semi-sexy sports bras that I treated myself to when I randomly had the notion to get into shape for a potential book tour. Yeah, that lasted all of 24 hours. It was shimmery and wine-colored with a deep V and sheer straps. There was an enticing little peekaboo between my breasts along the bottom.

“Uh,” *Goddammit, Paige. Get your shit together.* “Thanks?” I suppose an answer in the form of a question was suitable for a person who was still supposed to be pissed. With a dry swallow, I tried to distract myself by trying to figure out exactly where Penn was calling me from. The sight of him in a dress shirt with a tie loosened around his neck was giving me heart palpitations. And I’d seen the damn man *naked*. “So, uh...are you at work? Or something...?”

Penn leaned back in what looked like a leather executive chair. There was an expansive window behind him with a city skyline of sorts. One of his fingers, that he had used to get me off quite a few times, dipped into the knot of his tie-*dammit Paige, think unsexy thoughts!*

I tried. Oh, gods above I tried. But the smoky look he gave me while he crooked a finger into the tie at his throat and loosened it was just about the sexiest fucking thing I’d ever seen. My thighs involuntarily clamped together beneath the sheets to quell the sudden rush of heat.

“Yeah...” The dark look in his eyes dissipated as he sat back with a sigh. “I needed a mental break after working for four weeks straight. Unfortunately, that moment of clarity made me realize that I’d been a complete and utter asshole and hadn’t contacted you since the retreat.”

His look of utter regret made the tenseness in my shoulders sag a little. I had no idea what sort of work he did. Whatever it was, it seemed important. The delicious specimen of a man looked tired.

“Oh, I’m sorry.”

Penn’s breathy laugh as he finished unknotting his tie made my cunt quiver. How did this man have such control over my body *long distance?*

I was in so much fucking trouble.

“It's not your fault, Paige. But I appreciate the sentiment.” There was some muffled noise as his phone jostled a bit. I saw the insides of his palms for a brief second as he propped his phone up on his desk. I was blessed with a full crotch-to-head view of him and damn if he wasn't as beautiful as when I last saw him. “I do feel better... Now that I'm talking to you.”

His smile was warm with a questionable tinge of something else in its depths. I felt heat in my cheeks as his eyes drifted back down to my breasts which were still, unfortunately, in much closer view to him than my face. My eyes darted to the subconscious movement of his fingers slowly caressing up and down his inner thigh.

“So...um, will you give yourself a day off or uh...something? I-It looks like you need it.”

“There's something better that I need, Paige.” That heat in my cheeks rushed straight to a roar of blood in my ears from the husk in his voice. My phone shifted slightly against my bent legs as I smashed my thighs back together.

Please don't say 'you'. Please don't say 'you'.

“You.”

Damn it all to fucking hell.

Gritting my teeth together, I tried to remain cool as a cucumber. I needed to be the bigger person here. He was the ghosting asshole that hadn't contacted me after practically begging me for my number. I was in the right here. He needed to grovel. Wait, did I even like groveling?

“What, none of your model girlfriends were available for some afternoon delight?” I surprised even myself with my smarmy comment. I did my best to suppress my smugness as I mentally patted myself on the back for that sick burn.

“I wouldn't know. I haven't talked to anyone.”

“O-Oh...?” I couldn't camouflage my immediate surprise. There went my bravado. For fucks sake he was a smooth talker.

As quickly as my heart fluttered, the poison of doubt crept into my veins. The man could say whatever he wanted to a tin can and it would willingly jump into his arms. He was *that* good.

“Yeah...there's just something about this incredibly imaginative and gifted author I met a few weeks ago who I can't seem to stop thinking about.”

The impact of his words ran like boiling water down my spine to my

feet, where it was hot enough to curl my toes. The heat in my cheeks made my eyes water. Fuck his words, there was no way in hell he was going to make me pathetically cry over a poetic compliment.

“Apparently it didn’t warrant enough time to text or call said author.”

The words unexpectedly tumbled out of my mouth as my snarkiness bit through what could have been a romantic moment. Words and smartass comebacks were all I had after years of guys picking on me or just outright looking me over. Unlike those guys, it was obvious in Penn’s face that I struck a nerve.

“Once again you’re right.” Penn sighed as his shoulders sagged. Was this powerful man admitting defeat? “Which is why I wanted to invite you to my place in New York next weekend.”

Wait.

Wait.

Fucking...*what*?!

“I...I...*what*? I think I just hallucinated that you...asked me to *visit* you.”

“No, you heard it right.”

“...over Valentine's Day weekend.”

“Oh,” His handsome face fell as he put two and two together. “I’m sorry. I should have asked if you were free first. If you have plans then-”

“No, I don’t!” *Goddammit, could I sound any more pathetically desperate?*

“Excellent. It's settled then.” The look of pure satisfaction on his face made my throat go dry. Meanwhile, that look accompanied his fingers slipping buttons out of their hold down the front of his dress shirt. I forgot what planet I was on.

“Wait,” I blinked through the fog of the especially-for-Paige porn show on my phone as I tried to comprehend what exactly just happened. “Wait-hold on, I didn’t agree to anything-”

“Send me your flight information and I’ll reimburse you. I’ll arrange everything else.”

I must have looked like a fucking imbecile as I tried to comprehend what had just occurred.

Penn.

Invited me.

To his place.

Over Valentine's weekend.

It was as if my lust-filled daydreams that had spontaneously spawned in my brain during the random brain breaks over the last few weeks came into true, fairytale fruition. My common sense wanted to bitch slap some semblance of sense back into my skull. I was practically salivating at the mouth over the idea and all the unexpectedly sweet words that led up to the invite.

"I..." I meant, with every fiber of my being, to say something smartassy. Instead, Penn chose that moment to stare me down with hunger as his fingers soothed up and down over the growing bulge between his legs. "...kay."



Chapter 22

Penn

I needed Paige so damn bad I could almost taste her sweet essence on my tongue, even with her so far away. Having her almost on full display in front of me, via a video call, was more tempting than I realized. And the fact that she just agreed to spend a long weekend with me, and hopefully relive the same sort of things we did at the retreat, made my cock painfully hard. I was ready to haul her fuckable ass here on the next flight to New York.

I'll admit, I was the asshole in the situation. For what it's worth, I wasn't exactly used to keeping in contact with past sexual trysts. I know that asking for her number was one step beyond our casual agreement, but she willingly handed over her digits. But the sheer fact that Paige occupied every damn free moment in my brain since the writers' retreat unnerved me.

I'm not going to lie. I have enough confidence to walk down the street completely nude and not give a shit. If it didn't reflect poorly on the company, I would have done it on a dare no problem. But why I didn't have the balls to send Paige one measly text is apparently what scared me more than the thought of my dick making the front page of the newspapers.

As much as I wanted Paige in my bed again, she seemed a bit apprehensive over the thought. Maybe I needed to convince her that perhaps I was the one who needed help with my manuscript. Or maybe I should just be a bigger man and admit that perhaps, just maybe, I couldn't get her out of my fucking head.

That wasn't the only head that couldn't stop thinking about her. Just hearing her voice again made my cock twitch to life. Despite the incredible sex, our banter was just as, if not more, memorable. And now this woman had on probably the sexiest thing to be called a sports bra and was lying in her bed with a doozy of a smile on her face.

I wanted Paige.

I wanted her all over again.

As much as I wanted to deny that very fact, my dick had plenty to say about it. Considering how much I'd been working ever since I got back from the retreat, I was aching for some stress relief. Of course, I also didn't want to admit *why* I'd been working almost seven days a week and 12-hour days. But

it very much had to do with the talented writer on the other side of the phone.

I went out on a limb to invite her over and she accepted. At least, it sounded like an agreement. Her eyes had dropped to my crotch to watch as my fingers eased up and down.

“Are you alright, Paige?” I asked as I attempted to suppress my smirk. I missed the fluster on her face. She was so expressive. Too expressive. But she was *genuine*, nothing about her was fake. Unlike the revolving door of women who were in and out of my life.

“Um...I uh yeah. Yeah...uh. I mean yes.” It seemed to take Paige a long moment to collect her bearings.

“So...” Leaning back into my desk chair, I slid my thighs casually apart. I kept my eyes squarely on hers, enjoying her reactions. “Was that also a yes to my invitation?” There was a tenseness in her jaw as a rosy blush bloomed on her cheeks. Her eyes flitted between my crotch and my face, although they lingered more between my legs than anything.

“Huh? Did you say something?”

I let out a hearty laugh and she was startled by my reaction. “You’re coming, right?” *Oh, she’ll be coming alright.* Well, that is if she says yes. “It sounds like you need a break. I need a break, and well...I could use some manuscript help. If you’re willing.” Which was technically true. Although I hadn’t worked on my book since the retreat. The stiff set to her shoulders softened and I watched her walls of apprehension tumble down.

“Oh...well...if you need story help...” As she mulled over her answer, she sucked in her bottom lip. That little move made my cock twitch. “I suppose I can...”

“Excellent.” With a grin at my success, my fingers began to unbuckle my belt.

“Penn!” Paige’s inhalation was sharp as she sat up in surprise. Her voice dropped as her eyes darted around as if she could see the entire room. “... *Aren’t you at work?*”

“I am.” Her open-mouthed gape was adorable. I wasn’t an inconsiderate asshole or some sort of exhibitionist perv. “My office is locked, my assistant is at a long lunch, and there’s no one within 50 feet.” My fingers swiftly unbuttoned my fly but stalled on the zipper. “Unless...you’re going to be as loud as you were at the writers’ retreat...”

Paige’s face turned a delightful shade of crimson. “W-We can’t...”

“I’ve missed those noises that you make.” I didn’t think her cheekbones

could have any more color in them and yet she proved me wrong. There was a subtle shift of her phone. I could almost see her thighs clenching together. I licked my lips. “And why not? I require some uh-*inspiration* for my characters this time around...”

Paige left me in suspense as the fingers of her right hand danced along the neckline of her sports bra. It was a subconscious move, but my brain was having thoughts that were anything but.

“D-Dammit, Penn. I’m supposed to be pissed at you! Not...*turned on*... in all of the ten minutes you’ve had me on the phone.” My fingers finally slid the zipper of my fly the rest of the way down. Keeping eye contact with her, I slid my right hand down into the opening. A hiss of breath left my lips as I simultaneously quelled my stiff erection but also added to the undeniable need for the woman who couldn’t tear her eyes off my barely hidden dick.

“You have every right to be pissed.” Words were difficult but I did my best to maintain. This whole situation was completely filthy. But I remembered a certain sex bucket list of hers. “But...I can’t help that my cock missed you. Besides...wasn’t phone sex on your Sex Bucket List?”

The vibrant red in her flushed cheeks reached the tips of her ears and clear down to the heaving mound of her chest. The woman looked like she was running a marathon as she watched me tease myself. Her mouth fell open but snapped shut as soon as she heard the strangled noise I couldn’t hold back. So many fantasies ran through my head all at once: On her knees in front of my desk chair, splayed out completely naked and begging on my desk, bent over the arm of my sofa. Every single one was centered around Paige herself.

“I...”

“Mmm...Paige... What I wouldn’t do to have you on your knees in front of me right now...” I was rewarded with a harsh bite of her lower lip as she squirmed in her bed. I was ready to come undone even before I had a chance to fist my erection. “The way you sucked cock really stays with a man.”

That got a sexy groan out of her as she hooked her thumb under the strap of her bra and subconsciously eased it down over her shoulder. The way her tongue darted out to wet her lip made me wonder if she was also fantasizing about giving me oral.

“You’re a mean dude,” Paige whined as her body slouched further into her plush pillow. I huffed out a laugh before it turned into a strangled moan

of frustration. “A mean, fucking dude! A whole month with no contact and now I’m ready to tear your fucking clothes off.”

“Come on...you can’t blame a guy. You left me with a lot of good shit to fantasize over.”

“I...did?” Damn, I loved watching her look of shock. The previous men in her life did her an entire disservice.

“Fuck yes.” The words came out breathier than I meant. “And a refresher sounds real fucking good right now.” It was now or never. And I wanted now real fucking bad.

With a lift of my hips, I eased my dress pants down my thighs and shoved them over my bent knees. Her quick exhalation almost whistled through the phone as her eyes went wide. The blue depths caught the sunlight in the room.

“Oh...you’re really doing it...” The words were soft, almost as if she meant to internalize them but due to her sheer disbelief, they bypassed her filter. Good for me though.

My fingers fumbled with the bottom few buttons of my dress shirt. I parted the sides to reveal my taut abdomen and make way for any potential hopeful messes. With a playful grin, I hooked my thumbs into the waistband of my boxer briefs and eased them over my strained erection.

The chill air hit my overheated skin and I sucked in a sharp breath. From my phone came a needy whimper as my cock sprung free from its tight hold. It gave a resounding twitch from the noise Paige emitted.

“Your turn, beautiful.” I eyed her seductively as I made myself more comfortable in my chair. Paige hesitated as she chewed on her lower lip. “Just the top. I want to watch your face.” Her gaze met mine just as I wrapped my hand around my dick to give it a reassuring stroke. “Please.”

Her brow furrowed in slight concern as she sucked in her bottom lip. For a second I thought I was just going to give her a free show. Barely a moment later, her hands slid into view. They caressed teasingly slow over the swell of her breasts before her arms crossed in front of her. With a slight wiggle, her breasts bounced into view as she dispersed her entire bra up and over her head. It took every last shred of control not to cum just from the bare-breasted sight of Paige in bed.

“Mmm...just like I remember.”

“You know this is just a goddamn tease, right...?” Paige breathed out as her fingers danced around her flushed, pink nipples.

“You’re telling me. I’m ready to hire a fucking private plane to pick you up. *Tonight.*”

“This...this feels so...”

“Good? Incredible?”

“...*naughty.*”

“But it's a *good* naughty,” I reassured. “Just sit back and watch... Or have fun right along with me. It's up to you.”

“Ugh...fuck you. I can’t believe I’m going to do this.” Paige growled at me as her phone jostled and fell on its side. The orientation changed just in time for me to see her pull a brightly colored sex toy from her bedside table drawer.

“Oh, you will when you’re here.” I gasped out as my hand started to slowly pump up and down on my shaft from my sudden overload of excitement. My cock was so hard. It was stretched to compacity so much that it was almost painful. Maybe this was a bad idea. While my hand would be able to do the job with Paige’s sexual visuals, it wouldn’t be as fulfilling of a release as one if I was deep inside of her.

“This is all your fault.” Paige huffed out as she inelegantly adjusted her phone and shoved her free hand under the sheets. Thankfully she still gave me a great view of her tits and ever-expressive face. The buzzing from her toy was muffled but still apparent. Especially when it was paired with the sheer look of pleasurable shock on Paige’s face.

I wanted to draw this out, but she was not making this easy. Somewhere in the back of my mind, I attempted to make a mental note to play with sex toys during her visit. But the breathy noise of delight from the other side of my phone completely derailed that plan.

“*Penn...*”

I shoved the remains of my boxers down over my knees to give her a full view of what I was doing on my end. Fucking damn, she was beautiful. Her face was flushed from her efforts as I heard the buzzing go in and out. As much as I wanted to watch what she was doing with that toy of hers, I enjoyed the closeup of her bare breasts and looks of utter bliss.

“Fuck, you are gorgeous when you’re lost in pleasure. I cannot fucking wait until you get here.” Another thick bead of precum was coaxed from my tip and I used it to lubricate my fist as it quickened. Paige watched me through hooded lashes as she tossed her head about on her prop of pillows. “That’s it, Paige...cum for me. I want to watch you fall into your fucking

bliss.”

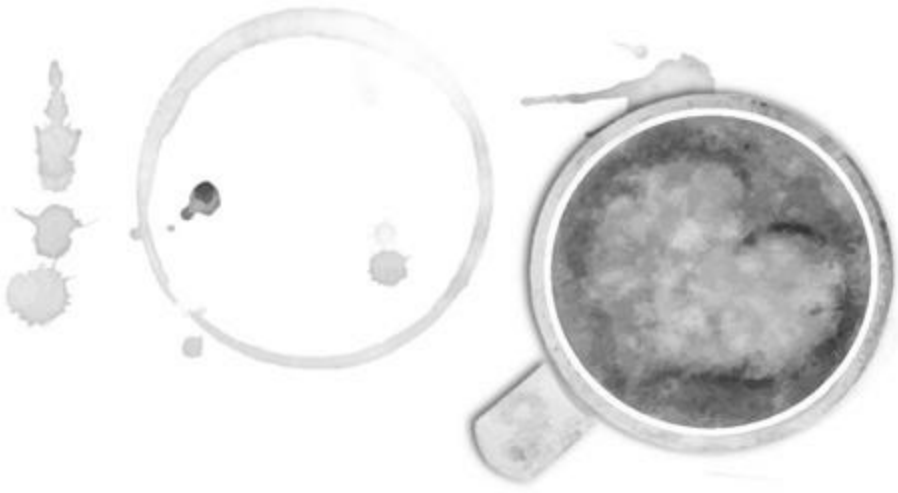
The last line earned me a huff of a laugh before it turned into a questionable moan. Fuck, she was close. With one last shuddering cry I devoured the vision in front of me as Paige orgasmed. It was a unique way to view her delights. I could drink in every twist of her face, every cry of ecstasy.

Wave after wave hit her and it didn't take much for me to follow into the sexual abyss right after. I was able to grab a tissue from the holder on my desk just in time to catch the hot spurts of cum. After weeks of no release, it felt incredible to relieve at least some of the tension. But unlike the last time I shared a bed with Paige, it wasn't nearly enough to sedate me, just take me down a few notches.

A strangled noise from Paige drew my eyes back up to hers on my phone screen. Her gaze was glued to my still-hard cock and the mess I was attempting to clean up. Despite her misgivings, she enjoyed every bit of this torrid little phone rendezvous as I did.

“Flight details. Now.” I managed to rasp out. “And unlike last time, I won't stop contacting you until I get them. Especially not after shit like that. Don't make me hire a PI.”

“Yeah...no. I-I-I...don't think I can turn down a visit now...”



Chapter 23

Paige

My mind still whirled with the thought that Penn easily coerced me into having phone sex. And not just phone sex, but *video call* phone sex. I didn't even know if I did it right. But damn, watching him pleasure himself as I used my vibrator was a special kind of...*something*.

I should have been pissed with him. I should have been pissed during the entire phone call. But that mother fucking smooth talker and his gorgeous body had me swayed in an instant. I wasn't going to admit to him that I'd been thinking of our time at the retreat every damn day since. Nor was I going to tell him that it was the best sex of my life.

This...*thing* we had. Whatever it was, was going to stay strictly sexual. At least, I hoped I could keep it strictly sexual. Even without considering all the sex we'd had, the connection between us was like some sort of kinship, a friendship perhaps. I don't know. It was weird. Unusual.

I slowly walked through LaGuardia Airport to find the end of the security line and spend a long weekend with Penn. It was no longer going to be on neutral turf. I was going to be at his place. In a big city. A city I'd only been to a few times to meet with my literary agent. Currently, Faith was on standby in case Penn was a smooth-talking sort who was secretly a serial killer who wanted to harvest my human meat for consumption.

While I didn't think Penn was actually like that, I didn't want to take my chance of being the corpse on the next episode of *Forensic Files*.

Maybe a small part of me fantasized that what was actually going on was that my so-called billionaire boyfriend was whisking me away for the weekend to do whatever the hell I wanted. That aspect sounded a hell of a lot better than being New York's next murder victim.

But he wasn't my boyfriend, nor would he ever be. I knew he came from money, but a billionaire? Get real. The man had his choice of beautiful women in the big city. Models, actresses, the wealthy elite. Tons of people who were infinitely more interesting and more fun to look at than me. Although...I was the one he called and texted with alarming frequency over the past week, ever since I agreed to visit. I suppose he had to make up for an entire month of lost time. Which was big of him.

I'm just going to tiptoe around the fact that our first phone sex tryst was not the last one... Which only made me slightly worried about what our reunion would be like. Would it be awkward? Would it be like two overly hormonal teenagers who haven't seen their significant other in two hours?

Penn did tease that he was going to hold up a hilarious sign so that he would be easy to find. I cringed at the thought of the sign, but not so much at the fact that he would be waiting for me. It might be something out of an adorable rom-com. If only our story *was* something out of a romantic book or movie...

"Paige!" I froze mid-step. My eyes darted around nervously to see where my name had been shouted from. Sure enough, there was a bobbing white sign with 'Hey Sexy Author' scrawled on it. Heat rose to my cheeks. *Shit.* I hoped no one else saw it. Considering how large of an airport it was, my hope was probably a moot point. Despite all that, my heart swelled to three times its size that this delectable sort of a man would take the time to both flatter *and* embarrass me.

"Penn..." His name escaped me in breathless wonder as he sauntered over to me with a grin. I found myself frozen on the spot. He looked *happy* to see me. Hell, he looked delighted. I wasn't expecting that.

Even with me dressed in skinny jeans, a sweatshirt, and a messy bun, it was the furthest from anything flattering. It was comfortable and he had no qualms to approach me in his designer label suit. My brain screamed at my heart to calm the fuck down. Without hesitation, he slid up to me and brushed a heavenly kiss on my lips. Of which did nothing to help the situation.

"I think I found the sexy author I was looking for." He crooned softly with a smile to match before his eyes roved over my body appreciatively. "Though her hair says otherwise." The smile turned to a playful smirk. I gave his arm a swat.

"Hello to you too. I'm sorry I don't know of the witchcraft celebs use to keep their hair looking perfect after a flight."

Without prompting, Penn grabbed ahold of my suitcase and offered his arm. I had to swallow back my dreamy whine. Maybe after you pull a few orgasms out of a guy they soften up a bit. This attentive Penn wasn't the kind of man I was used to. The guys I dated were awkward, some were even selfish. But...he was thoughtful at the retreat: He offered to help me with my manuscript, brought me coffee, and then made sure I screamed his name a few times in orgasmic bliss.

“It’s just a thirty-minute drive to the rental. I hope you like it. Apparently, the owner isn’t...fond of complaints.”

I shot Penn a curious look. So maybe I wasn’t staying at his place? A hotel? Someone else’s house? That deflated my sails a bit. So maybe it wasn’t that kind of weekend. The kind of weekend where maybe perhaps he’d ask me to...

Paige, you’re an idiot. Just fuck his brains out and go home.

Right. Priorities after all.

“Oh...uh...you didn’t have to go out of your way to get me a place... Especially since you paid for my plane ticket. I could have gotten the hotel for me.”

Penn’s laughter reverberated against the concrete walls of the parking garage.

“Paige, I’m kidding. The rental is *my* place.” I caught his eye as he glanced at me. “I’m the grumpy owner.”

“Oh...” *Well, I’m a dumbass.* I didn’t want to go making presumptions. So it was that kind of trip. I tried to awkwardly laugh it off. “The grumpy part threw me. You aren’t grumpy.” *Good save.*

Unlocking the car, Penn’s warm laughter infiltrated my senses once more. He busied himself with my suitcase and tote bag while I settled down in the passenger seat. Of course, he had a luxury sedan. I wasn’t overly familiar with cars but between the state-of-the-art electronic dash and leather seats, it was an easy assumption.

Penn plopped down into the driver’s seat, flashed me a quick smile, and started his car. My eyes watched how his hands caressed the leather of the steering wheel and gear shift. Fuck, I wanted to touch him. Forget that I wanted him to touch *me*. Some part of me needed that reassurance that I hadn’t lost my mind. That this just wasn’t a desperate-for-sex wet dream.

“I...I’ve really been looking forward to this.”

Those gorgeous blue eyes glanced over at me for just a second and a soft smile followed.

“As have I. Why do you think I kept calling you every day?”

Shit. So, it was a booty call.

Keeping his smile, his hand reached out and caressed my thigh. He left it there as he drove.

Okay so...maybe it wasn’t...? This was a rather romantic gesture.

“Oh...” I shrugged my shoulders bashfully as my eyes stayed on his

warm hand and its comforting weight.

“Are you hungry? Since they don’t feed you on flights anymore I figured you might be. I made reservations at this fantastic little Italian place down from my apartment.”

Jeezus, could he stop being so perfect? The whole me not falling for him and just having sexy fun was going to be difficult if he kept doing shit like this. Guys like him were supposed to be snobby and standoffish. Not...*sweet*.

“Actually yeah. All I managed was breakfast at the airport this morning. But uh...is it fancy...?”

Penn shot me a curious look before he chuckled. “No, it’s casual, you’re fine. I just came straight from work.”

I nodded, still confused with how this weekend was going to transpire. Maybe he was just taking me out to fatten me up for his cannibalistic needs. And yet...maybe...

“Is it weird to say that I’ve missed hanging out with you?” I blurted out as he parked the car in his building’s parking garage. Penn paused for a moment. Dammit, if I was going to survive this weekend, I needed to keep my brain-to-mouth filter more in check.

“I don’t think it’s weird.” His smile was sweet. “If I didn’t miss hanging out with you, I wouldn’t have invited you to visit.” I had to grit my teeth from his response as he got out of the car. For fucks sake I needed to get my act together before I said something stupid like ‘I love you’.

“It’s just...after the writers’ retreat,” I got out of the car and walked over to him as he pulled my luggage from the trunk. He offered his arm and we headed into the rather upscale lobby of his building. “...well...and your calls...” A torrid flash of the most explicit scenes danced through my brain. “...it’s been...really...*nice*.” I felt Penn tense next to me as we waited for the elevator. *Fuck, I went too far.*

“Consider this trip another annotated page of all the fun we have together. The calls have been...*nice*. But...” Tugging both me and my luggage into the elevator, the doors slid shut with a satisfying *thoop*. As soon as the quiet surrounded it, Penn grabbed me by the hips and pulled me hard against him. His right-hand dove into my hair and cupped my jaw. “I prefer our time...*in person*.”

The words were hot and teasing against my parted lips before his mouth captured mine in one fell swoop. I had a feeling this was the kind of kiss he wanted to do in public, but it would have *definitely* drawn attention.

Dropping my tote, my arms wrapped around his neck, holding him there so I could have my fill as well.

The ding from the elevator severed our connection. Which was probably for the best as I needed to come up for air but had been reluctant to break from Penn's embrace.

"You stay here."

I frowned in confusion. "Why?"

"Because if I bring you inside now, we won't make it to dinner."

Oh.



Chapter 24

Penn

Damn, it was good to see Paige again. Like more amazing than should ever be legal. Considering how much I worked myself to the point of exhaustion since the writers' retreat, these next four days off were going to be a much needed... reprieve.

I told my assistant not to bother me unless it was the utmost emergency. Since I was about a month ahead in all of my work, I didn't expect much trouble to go down. It was *technically* a holiday weekend. If any of my staff knew what was good for them, they had weekend plans for Valentine's with their significant others. As much as I was a hard ass on myself, I knew my employees had families and lives outside of work. My dad started that policy, and I continued it.

If it wasn't for the amazing brunette across the dinner table from me, I'd still be working to distract myself from all the out-of-character thoughts that had been bothering me since the retreat. At least now she was here and her *body* could offer the distraction instead of my brain and its outlandish thoughts.

Paige seemed a bit off since she arrived. She was seemingly back to her shy self, the quiet woman with too many coffees who intrigued me that first day of the retreat. I wanted her to be comfortable with me. I wanted her to enjoy herself. This weekend was my treat.

I missed her.

That sudden thought scared me. Okay, it scared me a lot. Meanwhile there was this constant tease with the visual reminders of her talented mouth and hungry hands as she sat there and ate her dinner in front of me. I needed to keep my shit together. I needed to help Paige open back up again.

The casualness of dinner helped. She felt comfortable enough to order her favorite, seafood scampi, after I insisted she order whatever she liked. It was a nice change of pace from women who would only eat a salad and a single ravioli. Paige was unashamed of her delicious curves and I was quite a fan of them. Her hips gave me something to grab ahold of. Those thighs wrapped around my waist with a brutal force that only added to my pleasure.

Shit.

I needed to stop fantasizing during dinner. At least I could hide my erection under the table. This woman had me all out of sorts. Just being on the other side of the table from her, while we had a lively conversation, made me hard and aching for her. It usually took the dispersing of a stiletto and a bare foot in my lap to get a hint of excitement down there with my usual dates.

But my usual dates didn't suck cock like Paige did.

"The check whenever you can." I flagged the waiter down on his next pass. I needed to get this woman out of here and back to my penthouse.

"Oh. Um...would you mind if I got the cheesecake? I can buy it—" Paige's hand was already withdrawing her wallet. I stilled her advance as I turned to the waiter who was still hovering at our table.

"Two slices of cheesecake with extra chocolate-covered strawberries." My eyes slid back over to enjoy her look of delight. "*To go.*" The sudden rush of heat to her cheeks as her eyes widened did nothing to help the situation with my cock. I missed her flustered reactions. "Put it on the bill."

"Yes sir, right away!" I watched him leave and as soon as he was out of earshot, I leaned across the table.

"Paige, seriously. I invited you here. Everything is on me."

"Including me?"

Well, forget my dick ever going soft again.

Although from the looks of it, the words took her by surprise as much as they did with me. I grinned.

"There's the Paige I was waiting for." The heat between us was broken up as the waiter brought the check along with a paper bag with our desserts. I thought refueling after some heated reconnection sex, by eating the cheesecake while lying in bed. Naked. That sounded like a slice of heaven.

Paige's spine was ramrod straight as she watched me toss a few hundred down on the table and told the waiter to keep the change. I hoped she didn't think that I was showing off in front of her. Yes, I had money, but I never used it to buy stupid shit or do stupid things. The look on the waiter's face, as I told him to keep the change, was why I liked sharing my wealth.

I was sure to grab the dessert bag before Paige got to it. It was the best chance I had of sneaking out of the restaurant without my cock poking someone's eye out. Or drawing any glances at something that was a *certain someone's* fault. Whether she knew it or not.

"Ready?" I held my hand out to Paige who still looked a bit off. Her

smile was soft and gentle as she eyed my offering. With a nod, she slipped her hand into mine and it felt like the noise of the restaurant melted away. It was just the two of us all over again.

We walked back to my building, hand in hand, desperate to keep the February chill at bay. Paige's attention swiveled every which way, taking in the bustling streets on Friday evening.

"Have you been to New York before?" Her eyes met mine before bowing away bashfully.

"A few times. My agent's office is here."

"Do you like it? I know it's not exactly for everyone."

"It's nice to visit. But I like...trees." I let out a huff of laughter.

"You can see Central Park from half of the windows in my place."

"I mean...I like being where trees outnumber buildings. You know... quiet. Peace. Here it's...suffocating after a while."

"I do enjoy your prose." I grinned down at her as she side-eyed me. My heart warmed when I saw her quirk of a smile. I was finally able to lower the bag from my crotchal region, but only in time for us to slip into the elevator in my building. As much as dinner was sorely needed, I was desperate to get Paige alone.

"So...dessert first or shower?" I asked as we both stepped into the elevator. Paige snuggled more into her coat as that familiar pink tint rose to her chilled cheeks.

"Would you mind if I showered? I'd love to get the airplane ick off of me."

I chuckled and shook my head. "Not at all. You're welcome to whatever you need during your stay." My breath caught as her bottom lip was sucked into her mouth.

Double entendre.

Shit.

Thank god we weren't in public. I was getting really sick and tired of hiding my hard dick.

"Good to know..." She murmured in a gravelly voice as we both stepped out of the elevator and into my private lobby. I keyed in my door code the fastest I ever have in my entire life. I dropped the dessert bag on my console table right inside the front door. I allowed her the moment to take off her coat and hung it up in the closet.

As soon as my hands were free to do as they liked, I pulled Paige back

to me.

“So, uh...what room will I be in...?” Her voice was barely above a whisper as her eyes stared at my lips.

Without a breath of hesitation, I answered her.

“Mine.”

I felt her tremble in my arms as she went back to chewing on her bottom lip. Without pulling my gaze from her face, I grabbed her wheeled suitcase. I stole a swift kiss because if I lingered on her mouth any longer, we’d be christening the foyer before a more favorable area.

“I’ll show you around on the way to the bathroom.” I offered with a gesture of my head. Her eyes reluctantly turned to take in the view. She surprised me with a sharp gasp. What was outside my windows was a sight to behold for those who weren’t used to it.

Through the glass, the lit windows of the buildings in the New York skyline glittered like stars in the sky. The light haze made the buildings look like shadows of lumbering giants while car headlights danced around their feet. I suppose it was almost as poetic as the countryside.

“Wow...” Paige wandered over to the bank of floor-to-ceiling windows. Once you put your toes up to the window it felt like you were standing on top of the world.

“Like New York a little better now?” I teased as I grabbed her hand to lead her on with the tour. We walked past the kitchen which warranted another gasp. I told her to help herself whenever as it was fully stocked. She lingered for a bit outside my home office/library. I had floor-to-ceiling bookshelves on every inch of wall space. It was complete with one of those antique rolling ladders from the New York library that I got from a local antiques shop.

“Penn...your place is amazing!”

“I hope you enjoy your stay here. Seriously, you’re welcome to anything.” I smiled as I placed her suitcase down on top of the bench at the foot of my king bed. Like the living room, my bedroom also had a bank of tall windows complete with remote-controlled shades for the rare mornings I slept in.

“...Anything?” A playful brow popped on her forehead as I caught her eye. I liked where this was going. Slowly, I pulled her into my arms and I gave her a smug look.

“When I tell a beautiful woman anything, I mean *anything*.”

“Well...” I watched as her throat bobbed with her swallow. “With compliments like those... You can do *anything* to me.”

Now we’re talking.

As I pulled her firmly against me, she was sure to feel what she’d been doing on and off for the past two-ish hours to my dick. My lips nuzzled against her ear as I whispered, “Then...I do believe it's time to tick another item off your Bucket List...” My hands slid down from her hips to caress and grip onto her bottom. I was rewarded with a hot gasp down the collar of my dress shirt. “Shower. *Now.*”

“T-Together...?” I was already pulling Paige towards the bathroom as I slowly peeled my clothing off.

“That was the thought. My shower is big enough for both of us.” Hell, it was big enough for at least half a dozen people. Paige licked her lips as her eyes darted down to watch my naked skin slowly be revealed. I made it down to my boxers before I turned my attention to her.

I wanted to take my time. I had all weekend with her. With no plans, I could study every inch of her. Worship her from head to toe.

Instead, I wanted to rip her clothes off of her. I could always buy her new ones.

My kisses did a fine job of distracting Paige enough to have her help me in the removal of her clothes. By the time I got her naked and the water running, she was ready to climb me like a damn tree. I could have sighed in relief. The last thing I wanted was for her to be uncomfortable around me.

“Shit, you weren’t kidding,” Paige exclaimed with a heavy breath as I tugged her into the glass enclosure. It was technically a wet room with a large soaking tub big enough for two people on one end and a multiple-head shower enclosure on the opposite side. Black charcoal pebbles lined the floor and stacked black glass subway tile up the walls. The entire side was a glass wall which faced the one-way window out to the skyline. This was my favorite room. “I could just live in your shower.”

I laughed as I pulled her under the steaming spray. Our bodies fit back together with ease. I took time to admire her in the bright lighting, all naked and glorious in my arms.

“I happen to enjoy this room a lot. And having that kind of view while you shower isn’t half bad either.” I nodded towards the windows Paige hadn’t noticed yet. A sharp squeak came from her lips as she darted to hide behind me. “Paige,” I continued with my mirthful laughter. “No one can see you. It's

a privacy glass.”

“Oh...phew.” She sighed with relief as her breasts pressed into my back. I felt a soft brush of a kiss against my shoulder blade followed by a delighted little hum as she stood under the hot water for a long moment.

“Feeling better?”

“Much.”

I could get used to this.

Closing my eyes, I let myself relax under the soothing spray. That was until I felt Paige’s hands caressing their way down from my sides, over my abdomen, and down to my dick which refused to wilt even a millimeter of an inch.

“Fuck, Paige...” I breathed out. She shifted around to face me, as both of her hands fisted around my cock. My hips arched toward her of their own accord, aching for so much more. Reaching out, I caressed her cheek, now warmed from the water. Our eyes met and it was electric.

Pulling her mouth to mine, I kissed her. I drank her in hard and deep, wanting to make up for an entire month without her naked body against mine. She returned my hungry fire as her hands continued their conquest.

Paige broke our kiss and I gulped down air. I was willing to kiss her until I passed out. But she gave me a hell of a good reason to stop kissing her as she slowly lowered herself to her knees in front of me.

“I don’t believe I’ve...properly *thanked* you for inviting me...” The words were hot against my sensitive tip. My cock twitched in anticipation at the shy vixen at my feet. Her hold kept my erection at a strong pulse in her hands.

“Just seeing you kneeling at my feet is thanks enough.” I managed to grit out with a wry grin as my fingers tangled in the hair on the back of her head. Instead of agreeing with me, she slipped those beautiful pink lips down over my tip. My nails dug into her scalp as I groaned, neither of which deterred her.

Her hands slid up the tense sinew of my thighs as she swallowed me whole. With the near-constant innocent teasing since I picked her up from the airport, I was ready to blow my load. Paige slid her mouth up and down my length slowly, as if she wanted to extend the fun as much as I did.

If she was going to pamper me, then I was going to pamper her. Grabbing the shampoo bottle, I squirted some into the palm of my hand before I used my fingers to coax it through her brunette strands. Her eyes

flashed open in surprise but hell, I needed this as a distraction so I could keep my orgasm at bay.

The purr around my cock did nothing to help the situation as I worked the suds against her scalp. Her hands caressed and worshiped the divots at the junction of my hips and thighs. This mutual arrangement was by far the most intimate thing I'd ever done. To be honest, I wanted to ingrain the vision in my brain forever.

By the time I got every trace of soap out of her hair, I was ready to cum so hard and fast down her throat. But there was so much more that I wanted to do to her before the big finale. I held my breath as I coaxed her off my cock.

"Turnabout is fair play." My voice was hoarse as she reluctantly followed my lead. I brought her mouth back up to mine. "I just want to get my hands on you first." As my mouth devoured hers, I managed to squirt some body wash into my hand. Rubbing my palms together, I worked up a rich lather before tending to every remaining inch of Paige's body.

Soft moans made their way into my mouth as my fingers massaged her breasts and played with her nipples, teasing them to ripe peaks. I made my way down her abdomen with soft swirls around her belly button before heading south. Banking off to the sides, I received a disappointed groan as I turned my attention to her hips and upper thighs.

Chuckling, I eased her back towards the wall before I turned her around to lavish the same attention to her back. My mouth stayed busy along the clean skin of her shoulder while my hands massaged her butt. It had to be sore after the plane ride.

Fuck, I was obsessed with all of her. Every single part of her body tasted sweet and felt incredible against mine. Enveloping mine.

But now it was time that I got on my knees and worshiped her.

I made sure every bubble was rinsed off her creamy skin before I pressed her against the wall and abruptly dropped to my knees. There was one last place that I needed to clean. And it was the sweetest place on her body.

My hands coaxed her one leg up and over my shoulder, as I spread lingering kisses on the inside of her thighs and along her southern hairline. She trembled under the tease of my mouth. Her fingers twisted and tangled in my hair as I eased myself closer and closer to her moist heat.

"*Goddammit, yes! Penn...!*" Paige's hiss of relief hit my ears as I open-

mouth kissed her between her thighs. Her wet walls pulsed around my tongue as my lips caressed one of my favorite parts of her body. “Oh, fuck I’ve needed this...wanted this... Wanted...you...” Those needy words of hers alone were about to make me explode. But first, Paige needed her delicious release.

It took her no time at all to scream out my name against the tiled walls as my mouth and fingers worked her climax to full fruition. It was blissful music to my ears. Her essence drenched my tongue and coated my fingers. I barely got the second finger inside of her before she was singing my praises.

Now it was my turn.

In my hopeful fortitude this morning, I stashed random deposits of condoms throughout my place. It may have been wishful thinking, but it was about twenty seconds from being one of the damn near smartest ideas I’d ever had.

Turning off the water, I grabbed the towel and manhandled Paige as I dried her and myself. She was still admittedly weak in the knees and I used that to my advantage. Tossing the towel aside, I grabbed ahold of her and hefted her up into my arms with a surprised squeal from the half-dazed woman.

I latched onto her ass as her legs hooked around my waist. Paige’s hands latched onto my shoulders as I strode over to the wall of windows in the bathroom.

“Penn! Oh my god, we can’t-”

“They’re one way, remember?” I whispered against her chin as I pressed her body against the steamy glass. She let out a shriek from the chill and I reveled in the little bit of torture. Foreplay in the shower was just as incredible as I had imagined. But dammit did I need her. “Besides...it’s excellent practice to condition you into possibly having actual sex in public,” I murmured against the column of her throat.

Air stalled in her esophagus. I felt it twitch under my lips. It probably wasn’t exactly the most appropriate thing to say, especially when it inadvertently referenced a future event. Dammit, if every time we got together was going to be this chemically explosive, then so fucking be it.

Using just my hips, I kept her suspended, seemingly in midair, against the New York City skyline. I managed to nab one condom off the nearby sink and handed it to Paige as I continued to lavish kisses along her neck and shoulder.

“I hold, you roll,” I murmured against her skin as my hands took over for my hips along the underside of my thigh. I moved the lower half of my body far enough away for her to have access to my cock. Her fingers trembled slightly but she was swift in her action. As soon as her fingers hit the base of my cock, her hands grabbed ahold of my jaw and pulled me in for a breathless kiss.

There was an undeniable burn in my forearms as I slowly lowered her down onto me. The condensation on the glass helped lubricate her descent. Her bottom lip dropped away from my mouth to give an outlet to her cock-twitching moan of satisfaction. I answered her back with a shuttering growl against her mouth. There was not one thing on this earth better than sliding my dick into Paige’s eager cunt. Especially when it had been *four goddamn weeks* from our last encounter.

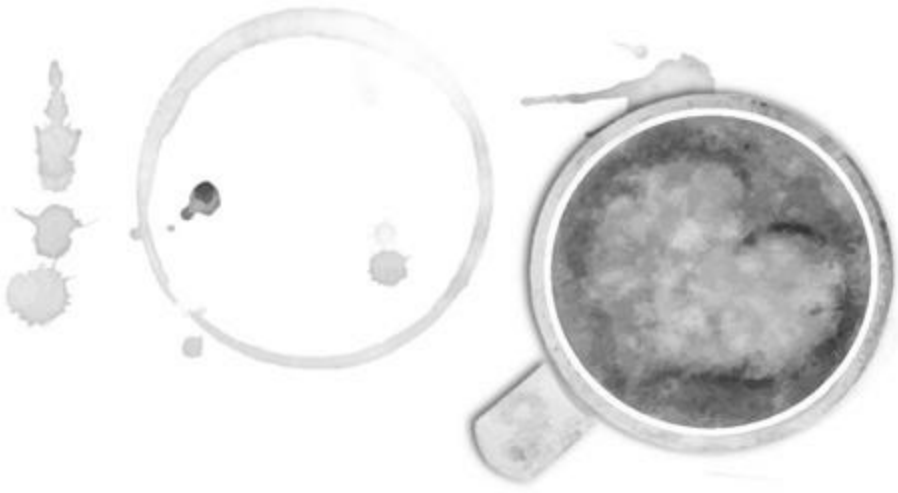
The way her body responded to mine only reiterated that my release was not long for this world. I fucked her with abandon against the window and it rattled with the sheer ferocity of the force of our bodies rocking against one another.

“How do you always feel so fucking good?” I gritted into her ear as I adjusted our position. Dropping her one leg to the floor gave my forearms a break so I could latch onto those sinful hips of hers and drive myself home. Her other leg was still draped over my forearm, and it bobbed with rapid wet slaps of my hips against hers. It opened her up to take me deeper. Nails dug into the skin of my shoulders, and I couldn’t give one damn. She needed to mark me so that after she left there was that physical reminder of this.

“Penn...*fuck*...” Paige cursed out with a groan as her head hit the glass. Her wet walls were like heavenly butterfly wings around me. They fluttered, heralding the onslaught of her orgasm.

In her mindless tumble over the edge, her hand grabbed a fistful of my hair. I fucking lost it. With an earth-shattering groan, I exploded inside of her. Stars glittered and darkened along the sides of my vision. I did my best to maintain my standing position along with holding both myself and Paige upright, but it was a hell of a task.

Because...*wow*.



Chapter 25

Paige

What a fucking dream.

The man fed me the most delicious cheesecake I've ever had in my entire life while we laid in his huge bed, naked, with the New York skyline as our entertainment. That was after fuck-all oral sex in the shower and also after he fucked the living daylights out of me against his bathroom window.

Like...*what?*

Why was being around this man just so...easy? How did he make it so easy? I had my trepidations before I came, but the instant I saw him it was like that steamy weekend at the retreat all over again. This dynamic was like having a best friend.

A best friend with *really dirty* benefits.

Maybe that's what made it so different. I wasn't dating the man, nor would I ever. I was just fucking him. Hanging out and fucking. That's it. Maybe it was the desperate need for romance that messed up every other chance I had with a half-decent man. Despite being so god-like on the hotness scale, he was...kind. Thoughtful. Not what I expected from a man like him. Maybe I sucked at my character analysis after all.

Penn...*surprised* me.

Or maybe this whole situation surprised me. I went out on a limb for writing help and got more than I originally bargained for.

Not that I was complaining.

I sat in a state of utter contentment as I stared up at his exposed ceiling and tried to catch my breath. I woke up this morning, warm and cozy, wrapped in a tight bear hug from behind as Penn spooned me. Usually, I hated snuggling with someone while sleeping. Every little movement would wake me from sleep. But oddly enough, I woke up and felt amazing for once.

Penn only added to that feeling when his hard cock rubbed against my ass before he slipped it between my thighs. How the hell did men sleep with an extra appendage sticking out? How did it not snap off when they rolled over? He didn't let me ruminate on it very long as he slowly woke up to my stirring. Which turned into him taking his time caressing and massaging my body from behind. It left me at his mercy, with nothing to clutch onto except

the extra pillow.

The tease of his cock in between my thighs was unbelievably hot. After slipping on a condom, with a subtle adjustment of his hips he slipped inside me. I was a writhing mess of need. Spooning sex was undeniably intimate until he coaxed me atop of him and let me have a turn. We both cried out into the hazy gray light of the winter morning as we each found our climax.

Morning sex was amazing.

Hell, any kind of sex with Penn was amazing. And apparently, he wanted to keep me on my toes with new positions every time we had sex. The man had to have the Kama Sutra memorized or something. Maybe he had a bookmarked copy around somewhere that I could snoop on his game plan.

“Come on, I want to take you shopping.” Penn playfully slapped my thigh. He rose from the bed and opened the shades. I squinted against the offending light and slowly sat up as I drew the sheets up to cover my nakedness from the world below.

“Shopping...?” I asked, rather confused. Although I may have been distracted by Penn’s naked body haloed by the morning light. “For what?”

“Whatever you want.” He shrugged as he pulled out another pair of sinful-looking boxer briefs from one of the sleek drawers on the opposite wall of the bed. “But maybe a new dress for dinner tomorrow night.”

“But...tomorrow is *Valentine’s Day*.” He looked unperturbed by this fact. I don’t know why I was rather obsessed with it either. It wasn’t like I’ve had a Valentine date in, what, five years? “Penn, you don’t have to buy me a dress. I was able to pack perfectly acceptable clothing options.”

“And?”

I pursed my lips. “And you don’t need to do that.”

“Of course, I don’t need to. I *want* to.” Glancing at me with a grin, he shopped around in his drawers. “Besides...you need a jewel to go with that new outfit too.”

“*Penn*,” I warned. This felt like it was straying into relationship territory. I didn’t want to be his February flavor of the month. “I don’t need jewelry either-”

He stopped at the foot of the bed and gave me a heated look. Tossing his clothes onto the end of the bed, he leaned forward. Pressing his fists into the mattress on either side of me, his voice went all husky. “I didn’t mean for here...” His fingers moved to linger on my ear lobes for a moment before

they slid down the side of my neck to caress along my clavicle. "...or here," His touch continued its teasing conquest down to my wrist, leaving a garden of goosebumps in its wake. "...or here."

My body was lost in some mix of renewed arousal, delight, and confusion. "So...where?"

"Here." Penn shoved his hand down behind me and under my ass and gave it a massaging squeeze. I gulped.

My brain was too scrambled to think straight.

"You said you wanted to try anal..." His words were searing hot against my jaw. "They make pretty training plugs with jewels in the end." I literally thought my body was going to spontaneously combust. Never in a million years would my brain have gone down that road of assumption.

"I-"

"Consider it all a consolation prize for being an ass and ghosting you for a month."

I blinked at him as I tried to get my thoughts back in order from his fluster. "I thought that's what this trip was for?"

"Yes, the *entire* trip. Food, entertainment, and whatever else I want to bestow upon you. You're at my *mercy* while you're here." That sounded both foreboding and *really fucking hot*.

Shit.

I needed to lay off the dark romances.



“Did you bring any toys?” Penn asked as we perused a rather upscale sex shop somewhere in midtown. I kept my eyes down as I pretended to look over the shelves of lube. I didn’t want him to know that, yes, I did bring one because I wasn’t exactly sure how the weekend was going to go. Especially if I was supposed to have my own room, or stayed at a hotel and had to deal with the after-effects of the essence that made up Penn.

“Nope.” I shook my head as nonchalantly as possible as I picked up a bottle of lube and pretended to study it. I was debating if I’d sunk to an all-time low spot in my life or if I was living my best life. With a man with ungodly amounts of money who was treating me to a shopping spree at the

fanciest store I'd ever been in. Dildos excluded.

"Then pick a few out that look *especially* fun." The husk of Penn's voice tickled down my spine as he whispered the words against the exposed curve of my neck. "Because if I'm *fucking* you from behind, I want you to *play* with yourself. But...we have to work our way up to that."

The rather expensive bottle of lube slipped from my hand. My cheeks flamed from the embarrassment and what Penn's suggestion did to my body. The visual was hot but I felt my butt cheeks clench in trepidation. Or was it anticipation? I was too flustered to figure out which.

So much for trying to remain cool under Penn's gaze. He chuckled with a grin as he wandered over to the anal toys. I quickly retrieved the bottle of lube from the floor and put it back on the shelf. I settled on an unscented water-based one in a nondescript bottle. My ass did not need anything fancy for someone knocking at my unused backdoor.

Penn seemed entirely too at ease in the sex shop. I on the other hand had more hot flashes than Mother Nature dealing with global warming. Between his naughty little whispers in my ear to make me laugh with the more ridiculous toys (Seriously, a vibrating pickle?) my body was in one hell of an awkward state of fluster.

Moving on to the next store didn't help matters either. They knew him by name and I side-eyed that fact. I wondered just how many other women the man brought to such a high-end boutique. That took away the fun just a bit. That was until an adorable sales associate shoved a glass of champagne into my hand. So...maybe this wasn't so bad.

He asked the sales associate for suggestions to help narrow down my search. I felt uneasy even looking at any of the dresses from afar. Everything was seemingly one of a kind and nothing had a price tag. Penn stayed close to me as we walked around the store. His hand stayed along the small of my back and every so often his thumb would give me a reassuring caress.

I gave my approval to a handful of dresses and we were led to a row of dressing rooms. Dressing rooms that were fancier, and bigger, than my first apartment. Plush carpet, a comfy armchair, display rack, and a full-length mirror with god only knows how many natural daylight LEDs in a vibrant halo around it.

Penn plopped into the chair in the corner, looking rather pleased with the entire situation as the sales associate hung each of the dresses on the brass rack.

“Please take all the time you need.” She smiled with a nod and Penn shot her a grin. My eyes narrowed at the odd exchange between the two. Maybe she was an old girlfriend?

I stepped up to the row of dresses with apprehension. The cut of the garments wasn’t something I’d ever pick out for myself. They were a bit too...revealing. Tasteful, gorgeous as all get out, but a bit much.

“Go on, pick one.” Penn encouraged as he leaned back in the chair with a playful smile. I pursed my lips as I selected a dress. I was just about to get undressed when the sales woman knocked and walked in.

“I also brought some heel options.” Juggling the stack, she set them down on a small table next to Penn. Her attention zeroed directly on him as her voice dropped. “I’ll make sure you aren’t disturbed.” On her way out she shot me a wink with a smile and closed the door behind her. As soon as the door latched shut, I locked it behind her.

“Shoes too? Really.” I said flatly as I began to get undressed. Penn just grinned, ready to watch the free strip show.

I almost jumped clear out of my skin from another knock at the door.

“I apologize, I forgot the lingerie you requested.” Giving him a death glare, I stalked over to the door, unlocked, and opened it with my jeans half way undone.

“Uh...thank you,” I said quickly. Grabbing the hangers, I abruptly shut the door right in her face before making a show of locking it. Glancing back to Penn, I dropped the hangers onto the rack before I whipped off my top. “That had better be it.”

“It is.” He grinned with a smug-as-fuck look on his pretty face.

“Seriously, Penn. I mean it. This is too much.” I gestured to the array of pretty things in the dressing room. I was afraid I’d tarnish if I touched anything. The chair he sat in probably cost more than a mortgage payment.

“Oh, come on, you’re having fun. Sometimes it’s nice to be *spoiled*.” He wasn’t wrong. It just felt...intimate. Uncomfortably intimate. “Lingerie first.”

I eyed the variety of lacy black and red pieces. Most looked more like complex finger traps instead of something that would actually cover my vagina. But considering the neckline on some of these dresses, I was going to need some elaborate underwear to keep my *assets* in line.

Penn watched from his corner in silence as I tried on piece after piece. The lingerie was not at all comfortable. Now the dresses on the other hand...I felt like a piece of art in those.

I lingered in the last one. It was my favorite. It was a rich wine red that paired so well with my skin, like cherries and cream. It had a high slit up the thigh. So high I couldn't wear my usual style panties with it. Actually, not even my fancy thong ones. The only undergarment that worked with the draped scoop neck and thin strap was some sort of strapless corset that was paired with a high-cut thong. When it was all paired with my favorite heels from the pile, I felt confident enough to turn some heads in any high-end restaurant in New York City.

"Is that the one?" Penn inquired from his quiet perch. My eyes met his in the mirror and he tilted his head to the side in question. The dress fabric felt sinful against my thighs. Like it was made from the fuzz of baby moths or something.

"Maybe." My lips made a thin line as my hands smoothed over my hips. Penn tipped his chin up as his gaze darkened. He shifted slightly in his chair. "What?"

"Come here."

"Why?"

"Come. Here."

With a cock of my brow, I turned and slowly walked over to him, a question in my gaze. Those beautiful blue eyes of his caressed my body from head to toe. He said nothing apart from a satisfied smile on his face. His pointer finger rose to the air and made the motion to spin around. Narrowing my eyes at him, I did so only to be greeted by the warmth of his hands pulling the zipper down along my back.

It was unexpectedly intimate. I felt aroused despite the semi-public setting. His fingers made quick work of the thin strap at the base of my neck and the dress dropped to a quiet puddle of red silk at my heeled feet. With a noise of appreciation, his hands roved over my ass cheeks on full display to either side of the thong. If you could call it that. It felt more like ass floss.

"Take off your shoes." The husk of his voice continued. I grumbled as I bent at the waist to undo the strap along my ankle. There was a soft shift of the chair before I felt Penn's teeth graze the heft of my behind. My breath caught as his hands were hungry in their conquest of my thighs. He massaged my cheeks before spreading them wide, sending the thin crotch of the thong straight between my labia and tight against my clit. The pads of his thumbs followed the tract between the junction of my thighs and ass until they met up at my slit.

A sharp noise escaped me before I shoved my hand over my mouth in surprise. Which was probably a smart idea as Penn took that moment to run the breadth of his tongue from clit to asshole along the crotch of the panties. Another noise fell from my lips, still muffled from my hand.

When my brain cells recollected enough for me to form words, I shot him a look over my shoulder.

“Penn, what the hell, we can’t do anything here.” I meant to scold him but he dipped in for another swipe of his tongue and it just turned into a needy whine.

“It’s fine. I took care of it.” He said nonchalantly against my cunt as his fingers pulled aside the thong.

My head shot back with a death glare.

“What the hell is that supposed to mean?”

His darkened eyes caught mine over the top curve of my bottom.

“It means our lovely sales associate is currently having lunch with the other employees while the shop is closed.”

“But...*we’re in here.*”

“Precisely.” I wished he would stop licking my cunt long enough for me to string two coherent thoughts together. “Which means...exactly what she said it means. *‘Take all the time you need’.*”

My brow furrowed for a moment before I felt two fingers ease their way inside of me. As much as I wanted to enjoy the onslaught in a public dressing room of an ungodly high-end boutique, what Penn alluded to hit me like a bolt of lightning.

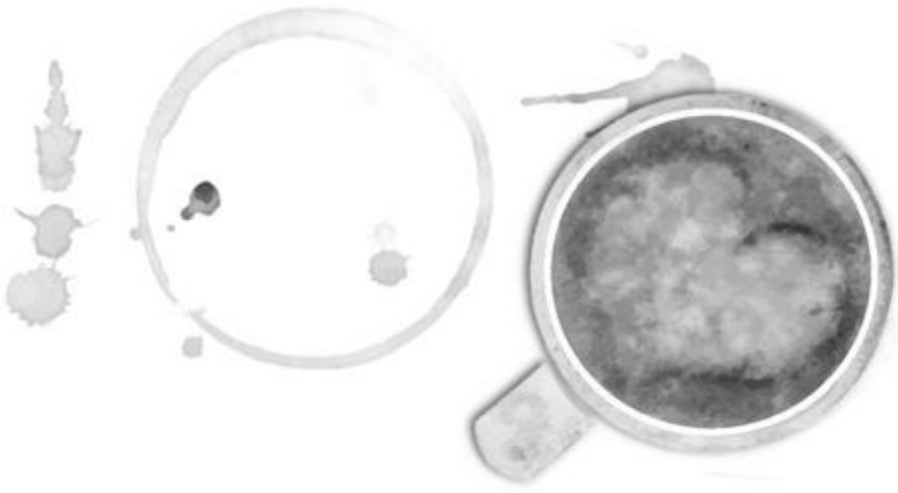
“Please don’t tell me you bought the entire shop lunch just to bribe them into letting us have...*questionable relations...*in the dressing room.”

“Bingo.”

Before I knew it, I was straddling Penn’s lap, still wearing the lingerie that I was supposed to be trying on, not testing its dexterity while cock-riding a dude in the dressing room of their store. With the killer heels on, it was easy to have the leverage to bounce myself up and down on him.

“I knew that once you did a little fashion show for me, I would need to *sample the merchandise.*”

I was still in a daze that he managed to talk me into such a thing. But between his fingers and mouth, they should be registered as dangerous sexual weapons capable of coercing a woman into having sex in public. *Yet again.*



Chapter 26

Paige

After that *interesting* tryst in the dressing room at the boutique, Penn promised one more stop that pertained to the plans he had for us for the evening. To my delight, it was a store that was much more my speed: A bookstore.

In a bookstore, I had no problem spending his money.

He thoughtfully perused the shelves with me and held the books I picked out as I shopped. His attention shifted between watching me select books to scanning over the offerings on the shelves nearby. I had to be mindful not to select too many as I still needed to fly home with the suitcases I came with and not buy another suitcase just for my books.

But I was tempted.

“It would be fun to do a book signing at one of these big bookstores.”

I looked up at him and shrugged with a smile. “Yes, one day. It’s my goal to work up to that.”

“So you’ve mentioned. Why don’t you do it? You seem to have more than enough fan support behind you. You could be sold out at bookstores across the US.”

“I’m...I’m not sure I’m in the right mindset for that now. Or if I could handle all that traveling and pressure and being on my A-game all the time.”

“You’ve been on your A-game the whole time with me and I’m having a nice time with you.”

“Yeah...but...” My shoulders dropped in frustration. I took a breath before I got all prickly over the fact that he brought up this issue again. “You’re...you. One person. You’re used to my word vomit and insanity. Or well...maybe you just tolerate it.” Penn chuckled.

“So? I’ve read what you’ve written. It’s good. And other people think it’s good. I’m sure you could show up in nothing but a bikini made out of soda tabs and they would all still be pleased to finally meet you.”

“...Maybe.”

“You know I’m right. Sometimes it’s nice to have that anxiety. It makes you feel alive.”

“I don’t know. Maybe if someone set it all up for me and just said ‘Here.

Go to this bookstore at this date and time to sign books.’ Maybe then. But I doubt it. Anxiety sucks. It...suffocates you in unexpected ways. Crippling ways. Besides, my publisher probably doesn’t exactly want to put the money into sending me across the US on a big book tour. But...” I sighed. “Maybe one day I’ll unlock the secrets to conquering my anxiety. But today, nor any day in the like, next five years, will be that day.”

Thankfully Penn dropped the conversation. I don’t know why he was so determined for me to be thrust out into the world. I was perfectly content being the mysterious author Bridget Paige who sat at the top of the New York Times Bestseller list. Shit, maybe he figured out who I was?

My troubled thoughts dissipated as soon as Penn suggested pizza and a movie for the remainder of the evening. Mr. Uptight could actually be casual and relax at home? Ordering in and either a movie or a book to entertain me was the epitome of an ideal night.

What I didn’t account for was the wild card of a person Penn was. After the movie, he disappeared for a shower. However, the mischievous grin he gave me on his way out of the room had me questioning his methods. What also didn’t help was the fact that I just so happened to reach a very smutty part in my book, and was already on edge, when he padded out from his bedroom wearing nothing but what he was born in and looking as aroused as I felt.

“How’s the book?” He crooned into my ear as he lavished my neck with slow kisses.

“Good...” I attempted to breathe out, but my voice wavered.

“Oh...so *that* kind of good.”

I did have to admit that it made my book twenty bazillion times hotter when I had an external equivalent of a book boyfriend attempting to coax me to the bedroom. Although Penn didn’t give me a choice in the matter. With a squeal from me, he threw me over his shoulder and headed for his bedroom.

“I was always curious at just how turned on those books made you.” I swallowed dryly as he dropped me onto the bed. “Tonight, I’ll find out. And...better yet, we have new toys to play with.” His grin was positively sinful and made my thighs inadvertently clench together. Penn took note.

Taking the book from my hand, he placed it on the bedside table. It was then I noticed that he took the liberty to set up the bedroom with low lights, soft music, a different blanket on the bed, and had the new toys lined up like an army of brightly colored silicone soldiers eager to unleash delicious hell.

“What’s all this?” Penn was already undressing me as I sat there still processing what he planned for the rest of the evening.

“Anal training.” He grinned. “I hope you know I’m determined to get through most of your Sex Bucket List while you’re here.”

Oh, I was well aware.

That seemed to be more of the motive than reading over the manuscript he talked about. Speaking of which, I hadn’t seen or heard about it since we spoke about it on the phone. I should have been perturbed about that fact, but his taut cock was at eye level. The after-effects of the smut scene from the book were still swirling low and hot in my belly.

“Any interest in giving your new toys a try?”

Considering I felt ready to impale myself on his dick at any second, I nodded. Ever since the trip to the sex store I was on edge to give them a try. Especially with someone who knew what the hell they were doing.

Penn bent down to my level, leaning his curled fists into the bedding on either side of me.

“Quick shower. And I mean *quick*. Use the bidet to clean that sexy ass of yours, then report back.”



My ass was probably the squeakiest clean I'd ever felt. The anticipation of a man aching for me and wanting to try something sexually new to me hurried me along. When I walked back into the bedroom, Penn was sitting on the bed with a well-lubed fist sliding up and down his cock. Hell, had he been watching me shower?

Add that to the column of 'Things that Unexpectedly Turn Me On'. The man was pleasuring himself to the visual of my naked body. His gaze was dark as I walked my way over to him. As soon as I was within reach, his hands reached around to gently caress and massage my now-sparkling ass.

"Good girl." He kissed my breast as he gazed up at me. "Now, on the

bed.” He didn’t have to tell me twice. “On all fours.” Assuming the position, I felt the bed dip behind me as Penn got comfortable.

His hands were gentle as they smoothed over the curve of my behind, almost as if in admiration. It felt oddly soothing as he ran lingering caresses down the back of my thighs. On his way back up, he grazed the skin near my mound. I was disappointed when he moved away.

“Relax, Paige. In due time. You being calm and as aroused as possible makes this much easier... And...more *pleasurable*.” His hands did another sweep, then another. Each time getting so close and yet so far away.

When he did finally manage to graze against my swollen lips, I jumped from the contact I’d been eagerly anticipating. There was a soft chuckle before he did another pass. This time he fully cupped my heat. With a low groan from him, two fingers traced up and down my slit before dipping in to give my clit a swirl.

I wasn’t exactly sure how I was going to keep balanced on all fours when I was already trembling as he teased me. With the distraction, I barely felt the brush of the pad of Penn’s thumb against my anus. His free hand kept me steady as he soothed the digit over my flexing hole. The lube made the caresses easy while he kept me distracted.

The rubbing of my clit eased back slightly as his entire finger covered my asshole. He slowly eased the tip of his digit inside. My sharp inhale burned my throat.

“Atta girl...” Penn soothed with a raspy growl in approval. My fingers curled into the sheets as my brain debated whether this was hot or not. He reassured me that if I felt any discomfort at all, all I had to do was tell him to stop and he would.

I played with toys in my ass before. While it wasn’t an everyday activity, it was a fun way to spice up my self-pleasure. But doing it solo made it awkward to juggle entertaining two holes at once. With Penn doing the (literal) grunt work, all I had to do was settle on my hands and knees and enjoy it.

Just like all the other things on my Sex Bucket List items we tried...

I loved it.

It felt a hell of a lot better with a partner instead of some stiff, silicone toy. With a subtle press of my hips back, I gave Penn my signal that I wanted more. I’m sure the moan helped as he sent me a resounding groan in reply. The lube helped him ease in the rest of his thumb. I did my best to keep

myself relaxed.

“M-More...” I panted out. While his thumb was fine and dandy, my body was crying out for more. It wanted to be stretched, to be filled in both holes.

Penn made some noise of surprise behind me. “You’ve done this before...”

“O-Only to myself. And with nothing bigger than your thumb.” I panted as I got a huff of laughter in reply.

“I was not privy to this information.” I glanced over my shoulder to his deadpan expression as he finger-fucked my ass. *Okay, fair.* “Shall we go *bigger?*”

I gave him a nod as he brought my brand new, hot pink bejeweled butt plug into view. He withdrew his finger and made a show of lubing it up. I felt the slick liquid being added to my skin once more. My anus clenched in anticipation.

The sensation as he slowly slid the plug into me was interesting. It felt wrong to start. Like the toy was trying to go the wrong way down a one-way street. It stretched me and while it felt weird, it felt oddly good too.

My asshole swallowed the plug hungrily. I could hear the smile in Penn’s voice.

“*Good girl.*” The praise came out as a purr. “Are you okay?”

I nodded as I uttered a simple, “Yeah.”

“Good.”

His caressing fingers went back to playing with my slit. With every flex of my vagina, my body clenched around the plug. Fingertips caressed my clit and my body trembled. It felt like he was slowly chipping away my protective layers to expose the live wires hidden underneath.

When his fingers finally slipped inside me, my own curled tight into the plushness of the waterproof blanket. Penn made a noise of delight as the two digits of his opposite hand started to pump in and out of me with ease. He made sure to mention in our conversation at the sex toy store that cross-contamination must be kept at a minimum. Whatever went in the *back door* couldn’t go in the *front door* without getting cleaned off first. My vaginal muscles flexed around him which caused the plug to shift in my ass, enhancing the pleasure tenfold.

Penn continued the mind-numbing pattern of increasingly quick thrusts of his fingers as his thumb played with my clit before stopping abruptly. By

now I was face-first into the bedding with my ass high in the air, begging incoherently for something. *Anything.*

“Want to try something bigger yet?”

Panting, I was dizzy with need. The jerk thought it would be fun to keep bringing me to the brink of orgasm and then stop.

“Fuck yes!” I rasped out as I turned my head to the side, my cheek still buried deep in the wrinkles of the blanket. Penn’s hands left my body as I felt the bed shift behind me. There was a wet sucking noise, and I caught the heated vision of him sucking my slick off his cunt-only fingers as he handled a condom wrapper.

With the crinkle of the condom, I managed to shove myself back up onto all fours. There was a subtle pressure as he gently pulled the plug from me. I let out a soft sigh but felt oddly empty.

“Remember, you tell me to stop at any time and I’ll stop.” Penn gently reminded as he applied more lube to my ass. I gave him a bobbing nod and shifted slightly on the bed.

His cock brushed my rear entrance and I immediately tensed. A reassuring hand caressed my bottom. I let out a slow breath and remembered to relax. There was another press of firm pressure before I felt the tip of him slip inside.

A sharp noise unexpectedly slipped from my lips and Penn stopped.

“Paige...?”

“Don’t stop. I’m fine.” I breathed out, maybe a tad higher than my normal vocal range. But I really was fine. I was determined to do this.

Penn hesitated but I made no move to pull away. With a gentle touch, he continued to press inside. The lube helped tremendously but he was *big*. I felt the tang of his nails in the heft of my ass along with a soft rumble from him. The mere fact that he was trying to keep himself together for my benefit sent a flashover of delicious heat throughout my body. I flexed around him. His next noise of delight didn’t help things either.

With no protests from me, he continued to press further. It felt so weird. But it felt...*good*. Like, really good. Not every day good, but this was something I would definitely entertain at another time, good.

He timidly pressed in until I hit my limit. Reaching back, I grabbed ahold of his wrist and he stilled.

“I...feel like I want you to...*move*.”

“Alright... Remember to tell me if it’s too much or you want to stop.”

“I know. I will.” I quickly reassured him as he adjusted his hold on me. He started with the smallest of thrusts and only worked his way to a slow, steady rhythm when he heard no protest from me. The thrusting part made this feel infinitely better.

A pleased whimper slipped from my lips as my forehead dipped back to the bedding once again. My fingers curled tightly into the fabric as Penn steadily picked up the pace. I felt him go slightly deeper as he continued to work me open.

It wasn't as pleasurable as vaginal sex, but it was fun. My clit was still pulsing from the earlier teasing. Something in my body was asking for more.

A gentle buzzing started before a vibrating bullet toy grazed my arm.

“Give that a try.” Penn offered breathlessly, not breaking his gentle rhythm. My head swam with the thought of him deep in my ass and the toy against my clit. I was fairly certain I'd orgasm in seconds flat.

I shifted my body to slide my hand with the toy under my upended torso. The move made me wince with the slight change of angle of Penn's dick in my ass. But I settled back into my comfortable position as the toy descended upon my clit.

Stars immediately blinded my vision as I let out a sharp noise of surprise once the vibrator made contact. My toes curled so tightly that I thought my calves were going to snap. Penn continued, undaunted. I let my brand-new battery-operated friend send me sheer off the cliff with an orgasm Penn deprived me of all evening.

My mouth was dry as I shifted my face out from the lump of the blanket I'd buried my face in. The fabric was wet from my saliva. I was certain I screamed bloody damn murder throughout my peak. Soft caresses tickled down my back as Penn's hips eased to a stop. Once he felt I was calm enough, he gingerly withdrew. I let out a breath.

“Holy shit.”

“Are you good?” A kiss brushed against my tailbone as Penn chuckled.

“...Yep.”

I heard some rustling as his weight left the bed. Water ran in the bathroom as he washed up. The aftershocks tapered off enough to lower my hips to the bed. I felt light like the usual post orgasmic bliss, but my vagina was still aching for something.

Rolling onto my back, I caught my breath as Penn padded out of his bathroom. His cock looked painfully hard, stretched in a tight curve that

reached up toward his abdomen.

“Ready for round two?” Penn suddenly appeared on all fours above me. I shot him a look.

“What’s round two?”

“*Double penetration.*” My eyes went wide and Penn laughed. “Calm down, I won’t break you the first night. We’ll start easy with the plug in your ass and...” He brought his face down close to mine as his voice dropped to a husky whisper, “*My cock in that fluttering cunt of yours.*”

Yep. Sign me up.

My body warmed once again as he kissed me, hard and deep, drinking me in like he missed me in the few minutes he was in the bathroom. As much as I enjoyed the former position, I longed for the face-to-face contact and kisses only he could give me.

Despite my stubbornness towards his care of me, he was right. I did enjoy it. I enjoyed it a lot. But that was too dangerous to admit. We could have fun as long as we left feelings out of it. But damn if I wasn’t drunk on the way his hard body pressed me into the bed. How his hands devoured me with every hungry caress. It didn’t matter how long ago he touched me.

Penn was unlike any other man I’d ever known. No wonder women flocked to him and laid out at his feet. Hell, I was laid out on my back, in his bed, and ready to let him stick whatever he wanted into *all* of my holes.

With my body beneath him, he took his time working me back up into a frenzy with free rein over my entire torso. He lavished each of my breasts in turn with suckling kisses as his hands followed suit with toe-curling caresses. The attention he bestowed on my still-aching clit had my hips arching clear off the bed.

He teased the cleaned anal plug at my rear entrance as his tongue darted in and out of my soaking wet folds. It was a cacophony of sensations all at once that had me pleading for more all over again. I could tell Penn was almost at his teasing limit. Aside from sliding the butt plug into my ass, his hands were no longer gentle. They were silently begging for something that only my body could give him.

In less than a breath, he slid on a new condom and positioned himself at my throbbing cunt. His fiery eyes met mine for a brief moment before his mouth descended as he slid inside. The way his cock filled me never failed to make fireworks explode within my body.

With a press of his forehead to mine, his hips began to rock. His dick

slid in and out of me with ease. The sensation of both of my holes being filled was something that felt both completely naughty and completely nice. It was odd to be fucked with something up my ass. But with each thrust his cock and the plug pressed together adding an entirely new sensation to my insides.

The pleasure was overwhelming. My fingernails dug into the skin of his back as my body arched up to meet his. How was it possible that he could continue to blow my mind with amazing sex, even with *multiple* sessions a day? How could a man want me that much?

Me.

Penn wanted me.

The implications made my heart flutter almost as much as he made my cunt. It was dangerous territory for my thoughts. Thankfully Penn's hips snapped quicker to the point that all I could think about was the delicious chaos he was bestowing my body with instead of my heart.

"Penn...oh yes...oh my god yes..."

"That's it..." He breathed out as his nose nuzzled my cheek. "Fuck yes, Paige. I can feel you're close. You're bringing me right to the edge with you. Send us over, baby... I want to fuck you straight into the beyond."

The unexpected endearment and filth out of his mouth did me in. My nails dug into his flexing shoulders as my body arched clear off the bed with a shattering scream. I saw stars and universes collide behind my eyes.

Penn was right about following me into the ether. His unholy staccato of groans was positively sinful in my ear. He went rock hard before he shuttered with his well-curated release. His body hovered over mine as he emptied himself deep within me. The continued waves of my incredible orgasm kept me writhing beneath him.

With a throaty sigh, he slowly lowered himself to collapse on top of me. He was like my own brand of weighted blanket. The weight of him calmed down my trembling body as the aftershocks still sent sparks throughout my system. His face tucked into my collarbone, right under my chin. No matter what we did or where we did it, his aftercare was always off the charts.

"Holy fucking hell, Paige." He huffed out. I had to chuckle. My sentiments exactly. "Remind me to change the sheets before we fall asleep." I cringed. I didn't want to look down below.

"Wha-what? Why?!"

"Because your delicious cum soaked them. And me."



Chapter 27

Penn

I didn't think I'd ever wake up to a woman in my bed. I was dead serious about the sleeping-over policy I had for women. That's why as I gazed down at Paige's sleeping form, I was scared shitless.

I liked this. I liked *her*. I liked how we connected. How we talked to one another. Our conversations were endlessly entertaining. Even in the silence between us, it was...*comfortable*. Despite her spewing how awkward she was, I adored it.

Adored her.

Paige wanted nothing more than something physical. Something without emotion. She seemed perfectly content with that aspect. But I couldn't get enough of her.

Despite her misgivings towards me, she responded to me without hesitation. If I asked her to jump, even though she would give me a side-eye, she would ask 'How high?'. She wasn't selfish like the others. She didn't do stuff with me to benefit her. She enjoyed my company as well.

Something between us reminded me of my parents. One of their favorite pastimes was doing over-the-top and corny public displays of affection just to get a rise out of me. To a 10-year-old it was gross. Now as an adult, it was something I'd like to have permanently in my life. One day.

I was doing something of the sort with Paige. The little caresses, the hand holding, shadowing my body along hers. It had to be just an infatuation, right?

Yes, because for women you're infatuated with, you go and order two dozen red roses and a gourmet breakfast on Valentine's morning to surprise them.

Why did my inner monologue have to be so sarcastic?

And yet, I stood at the side of the bed, admiring my handiwork. The breakfast tray was set on the bedside table next to Paige. The aroma of the freshly pressed coffee was already beginning to rouse her. The bouquet of red roses was a rich contrast to her creamy skin and white linens on my bed.

Carefully, I slid one rose out from the silk bow and brought it to my nose. I admired the naked woman in my bed. Paige was all tangled in the

freshly changed sheets. This trip allowed us to get to know each other a bit more outside of just writing. Maybe it was my subconscious way of seeing if this was something more than just an outstanding sexual connection.

Spoiler alert. It was.

At least, I felt that way. I just...couldn't stop myself from wanting to dote on her. Maybe it was because she didn't want it? That she didn't expect lavish gifts and gourmet dinners. My money didn't impress her or make her act any differently. She was still unapologetically Paige. I liked that.

I'd become so used to love that put myself second and my money first. That wasn't even love. That was a relationship of convenience. They got free shit out of me and maybe enjoyed sleeping with me while I got to relieve some pent-up stress and energy.

A soft smile curled at the corner of her mouth as she stirred a bit more. I stretched out next to her once again and brought the loose rose to her warm skin. The color contrast was a sinful mix of two opposites. Heaven and hell. Yin and yang. Paige and me.

The rose drooped forward in my hand to land along her knuckles. I drew the bud up to tickle along her arm and around the curve of her shoulder. The bloom caressed her bare collarbone, with which I'd spent the better part of the night becoming well acquainted with. Her body stirred with every lingering touch of the rose. Continuing its dance along her skin, I dragged the flower down to her bare breasts and made lazy circles around each of her nipples, teasing them to ripe peaks.

Her breathing quickened slightly before her lips twerked at the corners. Her eyes fluttered open slowly. It took her a moment to register where she was, but as soon as I came into focus, her smile brightened in a lazy curl.

"Morning."

I grinned down at her and presented the rose that had been my toy for the last few minutes. "Morning."

"What's this?" she asked in sleepy confusion as her eyes crossed trying to bring the scarlet bloom into focus.

"It's for you." I tipped my head towards the bigger pile just beyond her peripheral. "Along with twenty-three of its friends."

Paige's brow furrowed as she turned her head and was met with a heap of red roses. A gasp slipped from her lips as her fingers reached out to touch the blooms with her disbelief. I enjoyed seeing the spark of delight in her eyes that she tried so hard to hide.

Whipping her gaze back to mine, her mouth opened with yet another protest but then promptly closed it.

“I... Thank you.”

“Was that actually a ‘thank you’ that I heard?”

“It...was,” she said cautiously as fought back the smile that threatened to show. Sitting up, she drew the sheets to her chest and glanced over at me. “I’ve always wanted a man to give me flowers.”

“Oh well...” I leaned up on my elbow and gave her a serious look. “They actually came with your Happy Meal.”

“My...?” That threw her through a loop. The confused distress on her face only made me fall back to the bed in laughter. “...*What?*”

“They came with breakfast.”

Realizing I was teasing her, she swatted my arm before her trademark snort dissolved into laughter right along with me. “You’re such an ass.”

“It made you laugh.” I pointed out before I rolled over and brushed a kiss against her shoulder. “Now eat your breakfast before it gets cold. I think your coffee is less than scalding by now. I’m sure you wanted to get started on your six cups a day.”

That earned me a hearty side-eye as she scooted herself backward to the headboard and propped the pillow up behind her. Before she could reach out to grab the tray herself, I was at her side and carefully placed it on her lap. I used what I could remember from the retreat to order out. An array of pastries, eggs, bacon, and pancakes were arranged on the tray. It was probably enough food for at least four people.

“I can’t remember the last time I had breakfast in bed. I think I was a kid.” Her eyes surveyed the spread with interest before she snagged a cheese danish and took a bite.

“Sometimes it’s fun to indulge. Especially when you’re on a post-book vacation.” Her huff of laughter warmed me.

“Ain’t that the truth.” She smiled to herself before her eyes lifted to timidly meet mine. “Thanks for this. Most of the time I don’t bother to take time for myself. This has been...nice.”

“Well, if you want that big brain of yours to keep putting out top-notch shit, then you need to take care of it.” I turned on the smolder. “Along with that body of yours.” Oh, I lived for that side-eye she shot me multiple times a day. Most of the time I couldn’t tell if it meant utter sass, anger, or something else.

“Oh, you’ve taken *plenty* of care of that.” She chewed in silence for a moment. “Speaking of writing, how is your project? You said you needed help and we’ve barely talked about it.”

“This has all been...research.”

“Research?” That side-eye was back.

“Much like your own for yours.”

“Oh.” She said simply before it clicked. “*Oh.*” I was rewarded with a soft little giggle. “I’m pretty sure you don’t need help in that department.” Her finger cornered me in a playfully accusatory fashion.

“I personally don’t.” Leaning in, I brushed a kiss against her bare shoulder. “But I needed a purely female reaction to some of the...*antics*... male character is getting into.”

Paige snorted and I felt the vibration of her silent chuckle against my lips. Part of me was crestfallen that she’d be leaving in the morning. The long weekend felt like a dreamy escape from the weeks of work and my sad attempt to keep her out of my thoughts. There was no denying that I needed this to be a regular thing.

“You’re a piece of work.” An unexpected moan vibrated in her throat as she sipped her cup of coffee. “Holy shit I’m going to miss your coffee maker. I swear you have a barista hidden in your kitchen island or something.”

“Is that all you’re going to miss?” I knew it was a dangerous question, but I kept my tone light.

“Are you just fishing for compliments?”

“Maybe.”

“Just when I thought you weren’t full of yourself. You go ahead and prove me right.” Internally I winced at her jab. But the grin that quirked at the corner of her mouth betrayed the fact that she was playing right along with me. “Then maybe I shouldn’t tell you that this little trip may or may not have inspired some new book ideas.”

My brows shot up. “Really?”

“I had to inflate your ego a bit more after all, didn’t I?”

“Alright, fair is fair.” Now it was her turn to cock a brow at me. “When does your new book release? I want to read the entire thing. And the others.”

“Penn...” Paige started that inward retreat. “I’m not sure if that’s a good idea.”

“Why not? You inflate my...*ego*. I want to return the favor.”

“This...this was really only supposed to be a one-time thing.”

“And? We continue to inspire each other. Clearly.” I shifted closer to her so I could look her in the eye. “Maybe this is more of a writer’s muse thing?”

“You don’t need to know who I am.”

“Why not?”

“I...I like it better that way.”

“Why?”

“Because...I...like my quiet, my solitude. My anonymity.”

“Paige,” I sighed. “You have a gift. You have no idea how lucky you are that you can openly share it with others.”

“I do know! I love writing. It’s what makes me happy. I just...I just don’t want people to know it’s *me*, me.”

“Okay, so well...how would anyone know who you are at a book signing?”

“Uh...well,” She mulled the idea around for a moment as she took another bite of her breakfast. “I’m not really sure.”

“Exactly.”

“But they’d see my face.”

“So?”

“So? I like the fact that people *don’t* recognize me.”

“Name five authors that you know what their face looks like.”

“Stephen King, George R.R. Martin, Lucy Score...” Paige was quiet for a moment. “Shit.”

“See?”

“I don’t know, Penn. It’s just a lot. Writing fantasy is different than sci-fi. There is a much deeper fanbase.”

“Yeah, and *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* fans are chopped liver?”

“I...” Her lips pursed. “Fine. You got me there.”

“Exactly. You have nothing to worry about. I hope your publisher gives this trilogy a send-off to remember.”

“I hope so too.”



The rest of the morning was lazily spent in bed before I helped her dress in her newly acquired dress. I could tell from her body language that it wasn't her usual sort of thing to wear in a dressing room, let alone out in public. But damn if she didn't look incredible. I was used to her t-shirts and sweaters and skinny jeans. In the dress I bought her, she looked every bit the vixen my body knew her to be.

My hands were constantly on her throughout our lunch Valentine's date. Which I supposed helped her relax and ease into her new persona. I came to regret letting her pick out such a dress. Quite a few male stares wandered over in her direction with her tinkle of laughter. But who wouldn't admire

her? Especially with her incredibly imaginative brain and playful sense of humor. Not to mention her curvy body that I couldn't get enough of.

The reason I picked a lunch reservation over a dinner one is that it allowed more time for us to undress and unwind before her early flight in the morning. I was able to take my time peeling that sinful red dress off of her and worshipping the bounty beneath. That way I got a few hours of enjoyment out of that expensive lingerie set I bought for her instead of it being stuffed in a drawer for the rest of eternity.

Worth every fucking cent.

The intimacy tonight had been drastically different than yesterday when we had fun with her new toys. While that was effortlessly hot, tonight was slower. Softer. Drawn out and quiet as her eyes glittered in the moonlight.

We both took our time with one another. Enjoying every touch with no rush towards the end. The journey was the best part. I never had the pleasure to dedicate so much time to ravishing a woman from head to toe. Paige deserved every second. The noises I drew out of her were something that I'd be thinking about during all the lonely nights ahead.

Each touch of mine was reciprocated with a heady desperation from her. I hated to think that it felt like a goodbye. I couldn't stand the thought. Especially not when I could afford to make this a regular thing for the both of us.

Paige was the wild card in this agreement. I knew she had fun with me. She said so herself. That's all it needed to be with her. So what if I was getting more out of this than she was? I was this close to deleting all my past conquests from my phone. None of that world appealed to me anymore. What I had in my arms was what I wanted.

That only confused me further. Why the hell this woman made me a sap all of a sudden. I was comfortable around her. I could be myself. My money meant absolutely nothing to her.

Paige was so withdrawn from the world, and it made no sense to me. She was charming, funny, unapologetically herself. With a brilliant mind to boot. She had so much to share. She shouldn't ever question her worth.

There was something about her manuscript that still scratched at the back of my brain ever since the retreat. It was oddly familiar, even though it was brand new. Had I read her work before? The only clues she'd given me, through numerous conversations, was: It was part of a trilogy, a fantasy traditionally published, and well-received enough for potential to have a book

tour in the future.

Had I read her other books before? I used to read a lot more in high school and college than I did once I took over for my father. Too many other things pulled my attention away from sitting and reading. I missed it.

Come to think of it, there was a book I read a few years ago. I picked it up in an airport bookstore during an obscenely long layover. The beautiful cover art and blurb pulled me in immediately. I bought it on a whim to keep me entertained instead of the work emails that did nothing to pass the time.

I was immediately hooked. So hooked that I waited with bated breath for the next book. But why the hell couldn't I remember the name of it? That was the one book that got me out of a years-long reading slump. It might be worth revisiting once again.

Oh my god.

The realization hit me like a ton of bricks.

It was *her*.

The characters, Anja and Caspian. The world they lived in. The plights they had to go through all while denying that they were falling in love with each other. Two absolute tomes of books that were magical works of art.

Paige wasn't just *any* author. She was Bridget Paige. *The* Bridget Paige. The Bridget Paige who'd been constantly on the New York Times Bestseller list for the past five years, even though she'd only published two books. The Bridget Paige who the world had been anxiously awaiting the final installment of her trilogy. The one that I read the climax of at the writer's retreat.

How didn't I realize it before? How could I have been so stupid? Her books unexpectedly resonated with me at an equally unexpected time in my life. They had a special place in my heart, but life stepped in the way.

And that same Bridget Paige was completely naked and sound asleep in my bed. The same Bridget Paige that my entire body ached for. The same Bridget Paige that I was quickly coming to terms with not being able to get enough of.

Why didn't she tell me?

Probably because all the two of you have done is have sex.

Fucking hell, my brain needed to stay out of this.

She probably didn't tell you because she's hiding from the public just as much as you are.

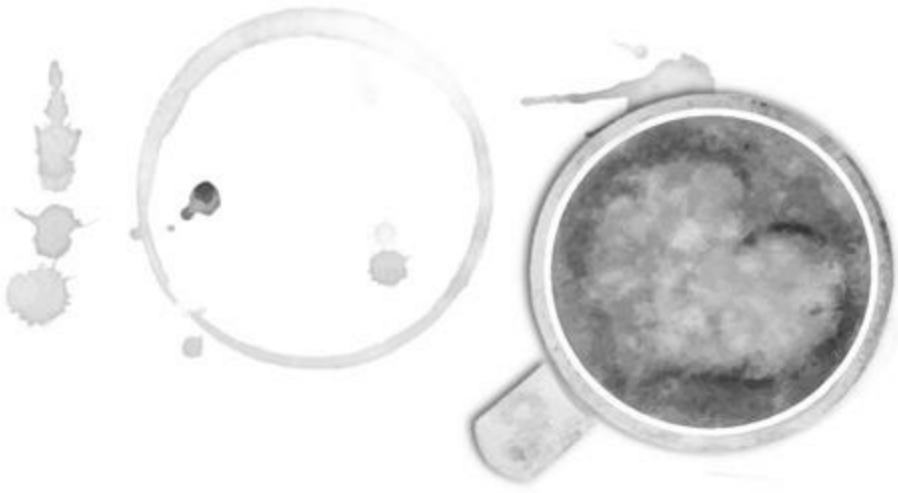
Okay, so maybe my brain did have a point.

Unlike me, Paige didn't have to contend with a disapproving father. One that would probably disown me for being a writer for wanting to dedicate my life to something so frivolous. Not to mention how it would affect the business if word got out.

Her books were incredible works of fantasy art. Why did she feel the need to hide herself from the world? She needed to be celebrated.

In that instant, I knew what I had to do.

Pennington Tech was going to sponsor her long-awaited book tour.



Chapter 28

Paige

A few months later...

Spring and summer were a blinding whirlwind of back-and-forth edits, marketing plans, book launch meetings, and discussions about future books. Someone from my publishing company, or Faith, had me on the phone just about every day about something. You would think that once an author sent off their book, with their final blessing, it would be over. Nope. Not in the least bit.

It's not like this part was terrible, it just wasn't my favorite. Writing was what I was good at. It was what I loved. Anything beyond that I was thankful I had an amazing team who had my back. Especially since it had been a very bittersweet time putting the final touches on the final book of my debut fantasy trilogy.

I had a month-long break while my manuscript went through vigorous edits from the developmental, line, and proofreading editors. Fantasy and sci-fi books needed to be gone over with a fine-toothed comb to make sure all the interweaving of what went on in my brain and in my world made sense. There was no way that I could catch everything. Although I was fairly methodical in how I wrote things.

But what about Penn?

The man hadn't stopped bothering me since I left New York. I suppose it was cute, but what the hell did he want from me? Someone to keep him company? Someone to sleep with?

Okay, so yes, when I felt particularly frisky, he could talk me into a little naughty video fun. Or audio when the signal wasn't the greatest wherever he was on his travels. Sometimes he'd even send me a random as hell photo of a questionable part of his body. Now I know women aren't fond of dick pics, but his? Don't judge, but I *really* enjoyed his dick in particular, so I didn't mind them one bit. Those got tucked into a folder. *For later.*

He sent them to me full well knowing that I wouldn't send any to him. Too many women had been burned during a moment of weakness by shitty guys. Not that I thought Penn would do anything shitty. But the tabloids had

a field day with the “mystery woman on the hot tech mogul’s arm” right after I returned home to my safe space.

It wasn’t the best way for me to figure out who Penn was. Honestly, it was a large shock. Okay, a huge shock. I never paid any mind to people who had so much money and that’s what made them famous. But when you walk past a tabloid magazine, with a photo of the man you just so happened to have fucked, with a woman who looked suspiciously like yourself, wearing a super high-end designer dress that was still hanging in your closet, you tend to take notice.

Christopher Pennington.

Well, Penn to me.

CEO of Pennington Tech. He wasn’t anything like what I expected in a CEO. How many CEOs had I actually met in my lifetime? He was...really nice. Sweet. Even a bit funny. The only part that had me convinced was his sheer...*intensity*.

But a writer? Usually those kinds of CEOs used ghostwriters to write their ‘How I Got Rich’ scummy books that automatically made the New York Times Bestseller lists. Never a wannabe sci-fi writer. He hadn’t shared any of his writing with me yet, but he asked me numerous plotting and world-building questions from time to time. There were even a few times where we bounced ideas off each other. Was he published? Was he terrible? I had no idea. I wasn’t going to squander or crush his dream if it was what made him happy.

My thoughts swirled in endless turbulence. The fact that I was once again in New York may have had a small part in that aspect. I didn’t tell Penn I was coming. Nor did I want to. Because maybe he would do something as stupid as trying to find me. With my name and book plastered in almost every window of the biggest bookstore in New York, I didn’t want to take the chance that he might put two and two together.

Somehow my publishing company managed to wrestle up a book tour with all the bells and whistles, just for me. How they accomplished that, I had no idea. There were plenty of other authors under Write Type’s umbrella. Other authors with bigger sellers with dozens of books on their backlist.

As much as I loathed the observation, Penn’s words rang true in my head. Who would notice me at book signings? I rarely left my house. I didn’t exactly have friends aside from Faith. My family was small and most of them had passed on. Maybe an old coworker would? Classmate? But hell, it’d been

years since I worked or was in school. Hopefully, they'd all forgotten about me. Especially since I didn't use my real name when writing.

I just had to get through one book signing. Then another. Then another. Then maybe it would become second nature. Faith updated me as locations sold out within hours. I couldn't believe it. People wanted to see me? People wanted books signed by me?

Faith said this was genius timing. Maybe it was a good thing that I put off book signings for so long. Not that I'd ever admit to her the real reason being my crippling anxiety. My book sales could easily triple due to the fact that all this pomp and circumstance of me finally going on a tour surrounded the third book. People new to me would want the first two books. Maybe it would even send the other two books in the trilogy to top spots on the bestseller list once again, right alongside my new book. That would be wild. They split my tour into two sections: Half of it would be spent promoting the release of the new book and the other half would be signings for the new book after it was released.

"There's my hotshot author girl."

I glanced up from my comfy chair in the bookstore's break room. Faith sauntered in with a bottle of water and a coffee, two of the three ingredients I needed to survive on a daily basis. The other was my laptop, but the last thing I could think about doing now was writing.

"Hey,"

"I know that face. It will be fine! Just breathe." Faith reassured me as she handed me the steaming latte. I took a slow sip.

"It's legit killing me to even breathe." A sad noise escaped Faith.

"You have fans out there that have been waiting for, what, five years, to meet you. You've got this. Go slow. Smile. Say 'hi'. They're excited to see you and get a signed book."

"I know, I have to keep reminding myself that. My anxiety won't hear any of it though."

"You've made it this far. You have no idea how excited I am for you." She shot me a smile with a playful little shove to my shoulder. "I'm going to make sure your signing table is stocked with what you need before you go out. Breathe. In. And out. In. And out."

I followed her instructions with a quick nod in compliance. Her eyes lingered on me for a moment to make sure I was still breathing. When I managed to take a few breaths unassisted, she was satisfied enough that I

wasn't going to keel over from straight anxiety just yet. Faith slipped back out of the room with a thumbs up.

The quiet was comforting. I could center myself with the white noise of the HVAC system. My heart rate was lowering to a more manageable speed. Now if only it wouldn't skyrocket the moment I stepped out of the room and into the crowd of people.

A click from the door handle shot my heart to my throat. I looked up, fully expecting Faith back with something else she forgot to tell me. The face that peered from around the door made my heart stop.

"Penn...?" The furrow of confusion in my brow hit my face first as I attempted to suffocate the sudden flutter in my heart. "W-What are you doing here?"

"So...what do you think?"

I blinked at him. "What in the actual fuck are you talking about?"

"You kept saying that you wanted to go on a book tour with your best-selling trilogy. Well...here's your chance."

"You?!" I abruptly stood up. His surprise appearance triggered a visceral reaction in my body. "You did all this?" I swept my hand to nothing, but the point was still made. Rage now overpowered my anxiety.

Before Penn stepped into the room, I was barely holding myself together mentally for an event that I needed to have a public-approved attitude for. The moment he appeared, it derailed all of the mental fortitude I'd put in place to keep myself seemingly put together.

"I wanted to do this when *I* was good and ready. Not when the guy," My voice dropped to a pissed-off whisper, "...I *was fucking* decided to coerce my publisher into doing this...this *now!*" There was a flicker of emotion on his face.

"Paige..." He took a step toward me with open arms and I took a large step back. My reaction made him pause. "You're...incredibly gifted. The first half of your tour is already sold out." *Okay, so that news was new to me.* How did he know? It didn't matter, the death stare in my eyes didn't waver one bit. "The world's been eagerly awaiting you."

"Penn, like I told you before, I don't need to be taken care of. I can schedule my own damn book tour."

"Okay... that's fair." A heavy sigh dropped his shoulders. "But be honest." His eyes narrowed at me. "You never were going to be ready, were you? You have hundreds of fans eagerly awaiting you out there. But you've

been too scared to take the next step. You needed this push. You needed this reminder that you are an amazing author with a *brilliant* mind. Those readers out there want more from Bridget Paige.”

“And they would have gotten a whole lot more. Except now I’m going to fucking die from fucking anxiety as my fucking heart beats through my fucking chest. I-”

“Paige! There you are! Can you believe it? You have at least a hundred people in the stand-by line-” I couldn’t tell if I was thrilled, or mad, Faith walked in the middle of my rant. My agent stopped in her tracks as soon as she noticed Penn. An expertly-threaded brow cocked at him in disdain. Thank god she was on my team. “Can I help you?”

“He was just leaving.” The look I shot him could have taken down a bull elephant.

Just when I thought we sent him on the run, Faith’s expression suddenly changed.

“Oh my gosh, Mr. Pennington! Forgive my manners and that of Ms. Paige here.” Her eyes gave me a sharp glare in warning. “I don’t think that, uh...*Bridget* had any idea that you’re the mysterious sponsor of her book tour!”

“I...*didn’t*.” I gritted out through clenched teeth.

“He insisted that his identity would remain a secret.” It was a vain attempt to pull me from the ledge. She turned her attention back to Penn. “I... I wasn’t expecting you to...*show up*. We would have made proper meet-and-greet arrangements...” A flush lit across Faith’s high cheekbones. Oh my god, was she *flustered* by him? I mean, who wouldn’t be. He was the hottest New York socialite, according to the newsstand’s array of tabloids that I passed by on the way here.

An uncomfortable silence settled over the room as Penn and I stared at each other. I tried with every ounce of my power to ignore the almost palpable sexual energy crackling between us. It’d been a few months since our long weekend at his penthouse. But there had been plenty of dirty calls and playful texts, despite our busy schedules. My body wanted to be in his arms again, but my brain was having none of that nonsense.

This was not going to be me wilting all over again. Maybe I was a willing participant then. But now? Now I was *livid*. He had no right to throw his private investigator, or whatever, into my personal life and figure out who I was. Let alone set up the one thing I was *not* ready for.

“It’s...fine.” His voice came out flat. Defeated almost? “Like Ms. Paige said, I...I was just leaving. I ...wanted to wish her good luck. And well... remind her that someone does believe in her even when she doesn’t believe in herself.” There was hurt in his eyes as he cast me one last glance before he left the room.

His words were a cold knife to my heart. He had no right to say such sweet shit to me. Part of me wanted to take back every awful thing I just said, while the other part cheered that I finally put the billionaire playboy in his place. I did not need a bossy man in my life. I did not need to be taken care of. I’d been doing that for years, and rather successfully I might add.

“Okay...that was weird.” Faith breathed out as she gave me one hell of a side-eye. “What the fuck was *that* all about? You do know that he set up every damn thing for you on this tour? Luxury hotel stays, meals, first-class travel... You could have at least said ‘thank you’.”

“Everything that I could have arranged with you. Myself. When *I* was good and ready. Just because he’s a hunky billionaire doesn’t mean he can just go and...and take charge of my life like that!” Faith’s face contorted into further confusion.

“Okay I agree on the hunky billionaire thing, but...*what?* Why the hell are you talking about him like you...*know* him?”

I cringed. I should have covered my tracks better. There was no point in hiding it now. Faith had to know so she could at least side with me for the remainder of this tour. Dropping my face into my palm, I mumbled, “He’s ‘*writer retreat guy*’.”

Faith inhaled sharply and made a noise that should not have come out of a normal human being. “*Holy fucking shit.*” Her hand shot up to her mouth. “You’re kidding.”

“Does it look like I’m kidding?!” Oh god, I was probably all red and blotchy from the stress. Not at all a person who should be going out in front of people and pretending everything is okay.

“Okay fine.” She huffed out, still in disbelief. “But for fucks sake do you even know how lucky you are?”

“But...it was only...*sex*. That’s all it’s been. Well...and helping each other with our manuscripts.” I tried not to sound disappointed, but the arch of Faith’s eyebrow questioned the tone of my voice. “I mean, *great* sex mind you. So yeah...it’s been fun. But now I’m pissed at him. *Again.*” I let the anger seep back in, instead of thinking about a much-needed quickie with

Penn. “I don’t need a man to take care of me. I’m perfectly fine doing this all on my own.”

“Yeah but...” Her voice hushed to a whisper. “...*the sex.*”

It was a valid argument.

“It was...*good.*”

“Paige, I hate to break it to you. But no man does this kind of shit because of *just sex.*”

Faith’s words were like a punch to my gut.

There was no way. Penn and...*me?* The thought was absurd. The man just liked being in control of everything in his life. Because he had money, he thought he needed to give everyone a leg up. While the notion was admirable in most regards, I didn’t want to be considered a charity case.

Nor did I want a relationship. Well, at least not with him. Or...I didn’t think so. Penn didn’t want a relationship. He wanted a casual fling, just like all his other past conquests. From what I saw in the tabloids, once I figured out who he was, the man had a different woman on his arm every week. I may or may not have done some deep dives into his history in the middle of the night. And as much as I would like to settle down one day, Penn was not the person to chase after to make that happen.

This was purely about sex. Or well...*it was.* He crossed a boundary that I was not at all comfortable with him crossing. He did so without my permission and did the one thing I *explicitly* said I *didn’t* want to do. Not only did he disrespect my privacy, but he also disrespected my wishes. Just because he had all the money in the world didn’t mean that he could do whatever the fuck he wanted.

I wasn’t one of his weekend bimbos.

And I never would be again.



Chapter 29

Penn

I fucked up.

I royally fucked up.

I thought setting up the book tour for Paige would give her that kick in the ass that she needed to put herself out there. That she would be thrilled I took out the complicated step of setting it up and all of the logistics. Which was a piece of cake once I figured out the schematics of who she was. With my top team of high-paid experts at my disposal, I arranged as stress-free a book tour as possible.

Instead, she was pissed.

Hated me.

Loathed me even.

I was stuck watching her blossom from afar. Instead of thanks, I got off-putting growls and grumpy side-eyes from Paige. That was only when I dared to make myself known at each signing stop. By the fourth bookstore, I kept to the shadows. By the sixth, I debated coming at all.

Never mind that I was running myself ragged with flights across the United States chasing after her at every stop. Despite all that, I couldn't stop. I had to make sure she was okay. That she was enjoying herself with her book tour.

Why?

I still couldn't answer that. Maybe I didn't want to think of the implications. Nor did I want to talk to anyone about it.

Maybe I did go a little too far with this whole surprise book tour thing. Alright, way too far. I overstepped every single boundary that she set between us. All because I had a stupid moment of weakness, after an entire weekend where her body pulled every damn drop of release from my balls.

Maybe, just maybe, I liked Paige a lot more than I ever wanted to admit to.

There was no way I could ever manage an apology worthy of her. I fucked up because I thought this was what she needed. Instead, it was what *I* thought she needed.

I wanted to be the one there for her. To take care of her. The *only* one.

Our Valentine's weekend together, and the many months without being together, only cemented that fact.

I knew she could take care of herself. Aside from the exuberant amount of coffee she consumed daily, she'd been taking care of herself for a long time. Without help. And doing a smash-up job of it. She was successful in her little quiet world.

Which was the total opposite of all the past women in my life, including my high school sweetheart. Each and every woman in my life would have bled me dry if I let them. They would have taken me for all I was worth because they had a pretty face and knew what to say. After the first dozen or so, I finally learned a very expensive lesson, multiple times over.

My mother said I was too sweet for my own good, just like my father. In the wrong hands that sort of knowledge would be abused to no end. But if you found someone who appreciated that time and care, well...they would be a winner.

The mere fact that Paige was not only the complete opposite of all those women, she turned down my efforts. She was unimpressed. While the gestures were appreciated, at least I hoped they were, they weren't necessary for her to spend time with me.

Paige wanted to hang out with me because she liked to. She didn't need a new purse every time, or needed to be treated to an expensive-as-hell dinner, or a take fancy trip somewhere. She was perfectly content sitting at home in pajamas and watching an old movie.

So... Paige was perfect.

It's not like I could ever walk up to her and admit it now. Or well, ever. She quit me like a bad habit. Completely cold turkey. All of my texts and calls were ignored. With that blatant but silent message, there was no way that she felt the same way for me as I *maybe* felt for her.

Yet here I was, hidden amongst the stacks as she charmed and wowed everyone who stepped up to her signing table to meet her. As I suspected, the world was slowly beginning to see the Paige that I knew. They adored her just the same.

Her smile was beautiful, and her tone was always full of delight. Guest reactions ranged from crying to excitement. There were even those fans grateful to her for giving them a book that left them breathless and in a book hangover for the rest of eternity. I hoped that perhaps some part of her did want to thank me for what I did. Maybe one day... Or maybe never.

It looked like she was having fun. Not one part of her seemed nervous. She was being her authentic Paige self. That was all I wanted to show her. That she had the power to do this and kick major ass while she did it. I saw that strength within her.

With the utmost class, she gave approval to the bookstores to let the stand-by lines in after the ticketed guests had made their way through. She looked tired every time, but the gleam in her eyes and her smile never faltered. This signing was no different.

Paige rose from the table slowly and I found myself transfixed with her all over again. What about her was so intoxicating? She wasn't even doing anything to sexually tease me and I still couldn't take my eyes off of her.

I suddenly realized she was headed straight for me, but hadn't seen my hiding place. With my head down, I made a mad dash towards an exit, but Paige's elbow ended up clipping me by accident.

"Oh, I'm sor—" Paige's voice was sweetly apologetic until that flash of recognition hit her blue eyes. "Oh... Penn." The words were tart on her tongue. The same tongue that had blown my mind and my dick on more than one occasion. I internally winced. At least she managed to say hi instead of completely blowing me off like all the other times.

I spoke too soon. As soon as she physically recovered her bump into me, she set off on a determined march toward the bookstore exit. My eyes immediately went to the sway of her hips in the dark skirt she wore. I was dumbfounded for a second. With a shake of my head, I strode after her.

"Paige, wait!" At least that got me a glance over her shoulder as I held the door for her.

"I have nothing to say to you."

"That's fine, sometimes I just like to hear myself talk." She let out some sort of noise that sounded like a repressed bit of laughter. "It looks like you're enjoying yourself on your book tour." I wanted to start out lighthearted but the moment she walked clear past her chauffeured car had me bristle. "Hey, you missed your ride!"

"The hotel isn't far. I'd rather walk." She called over her shoulder as she kept up with her brisk pace.

My fingers fisted at my sides. I couldn't yell at her. I couldn't tell her what to do. That would make her run even faster. I needed to walk a delicate line. Waving off the driver, who looked on expectantly, I chased after her.

"That's fine. I'll walk with you." Greeted with a side-eye, I realized that

I was still on dangerous waters.

“Penn, you’ve already done more than enough. You don’t need to babysit me on this tour. That’s what the goons you hired are for.” I opened my mouth. “And don’t you dare gloat either.” I promptly closed it and swallowed back my smartass retort. “Don’t you have actual work to do? Whatever it is that CEOs do in all their A-hole-iness. Or do you just swim in money on any given day?”

She was pushing my buttons right back since I showed up at, yet another book signing, and pushed hers. *Okay, I deserved that.*

“Vault swimming day was yesterday.” That at least got me her trademark snort. She hadn’t completely written off my humor. “Is it so bad that someone wants to support a fellow writer?”

“Not...*exactly.*” Her eyes found mine before she quickly looked away. “But supporting a fellow writer is buying their books or offering to beta read for them. Not go into full stalker mode and follow them to each of their book signings. If one of those readers at my signings did that, I’d be alerting the off-putting men-in-black you assigned to me.”

“Oh, so you do appreciate them,” I called after her as she slipped into her hotel off the street. She was nimble on her legs. I found myself scrambling through the marble-lined lobby after her.

“I didn’t say that. I’m saying you’re acting like a stalker. I should use your own men to get rid of the creep.” Paige had no problem saying this to my face as she smashed the up button on the elevator. “Spoiler alert. You’re the creep.”

“I am not. I just wanted to make sure that you are having a pleasant book tour.”

“Tell me, Penn.” She turned and looked me square in the eye. “If I had a random ass fan start following me through every leg of my tour, hiding creepily amongst the book stacks, and then accosting me after said book signing, only to follow me to my hotel, what would you do?”

I answered without an ounce of hesitation. “Tear the fan to pieces with my bare hands.” There may or may not have been a bit of a defensive growl in my voice. If any of those fuckers even looked at her the wrong way...

“Well, that’s surprising because that’s you right now. And before I call your stupid wannabe fuzz, there’s the door.” She made a show of shoving her pointer finger next to my face in the direction of the main hotel door.

“Yes, but *I* know who I am. I’m not a threat to you.”

“Are you sure about that, Penn? Do you always obsess so much over your ladies of the weekend? Maybe you’re the reason they don’t come back. Maybe you suffocated them to death.”

Her words were harsh. Untrue, but harsh. They still left me with my jaw unhinged and me suspended in disbelief. With the distraction, she slipped into the elevator and repeatedly struck the button. I managed to slip inside just as the doors closed.

Except my rather expensive patent leather shoes snagged on the gap between the floor and the elevator. I lunged forward toward her as I stumbled. Paige pushed herself back against the wall as her face twisted into a turbulent mix of scorn and surprise.

My hands landed hard on the wood-paneled walls to either side of her head. She was caged beneath me. Our faces were only a breath apart and I was *very* aware of the proximity of her body to mine.

Fuck, it’d been too long since I had her in my bed.

Paige made no move to escape. I could almost hear the flutter of her heart in my ears. Or was it my elevated heartbeat, sending a cascade of blood rushing throughout my body? Including a very problematic rush south.

It felt like a magnet pulled me in towards her curves. My body was desperate to mold against hers once more. I craved the connection. I craved *her*.

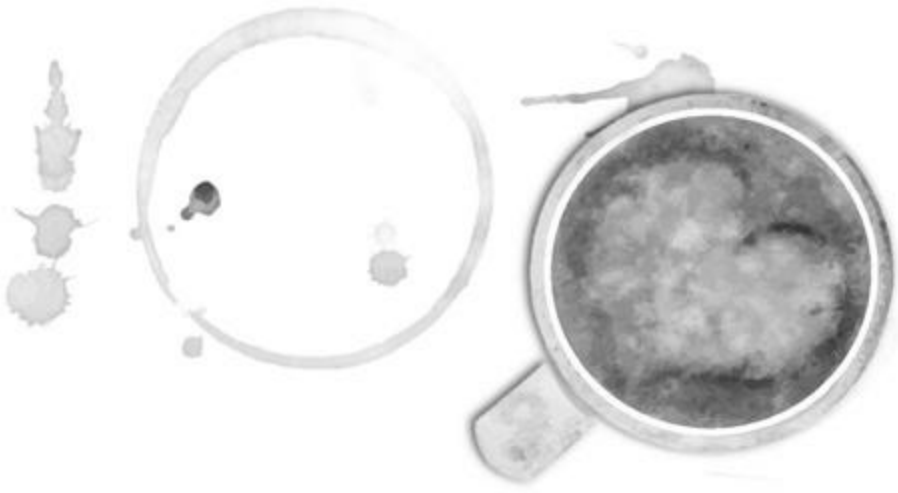
With a subtle tilt of her chin upwards, her parted lips were within reach of mine. She must have felt it too. That undeniable attraction both of us were trying to suppress but having a really shitty time doing so.

I wanted to kiss her real fucking bad.

“Paige, I-” The ding of the elevator stopped my breathy confession dead in its tracks.

“L-Last I checked; you weren’t invited to my room.”

Her stuttered whisper was like cold water on my overheated body. With another drop of my jaw, she dipped under my arm and slid herself out and away from me with only the slightest hint of a look back. All before the doors of the elevator closed.



Chapter 30

Paige

Penn was driving me nuts.

Totally bonkers.

What was his game? Was he trying to keep an eye on his investment to make sure I was using every aspect of the book tour that he meticulously planned? That I didn't die of anxiety? Or did he do this because...?

No, I didn't want to think about it.

While I was actually enjoying the tour, it was the travel that was slowly killing me instead of the anxiety. Two tour stops a week left two days for travel and three days for overlap. Just when I got comfortable, I had to pack up and move to another hotel room.

But now I was back for round two of the tour.

Back in New York.

I had to give it to him, the hotels he picked were beyond beautiful. Each one was a hotel that I never would have dreamed of ever staying in unless I won the lottery. While my book advances had been generous, they'd never been *this* kind of generous. The Penn kind of generous.

The organized schedule and the comfortable, lux hotels made the travel so much easier. I loved meeting all my fans for the first time and hearing them gush about my books. I loved coming back to the hotel rooms with massages and a million or whatever thread-count sheets.

Of course, my heart fluttered every time I saw his gorgeous eyes looking in my direction from over the stacks in every bookstore and library location. It annoyed me to no end that he felt the need to show up for every signing, but damn if the softer side of me didn't want to melt from the gesture. By the fourth location, I found myself looking for him. I felt weirdly comforted by having him close by. No matter how weird I acted, Penn wanted to be in my corner and would be rooting for me every step of the way.

If it wasn't for the whole playboy lifestyle, he would have been a dream of a boyfriend. Hell, he'd be worthy of the title of 'book boyfriend', the ideal man that a woman author wrote. One who said and did all the right things.

Well, and all the things you didn't know you liked but the author had unknowingly turned into a kink for you.

It also didn't help that he exuded sexual energy. The confrontation in the elevator after my last signing had me on a tease of a sexual high. Something that I didn't want to admit that I'd missed during these long weeks with the stress of the tour. A good fucking by Penn sounded a hell of a lot better than a massage right now. Although maybe I could request a male masseuse to get someone's strong hands on my naked body.

I'd been so tempted to kiss him. To pull him against me and go at it in the elevator. To get him out of my system once and for all. Casual sex wasn't something that I did, like ever. That required face-to-face interaction, some sort of continued correspondence. My battery-operated friends didn't talk back or give me as much grief as Penn has. Well, only when their battery ran out at the most inopportune times.

Why couldn't I get Penn out of my damn head?

Faith said that no normal guy would go out of his way like this to do something nice just for sex. Especially when Penn had his choice of top shelf New York City women. Maybe sex with me was different? Maybe I wasn't as awful as I thought I was. When Penn had his hands, mouth, and dick involved it felt like the Fourth-of-fucking-July between my legs. Explosion after explosion...

Speaking of which, I could go for an orgasm right about now.

I nearly jumped out of my skin with a knock at my hotel room's door. *Damn, did I just manifest a booty call?* Maybe it was a hot masseuse this time around. A girl could dream.

Tightening the knot of my hotel bathrobe, I shuffled over to the door. The knock sounded again, this time much quicker and more impatient. Grumbling under my breath, I heaved the door open and felt my heart stop.

"Paige, uh...hi."

"Penn...? What are you doing here?" I knew there was a startled look on my face that I could do nothing about. "The book signing isn't until tomorrow."

"I know." A bouquet of red roses appeared out of nowhere. Their heady fragrance infiltrated my nostrils. Instantly I was transported back to our Valentine's weekend together. When things weren't so overly complicated. When maybe I could have seen myself as something in Penn's life. "Can I... come in?"

There was hesitation in his question, and I had to take pause. Was it a good idea to let him in? Probably not. It was probably a terrible, no good,

awful idea. And what did my body do? It stepped aside to let him in while my brain was affronted by the sheer audacity.

Traitor.

I suppose having those orgasmic thoughts of vaginal fireworks just moments before he arrived did nothing to help the situation. Penn was still dressed in his usual business attire, looking delectable as always. His gift of flowers somehow made it into my arms as I closed the door behind him.

“I...wanted to wish you luck before the big release day party.”

My weeks-long book tour ended right where it started, in New York. Each stop I signed my previous two books but also drummed up excitement for the release of the third and final book. The book that had been inspired by the handiwork of Penn himself.

Which I was eternally grateful for. As was I for everything that he coordinated for the book tour. I just couldn't bring myself to find the words to properly portray that without getting angry at him all over again for the breach of privacy.

Thankfully nothing had come of a handful of people knowing my true identity. As Paige Booker, I barely left a mark on the world now that I had essentially become a borderline recluse. Bridget Paige on the other hand, last I checked she was a worldwide sensation.

Penn's little plan worked. A part of me was curious to see how well my third book's launch would go. I told Faith I didn't want to know. I only wanted to know that I sold at least *some* copies. However, she couldn't help her excitement and accidentally slipped that the big book release party tomorrow sold out just days after the start of the tour.

“Oh...uh, thank you. Faith said it sold out weeks ago.” Penn smiled softly.

“It did. Actually, we opened up two sets of other tickets and they were also promptly sold out. Your publisher had to contract other printers just to keep up with the demand.”

Oh shit.

Not that I minded an extra-long book signing session. Nor did the bookstore mind the additional revenue. It was just that no matter how many times Faith told me that I broke my sales record, or sold out, or had some viral social media post, it never ceased to amaze me that someone out there *loved* what I did. Loved what I wrote. While yes, I wrote for me, it was also vindication that someone else, besides me, liked the drabble that slipped out

of my brain from time to time. According to Penn and Faith, *lots* of people enjoyed the world I created.

“Wow...” I sighed, still in amazement. The roses felt heavy in my arms. I placed them on the wet bar counter by the door. “Some days I still feel like I’m in denial that all this is really happening to me.”

“And I’ll always be the one to tell you that you’re immensely gifted with an imagination that takes my breath away.”

I felt a heat rise to my cheeks at Penn’s admission. This wasn’t news to me, but it was the fact that he said it, and continued to say it is what made my heart flutter. Maybe Faith was right about him. Perhaps I was something more to Penn?

“It is nice to hear someone, other than my agent or publisher, say such a thing. Although, they don’t use such poetic language.”

Penn’s rakish grin made me weak in the knees. I knew it was just something to inflate his ego further, but I couldn’t help but compliment him when he got this way. Gosh what I wouldn’t do to hear those kinds of encouraging words every day.

“So maybe you do still like me.” His teasing tone accompanied his smile.

“Oh...now I didn’t say that-”

“You don’t have to admit to it, I’ll just pretend that’s what you really meant.” My hand somehow slipped into his as our eyes remained locked. Bending down, he brought my knuckles to his lips and kissed them.

I gave him too much of a leeway of comfortability between us. But hell, I wanted to give in. I wanted to give in and pretend none of this invasion of privacy and going against my wishes had ever happened. No harm had come of it, right?

Right?

“Still full of yourself, I see.” I teased right back but my voice dropped to barely above a whisper. Penn took a step closer to me, his hand still clutched around mine. The room grew hot. I felt the only way to cool down was to chug a tall glass of Penn.

“You like it.” Penn hummed as my hands subconsciously slipped under his arms to clutch onto his sides. Why was my body moving before my brain even considered the next option? It was like a reflex. A really hot and naughty reflex.

Fingertips caressed down my cheek before his warm palm cupped my

jaw. It was the kind of tender shit like that which made me want to rip my robe off and present my ass to him. Why did it make me borderline feral?

As soon as his fingers tangled into the hair behind my ear, it was over. His body pressed mine hard against the wall as our mouths collided after too many weeks apart. All any part of me could focus on was the sheer power of his mouth as it slanted across mine. He drank me in deep. Deep enough to make my toes curl.

Like a reflex, my arms wrapped around his neck. He answered by cupping my ass and shoving me straight up the wall to pin me there with his hips. A groan slipped into my mouth and not a fraction of a second later I knew the reason. With a shift of his hips, I felt his hard cock right against the heat between my thighs. That was when he realized that I was completely naked under my robe.

It was Penn's turn to turn feral as one hand slipped under the softness of the robe along the heated skin of my thigh. The other dove into the mussed edges of the neckline to grab ahold of my bare breast. Oh, it felt like heaven. An answer to my many weeks of stress.

With a flourish, Penn divested himself of his suit jacket before his hands found new spots to wander. My robe was held on by the wall and a prayer. His mouth found its way down the column of my throat as I took that moment to catch my breath.

No.

This was wrong.

Penn latched onto that one spot on my clavicle that made me keen.

Nope, this was 100% right.

Fuck, no.

No. No. No.

I couldn't do this.

I couldn't keep doing this when there was no end game. The only thing it would bring me was hurt and unnecessary chaos in my life. While, yes, it was fun and sexy as hell, I couldn't keep doing this with Penn. I couldn't keep doing this and *not* catch feelings for him. If these weeks had taught me anything about him, it was the fact that I needed him in my life for longer than just a monthly booty call. And as much as I wanted to ride his face into oblivion, I had to put an end to this once and for all.

"Penn..." It took every shred of power to wriggle out of his arms and back away before I did something I regretted. My hands scrambled to fix up

and tie my robe back to something more appropriate. “We...can’t do this anymore.” *Fuck*. He looked so pretty, all dazed and disheveled. Blinking, it took a few moments for my words to register on his face. “Look, thank you for arranging the book tour. It’s been...great. Actually, better than I could have ever imagined.”

His mouth dropped open to say something then promptly closed. A shaky hand combed through his styled quaff. For the first time, the silence was uncomfortable.

“As fun as it’s been...I-I’m not sure if I could ever forgive you for invading my privacy like that to set up this book tour.” Something flickered in his eyes as he held my unsteady gaze. I had to look away before I said something truly stupid instead of what needed to be said. “Maybe one day I would have told you who I was when I was good and ready. But, dammit. You broke whatever trust I had in you.”

“Paige-”

“Don’t, Penn. Just don’t. Look, you’re a nice guy and I know you meant well but...you can’t just go and interfere in someone’s life without any consequences. Or feel like you need to.”

The hurt in his eyes made my heart stop. I couldn’t let him get to me. This nonsense needed to end once and for all. His shoulders sank. I stooped down and plucked his suit jacket off the floor, handing it to him.

“I’ll be forever grateful to you for helping me with my book. You... helped me during a time of crippling self-doubt. And well...” I shrugged and moved my eyes to the floor as I pulled the hotel room door open. “Thank you. Maybe I’ll...maybe I’ll see you around.”

Penn gave me a careful look as he slipped back into his suit jacket. With a soft nod, he fixed his dress shirt underneath so that he didn’t look like he had been five seconds away from fucking me against a wall. Stepping out the door, he cast me one last look.

“I-” He sighed as he shook his head. Something seemed to be on the tip of his tongue, but he stopped himself. “Just know that I don’t regret any of this for one second. Good luck, Paige. I wish you all the success in the world.”



Chapter 31

Penn

I was a fucking idiot.

Paige left me with a clear-as-day opening, and I was too much of a fucking wuss to say anything. I suppose I couldn't always think straight when all my blood shot to my dick whenever I was in the same room as her. I'd been too much of a wuss to admit everything that I'd kept bottled up for weeks. Hell, months.

I was one of the youngest and most successful CEOs under forty in the United States. Even with all that power and confidence, I didn't have the balls to say three little words to her face.

I was in love with Paige Booker.

And I couldn't tell her.

Not after I'd broken her trust in my attempt to get the world to love her as much as I did. Not when she only wanted me to help her with book research. Not when she kicked me out of her hotel room. I don't know why it took me so fucking long to see it. Maybe I was in denial. Maybe because she was so different. But this woman made me act in a way that wasn't the usual me.

No one else made me feel the way Paige did. No woman in my past had ever come close. Maybe that's why I was so scared. Because she was unlike anyone I'd ever met. There was a black hole in my chest whenever we were apart. And when we were together? I wanted to consume every part of her at all times.

It wasn't even a sexual thing. Don't get me wrong, her body got me hard in an instant. But I found that I enjoyed our conversations, the banter. I loved spending time with her doing everything and also absolutely nothing.

I wanted her to feel the same joy I felt whenever I was with her. At least she now had thousands of fans who could bring her that elation. As for me?

Only Paige could bring me that kind of euphoria.

I would have been at her big book release signing today but I was stuck in all-day meetings with a top client of Pennington Tech. I needed to be here. But every part of me wanted to be in that damn bookstore, standing behind Paige and cheering her on.

Her words continued to ruminate in my head. There was no way that ‘I’m sorry’ would ever suffice for what I did. I broke the already fragile trust of a woman who went out on a limb to try something different with a man that she would have never talked to in the first place. What could I do? I had to do something that showed her I was sincere. No amount of money could ever buy that.

I needed to stop thinking that way. Throwing money at problems was a terrible and easy-way-out coping mechanism that had been forced upon me with all the troublesome women I’d dated ever since I landed the CEO position. Not by choice. I wanted to be a writer. I didn’t want to be the leader of a multi-billion-dollar company. I wanted to be just like Paige.

She encouraged me to keep writing. My thoughts of late were either occupied with thoughts of her or desperate attempts to *not* think of her. I hadn’t written since the retreat. Despite the unexpected distraction of her there, it was the most words I’d written in years. And it happened in one weekend.

I couldn’t exactly get up and quit my father’s company. It would devastate him to no end. I doubted quitting my job would give Paige the sincerity I needed to apologize. But I didn’t want to give up on my dream. Or Paige.

No amount of flowers was ever going to cut it. Neither were words. Honestly, I was this close to getting down on my knees in my best suit and groveling.

But what would I say? Paige was too elevated for just a simple ‘I love you’. She needed a grand gesture. Something worthy of her. Something that would show her just how fucking serious I was.

“Chris?”

My head shot up.

Fuck.

I should have been paying attention.

“I-I’m sorry. Email emergency. You were saying?”

I managed to get my head back into work enough to finish the rest of the day out with no more incidences of my head in the clouds. My assistant gave me a few odd looks. I know I wasn’t acting like myself.

What was even worse was the fact that I was in the same city as Paige, and I couldn’t be with her. She didn’t want me with her. Instead, the evening had been spent staring out the window in the direction of her downtown New

York hotel, not far from Rockefeller Center and Times Square. It was within easy walking distance of the bookstore since I knew how stubborn she was about the security detail.

Grabbing a beer from the fridge, I padded into the living area and turned on the television. I had a feeling it was going to be a sleepless night. Maybe I could put on some episodes of *The Office* or *Schitt's Creek* and just zone out. I needed something lighthearted to pass the time and think of something else. But maybe I'd check boring ol' cable television first. Sometimes there was a random classic movie on.

As I clicked through the channel guide, all I could think about was Paige. What would we be doing right now if she was mine? Would we be out to a new restaurant? Would we have ordered pizza for a naked picnic in bed? Would she be screaming my name as I fucked her across every square inch of my penthouse?

I tossed the remote aside with a groan. A flash of a scene featuring Paige bent over my couch as I fucked her from behind, had me rock hard. Thank god I changed into sweatpants when I got home or else I'd be reaching out to my dry cleaner to replace the zipper on my fly.

My hand slipped down to adjust myself, but it only made the situation worse. A mental image of Paige kneeling between my legs and sucking my dick within an inch of its life made me give the tip of my erection a teasing stroke. I wasn't one to fantasize about a woman unless it was desperate measures. But all someone had to do was utter anything that sounded like her name and my cock twitched to life.

But that's not all that this was. What Paige and I had was not just sex. Mind-blowing sex, but not just sex. Even though that's how this whole mess started. Well...the physical part of it.

Before I had any idea of how magical her mind and mouth were, something drew me to her. Was it the multiple cups of coffee in front of her? Maybe. I wasn't someone who believed in destiny, and I wasn't a sap for a romance like fated mates or anything. But perhaps Paige was set in my path for a reason.

Why did it take the chaos of this book tour for me to realize how I felt? The feeling of the retreat may have been more physical, but it didn't ease the loss of her after we parted ways. No, I'd just been too stuck up my ass in the butt crack of denial to admit why I worked myself like a dog in an effort to distract myself from thoughts of her.

I was scared.

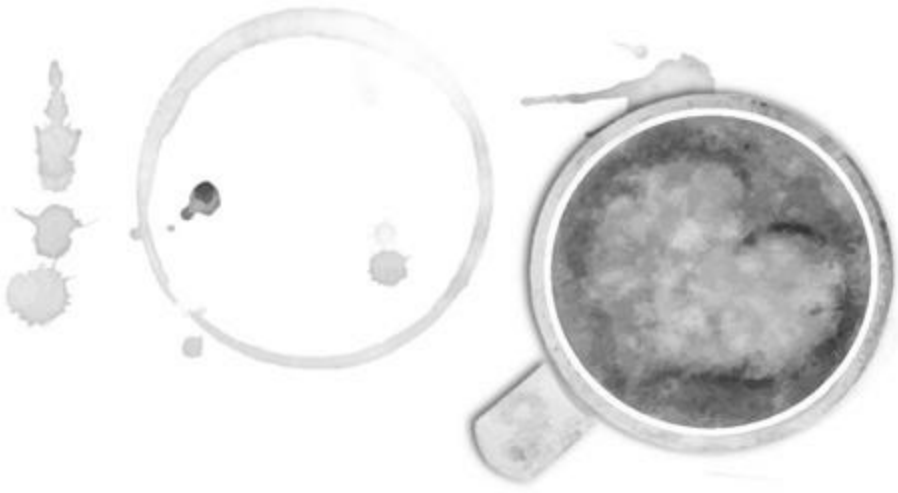
I was scared of these...*real* feelings. Feelings I hadn't had before. Because Paige saw me for me. Not my money. Not my fame. Me.

"...you can see it all and more, tomorrow on *Top of the Morning*."

The droning of the commercial pulled me from my thoughts. Blinking, my brain made its way through the muck of my endless tumultuous internal process. It was then that an immensely stupid and beyond preposterous idea seemingly apparated from thin air.

Grabbing my phone, I dialed my lawyer who I kept on retainer.

This was going to need some careful coordination.



Chapter 32

Paige

Faith, I have no idea why you would think that I'd know where anything was in this damn city. Suburb girl and borderline recluse, remember?" I grumbled into my phone as I dodged far too many people on the street at such an early hour of the morning. Taking a sip from my second coffee of the day, I squinted up at the street signs. I swore I could see all the damn noise in the city. It seemingly vibrated at all times in a warbled hum.

"It's right in Rockefeller Center. There's usually a whole gaggle of people outside at this time of the morning."

"Like I know where that is."

"Radio City Music Hall?"

"I know *of* these places but not where they are in this maze of buildings." Faith was testing my patience. I was only halfway caffeinated to my usual strength. I didn't have nearly enough to successfully navigate a city I'd only been to a handful of times.

The signing yesterday was an incredible success. She wanted to invite me out to celebrate. Given I'm not much of an alcohol drinker, she opted for the one thing that flowed through my veins: Coffee. I was beyond excited for that aspect as New York had some of the most outstanding coffee shops and one sat on practically every street corner. Except for the one coffee shop where I was supposed to meet Faith at.

"Are you even looking down the streets?"

"Yes, of cour-" My eyes glanced down the next block and I saw a horde of people outside a blocked-off area. "Ooh! I see people." I made a sharp turn on my heel and headed down the street. "Is it by the *Top of the Morning* barricades?"

"YES-I mean uh... Yep."

My brow cocked on my forehead. I guess she was as excited about coffee as I was. Considering my coffee from the hotel was halfway gone and now lukewarm, I needed a steaming hot, fresh cup.

Timidly, I wandered down to the gathering crowd huddled around the bold blue and yellow branded barricades. There was a titter throughout the people as they all strained to look at the large television screens and through

the huge window into the studio.

I vaguely remembered walking past the set a few years ago on my first trip to New York. I spent a few extra days being a tourist, after meeting with my publisher for the first time. Unlike then the studio behind the glass was brilliantly lit with a tizzy of activity.

Having never seen a live taping of anything, I stopped at the edge of the crowd to see if maybe someone famous was being interviewed. The crowd looked a lot bigger than just fans of the show. Maybe it was Ewan McGregor or Henry Cavill? Hey, a girl could dream, couldn't she?

They must have been on a commercial break as the speaker system suddenly blasted the voice of one of the hosts. I nearly jumped out of my skin from the intrusion. The crowd started to buzz with squeals and murmurs. The name of the person they introduced was garbled in the crowd noise, but my curiosity was killing me. It had to be someone noteworthy. Faith knew I was close. I'm sure she wouldn't mind if I was a few more minutes late for our coffee date.

"...Thanks for allowing me to be here on such short notice."

I froze.

The noise of the crowd died down just in time for me to hear a voice that struck both fire and ice in my veins of late. Maybe I was hallucinating. I had spent the better part of the night thinking about the man. It could just be my subconscious playing tricks on me.

My shorter stature made it easy for me to maneuver my way through the crowd. But I wasn't above choking a bitch if they got in the way of my mission to make sure that I hadn't heard who I thought I did. Part of me wanted it to be him, and part of me thought I was nuts for having any shred of hope like that. I managed to make my way to the front of the crowd, breathless and with my hair a bit disheveled. That was when my fear (Or was it excitement?) came into full fruition.

Penn.

On Top of the Morning?

My puzzlement lasted for only a second as one of the most famous and critically acclaimed science fiction books in recent times flashed across on the monitor. The author was infamous for being a no-face recluse, like me. I read it years ago and it was incredible. Ironically it was the only science fiction book I'd ever read. It was then that my brain started to put two and two together.

Wait...no.

It couldn't be.

“For those of you just joining us, Christopher Pennington, CEO of Pennington Tech, just admitted to being the ever-elusive author, Austin Jupiter. So, Christopher, it's been over ten years since your book, *In Shadows of Stars*, was published and hit the bestseller list. It also received a flurry of publicity and even won you half a dozen literary awards.”

“Well...” Penn's expression changed on the monitor as he divulged into nervous laughter. “There's a woman out there who, let's just say...got past the barriers I built up, and helped me rediscover the passion...” I cringed as my heart raced faster.

My heart was just getting over the wild flutter of seeing Penn again. On national television, no less. Now I was dealing with the realization that he was actually an extremely decorated and talented published author. The most elusive enigma of a published author, ever.

Me and about a billion other people.

I suddenly understood why Penn pushed me so hard to go on a book tour. To not be ashamed of who I was. Because it was something he always wanted to be recognized for. To be remembered for.

Penn envied me.

I hoped Penn wasn't about to unleash the torrid details of our affair on *live, morning television*.

“...My passion, for writing.” I let out a sigh of relief. *Where was he going with this?* “She made me realize that I shouldn't be ashamed of being a writer. That...” Penn's eyes lifted and somehow found mine across the studio and amongst the crowd. I felt a complex mix of nerves and heat as he continued. His gaze held me tight with its intensity. “...someone could tolerate me as my true self...and yet, through it all, I...*fell in love with her*. I'm in love with author Bridget Paige.”

I didn't register the long-forgotten coffee cup leaving my hand until it hit the sidewalk and splattered the gossiping onlookers. The people around me started a commotion but I was still in complete shock.

Penn...loved me?

Mr. I'll-Never-Settle-Down. He was a playboy billionaire. We didn't talk about what we were to each other. What the future would bring. I did my best to keep my feelings out of it. I didn't want to get hurt while I had some adult fun for once and finally finished the last book in my debut trilogy

thanks to him.

I ignored each flutter of my heart when he said something unexpectedly sweet. I ignored the fact that I still had the Valentine's roses preserved in a vase in my bedroom. I ignored all the hours I'd reflected on all the banter, all the text messages, and every filthy but hot-as-fuck word that came from his mouth.

Not only did he say that he loved me, but he just admitted to the *whole world* who he *really* was. Despite knowing full well about the numerous repercussions.

I just...I just couldn't-

"Hey! Watch what you're doing!"

Blinking, I suddenly realized the mess I made. Swearing, I shoved my hand into my bag and procured a fistful of napkins for those who had been unknowingly in the splash zone.

"I'm so sorry, I-"

"Is there a Bridget Paige out here?"

I froze and looked at Penn. He was beaming and looking sexy as ever. That heavy weight was finally off his shoulders. I'd never seen him this happy. Well except for the time right before I crushed his heart when I told him off before my book tour. But what did his interview have to do with me?

"Uh...I'm Bridget Paige." Like a freshly disciplined student, I timidly raised my hand.

"Oh my god, Bridget Paige!"

"Bridget Paige is here!"

"Look, it's that author lady!"

The chatter started all at once as each person in the crowd slowly turned to look at me. At least I styled my hair and put makeup on today. The last thing I expected was to be recognized by eighty percent of the crowd on a street in New York.

"Come with me." The hulking security guy for the network grabbed my forearm and hastily pulled me inside as the crowd began to descend on me. I didn't like where this was going.

"Uh...am I in trouble?"

"No. The hosts want to talk to you."

Shit.

Live television?!

Oh no no no no no...

I felt like a disobedient toddler who was getting dragged out of the grocery store for punishment that wasn't appropriate for the public. I hadn't mentally prepared myself for an interview. Let alone an interview on a live morning show with millions of viewers at any given time in doctors' waiting rooms and bored housewives' living rooms.

Before I knew it, I bypassed security and was warmly greeted by several studio assistants who manhandled me between pulling off my coat, touching up my hair and makeup, and making sure my outfit was television-worthy. I barely had time to register what the actual fuck was happening. One thing was for certain, I couldn't drop any fucking f-bombs or swear words on live TV.

I swore under my breath. "*Fuckity fucking for fucking fucks sake. Fuck.*" Hopefully, it was all out of my system.

That was until I stepped onto the live set and saw Penn.

He looked as effortlessly handsome as ever. Styled hair, crisp white dress shirt with a navy v-neck sweater over top and grey wash jeans. But what had my knees weak was his beautiful, genuine smile as he rose to greet me.

Fuck.

"Bridget."

I bristled as my pen name slipped breathily from his lips. I wasn't used to him addressing me that way. But god bless him for keeping my true identity intact.

"Christopher." His real name felt weird on my tongue, even though I said it a few times before, just never to his face. He would always be Penn, the handsome, quiet, confident man behind the pages to me.

Despite the curious audience of those in the studio, Penn opened his arms and I immediately slipped into them as if a strong magnet pulled me...*home*.

"Please don't hate me." His whisper tickled against my ear as he held onto me so tight that it took my breath away. "But dammit I've missed you. I've been in agony since the tour. Since you refused to talk to me, I had to resort to drast-"

"Miss Paige! You need to get your mic." Penn pulled away from me reluctantly as the audio tech clipped a mic to my shirt collar and then promptly dropped the receiver box down the back of my shirt. Penn chuckled at my shocked reaction. I swatted his arm.

As the tech adjusted the receiver on the waistband of my jeans, I had a chance to address the conundrum of a man in front of me.

“*Drastic?! More like, extreme! But I-*”

“*Places! We go live in 10...9...*”

The set dresser set up an extra chair out for me, directly next to Penn. But I wasn't done confronting him. I felt like a lot needed to be said before we did a *live* interview.

All I could manage in the next five seconds was a quick gesture. I pointed to him, made a heart with my hands, and then pointed to myself. ‘*You love me?*’ I mouthed. His answer of a grin and enthusiastic nod made my heart sing. I mouthed ‘I love you’ in return. Squeezing my hand, he pulled my knuckles up to his mouth with a kiss. It gave me the strength to face the cameras.

“And we're back! In a twist of fate, we have author Bridget Paige here with us now in the studio to speak with us about her side of this breaking literary love story.” I just so happened to see the playback monitor as it showed the entire embarrassing moment where I dropped my coffee as they zoomed in on my dumbstruck face.

“Welcome, Bridget! So, I'm assuming from your reaction that you had no idea Christopher had feelings?”

“I-well-uh... Nope.” *God, this was going to be torture.* I was so close to hyperventilating on live television. It was then that I felt a tight squeeze on my hand and glanced at Penn. With a secret smile, he let me know that he had my back.

That he'd always have my back.

“Technically...we uh...kept our relationship as...*professional* as possible.” Penn cut in saving me from another question until I mentally recovered from the first one. “Neither of us was looking for love. But after one conversation with her, I was smitten. As much as I didn't want to admit it.”

My head whipped to Penn. “Just *one?!?*”

Shit.

I forgot this was a live TV interview.

“I'm sure the audience is ready for me to ask this next question. Bridget, do you feel the same way?”

The last few weeks had been torture. It hurt so much to keep my fury towards him at the forefront. What I failed to realize in my overwhelming

anxiety and stubbornness, was that Penn believed in me. He believed in me and wanted to prove it so much that he pulled this stunt and sponsored my book tour. He cared about me so much that he announced to the world who he really was and that I was the reason why he didn't feel the need to hide anymore.

Because I believed in him in return.

I never felt more confident to answer a question in my entire life.

“Absolutely,” I said with a smile as I stared at Penn for a moment before turning back to the host. I was going to make this interview my bitch. “I suppose we both felt that we were in a safe enough place to be the truest version of ourselves. And in the end...we found our match.”

Penn's hand gave me a hearty squeeze and didn't stop. “I couldn't have said it better myself.”



My ears were still ringing from Faith’s initial scream-fest in my ear after the interview.

“Oh my god that was literally magical! When Penn called me last night, I was so fucking thrilled to help him out. You’re an internet sensation right now! Every social media outlet is obsessing over you two.”

“R-Really...?” I was trying so hard to pay attention to Faith as she gushed over my interview. “Wait, you knew about this?!”

“Yes! Well, just the fact that he had something big to say to you and he would be on *Top of the Morning*. Look, I know your new book just released yesterday and your next few stops have been long sold out, but I have a

feeling that your online sales are now going to be astronomical!”

I bit my lower lip to keep myself from moaning into the phone. “Uh... cool...”

“Shit, I’m sorry! You’re probably busy entertaining all your new fans from the talk show. Text me when you have a free moment! I’ll see you tomorrow!”

“Yeah...” The words fell from my lips as I hung up the phone and dropped it. I didn’t give a shit where it landed. All I could focus on was the way Penn was ripping my clothes off as his mouth laid siege to every inch of skin he bared.

“Have I told you that I loved you yet?” Unhooking my bra, I let out a sigh of relief.

“Just about every minute since we made our escape from the studio...” I mumbled against his mouth with a grin as his hands cupped my breasts. As soon as we got the all-clear after the interview, Penn’s window-tinted SUV rolled up on a side street to the studio and we dashed inside. With every city block and every kiss, Penn had to get almost an entire year’s worth of endearments out of his system.

I thought we were going to have sex in the backseat of his car. Which was going on my Sex Bucket List for later. Penn scrambled my brains at the moment, and I couldn’t think straight. All I knew was that it felt like all was right with the universe now that there were no more secrets or animosity between us.

“And I will never stop.” He gave me one more lingering kiss before something dangerous flashed in his gaze. “As for now...I plan on making love to every one of your *holes* before I take you out to the fanciest fucking New York City dinner to celebrate your big release. *Releases.*” He corrected with a naughty grin as knelt in front of me. “Then I’ll spend the rest of your book tour by your side supporting and cheering for you. And then again...for every damn second of the rest of your life.”



Epilogue

Paige

Two years later...

I couldn't believe it.

Every day I woke up in a literal dream.

The last few years had been a whirlwind. But it was a whirlwind of such an incredible magnitude. This morning was no different. I woke up in the very sexy, toned arms of the man I loved and who, in turn, loved me back and worshiped the ground I walked on.

Immediately after the TV interview, Penn and I moved in together. Not only did he accommodate me in every way possible in his space, but he also bought a cute cottage on the shores of my favorite beach with a private plane for any time I wanted to get away from the big city. He knew I made the sacrifice to move from North Carolina to join him in New York. He needed to be close to the office and his business. I was flexible enough to work anywhere.

With me by his side, Penn finally came clean to his parents. Their unexpected reaction floored him to no end. They were so proud of him. After a heart-to-heart conversation, his father finally realized that the tech company was *his* dream. It wasn't fair to Penn to saddle him with the responsibility. So, two days a week, Mr. Pennington was the CEO while Penn used that time to concentrate on his writing. And well...spend time with me. His mother was thrilled because apparently, his father was going stir crazy in retirement. Oh, and they adored me as much as I them.

Now that he had all that extra time, and no longer carried the stress of his secret, Penn was a changed man. With his extra time, he finished up and released the next two books in his coveted sci-fi series. The sheer influx of preorders broke a few of the booksellers' websites. It was safe to say that even though there had been a long time between books, his fans came out in spades to support him. He was currently in talks with one of the streaming services to turn his books into a multi-season series.

Life couldn't be better.

Despite yet another perfect morning waking up in our New York

penthouse, I couldn't help but pace in the same break room where I started my book signing journey at the city's biggest bookstore. Today was the release of my newest book and New York was the first stop of the book tour.

Book tours were now something I enjoyed and even looked forward to doing after every book I finished. I got to connect with my fans, see their smiling and grateful faces, and receive feedback on my work. Anxiety attacks about them were now few and far between.

Since my debut trilogy, I'd written two more books: One was the start of the prequel trilogy for the same series, and the other...well...

"Do you need a centering sensory hug, Pages?" I stopped my fretting and glanced up at my boyfriend. He watched me with love and concern in those gorgeous blue eyes. With my pet name, I smiled and sighed. The man had a flawless record for calming me down.

"I think you already know the answer..." Before I even finished with my sentence, Penn had me all wrapped up in a hell of a bear hug. Breathing in his fresh musk, I felt myself relax under his grounding touch.

"You'll do great. You have nothing to worry about. And I'll be sitting right next to you the whole time."

So maybe my nerves were more of excitement than anxiety. Today's kick-off was for my newest book.

A book that I wrote with Penn.

It was a sci-fi fantasy book that blended our two literary worlds with a heavy dose of heat and romance. Which was something we both now had plenty of *expertise* in. The day we dropped the book announcement, sheer chaos was unleashed. Our behind the pages romance was still talked about two years after the beyond-awkward television interview where Penn publicly professed his love for me. As much as I hated being put on the spot like that, it was an unexpectedly romantic gesture. A public love letter. Words of endearment passed between Juliet on the balcony and Romeo in the roses down below. Except with a lot less drama and death.

"Ms. Paige, Mr. Pennington? We're ready for you."

Penn gave me one last squeeze and a sweet kiss before his hand clutched onto mine. Sucking in a breath, I followed him out into the noise of the bookstore. As soon as we were through the door and past the bookshelves in the back, the crowd broke into a roar. There were flashes of cameras. I felt a bit frozen on the spot from all the overstimulation all at once.

Feeling me tense next to him, Penn wrapped his arm around my

shoulders and pulled me in tight. While it made me relax a bit, it sent a resounding chorus of ‘Aww’ through the crowd. Thank goodness the staff had crowd control roping around the table. It gave us a wide enough berth to stand in front of the table to greet the fans. They had a maze of guests roped off through the store and straight out to the door. From what I could see through the big storefront windows, the line went clear around the side of the store.

As the crowd had their commotion, I surveyed our signing setup. There were two huge bouquets of the most beautiful purple roses that matched our cover art. I caught Faith’s eye as she arranged our favorite pens on the table. She gave me a big grin and a wave. I pointed to the two arrangements with a question on my face and she responded by pointing squarely at Penn.

“Penn!” I leaned up and whisper-yelled into his ear.

“What?”

“The flowers? They’re from you?”

“Of course. You deserve to be celebrated.” He brushed a tender kiss against my temple, and I melted.

“Well...I didn’t get you anything for our big day.” I frowned. “Dinner, on me tonight?”

“If you insist. Although...I was thinking...dessert *on* you would be sweeter.” The blush hit my face in an instant. Despite my fluster, it did sound like one hell of a way to celebrate our mutual success. I squeezed his ass in a tease of a reply. Penn shot me a wink as he stepped forward to address the crowd.

“Thank you everyone for coming! Your support and love for our work has been incredible and we couldn’t have done this without you.” The crowd cheered and clapped while I stood mesmerized by my amazing man who could enchant a room full of people so easily. “But if it wasn’t for this one person, I wouldn’t be standing here today doing what I love...” Penn turned to me with adoration in his eyes. It caught me off guard. “With the woman I love.” Another rosy tint hit my cheeks as the crowd’s attention went from Penn to me.

He held my gaze as if I was the only person in the room. My heart felt like it was going to flutter through my ribcage. This was seriously the best fucking day ever. I couldn’t see how it could get any better.

“Paige?” His voice dropped to a level only I could hear as he reached out to grasp onto my hand once more.

“Hmm?” I was too caught up in his dreamy gaze to give him a proper response.

And I certainly couldn't speak as I watched him...

Drop to one knee.

“You've given me the power and encouragement to write my own life. To keep chasing after my dreams.” I was too shocked to move. Before my very eyes, a ruby red velvet square ring box with gold trim appeared with an adoring and hopeful Penn gazing up at me behind it. “And you're the last dream I want to chase.” His hand left mine so he could carefully pry the ring box open. “*Will you marry me?*”

Inside the box was a diamond ring that could have blinded the entire front row. But the twinkle in Penn's eyes far surpassed it.

I was shaking at this point. The whole room was dead silent. Except for the roar of blood in my ears. Of all the stuff in my life that I had been anxious or unsure about, this was the one thing I didn't need to mull or fret over. The answer had been in my heart all along.

All I could do was give him a vigorous nod as rare tears tumbled down my cheeks.

The room exploded in a jumble of screams, clapping, whistles, and cheers. My usually confident man trembled as he fished the platinum ring out of the box. With the tender brush of a kiss on the back of my hand, the ring found its rightful place. Penn didn't hesitate a moment longer as he pulled me into a fierce kiss that sucked the oxygen clear out of my lungs

Books By This Author

[The Gift Across the Street](#)

Needing to relocate for her job as a graphic designer, Clara finds herself alone for her first holiday in her new home. With Christmas fast approaching, she wants to make it as memorable as possible. Including the new-to-her tradition of a live Christmas Tree.

Clara is determined to remove the stuck Christmas tree from the top of her car by herself. Coming to her rescue is the handsome (and very shirtless) neighbor, Nic. Nic is sweet, funny, and handsome as hell, even if he seems to be something of a recluse.

Realizing she's new in town, Nic shows Clara just how charming her new neighborhood really is. Sparks fly, but how long will it take them to realize that the greatest gift was across the street all along?

Books By This Author

[Long Lost Valentine](#)

The hottest guy from high school, Tobias, just friended Rose on social media. It's been seven years since they graduated and she has always wondered about the "boy that got away". While out drinking with friends for her birthday, Rose gets dared to send some racy messages to Tobias. One steamy thing leads to another and the morning after leaves Rose embarrassed about what she admitted over the chat. Her only option is to ghost Tobias and hope that he never speaks to her again.

Except Tobias fell hard for Rose that night. He goes out of his way to learn everything about the quiet girl from high school, including recruiting Rose's friends to help woo her. Despite Tobias's dedication to romancing Rose, is it too late for Rose to see that she was right and Tobias was the one all along?

Books By This Author

[Romancing the Pages](#)

Mari Quay is a bestselling author who has one weakness:

Romance.

Her literary agent challenges her to write for her fans and keep up with the wildly trending romance genre. But there's just one problem.

Mari has never been in love.

Mari's best friend owns a bakery by the shore in Avalon, NJ. She offers a change of scenery to the struggling writer in exchange for summer help. That's where Mari meets the unusual town librarian, Ben McGregor.

On a drunken night out, Mari admits to Ben her predicament. He offers a unique proposal: Dating for scientific research. The two spend the summer figuring the ins and outs of romance and all the awkward opportunities that go with it so Mari can write her book.

By the time the summer is over, will Mari have her next bestseller?
Or will she perhaps find her forever muse?

Books By This Author

[Bed...& Breakfast](#)

Chloe Grant is only days away from her wedding to her high school sweetheart, Jeff Cameron. But with a last-minute RSVP, her fairy tale life-to-be is shattered. The shocking RSVP reveals that Jeff, the only man she's ever been with, has been cheating on her.

Angela Hankin, Chloe's best friend and would-be maid-of-honor, convinces her to get away from the chaos. Escaping the fallout of a failed wedding and relationship, the two friends go on Chloe's non-refundable honeymoon to Scotland.

Instead of being able to forget the past, the shadows of what her ex-fiancée did continue to haunt her. That is until the bed and breakfast owner's son, Alec Mackenzie, sets his sights on her. But the handsome and bewildering equivalent of a Scottish Casanova, is seemingly the same kind of man that Chloe is trying to run away from.

Can Chloe see past Alec's supposed playboy ways to the sensitive and passionate man with a sad past hiding within? Or will she go running back to the only man she's ever known and loved to make amends?

Books By This Author

[Spellbound in the Stacks](#)

Faelene Carey owns Ink & Parchment, a bookstore in the small New England town of Thistleton. Not only is she a successful businesswoman, she's secretly a witch who can transform into a cat. It's not that she minds it, there's just one problem. She must find true love before the 13th year after her first transformation or else be cursed to spend the rest of her life as a cat.

Subjecting herself to the hell of dating apps and blind dates, Faelene is stuck in a hopeless tailspin toward tongue baths and a diet of mice.

Thistleton firefighter Aidan Kennedy, stops by Faelene's bookstore like clockwork. She's had a crush on him since the first time he walked through her door. He's polite and gorgeous but incredibly stoic. Try as she might, Faelene can't seem to break through Aidan's tough exterior.

Aidan is holding onto his own secrets. It isn't until he rescues Faelene in cat form from a tree, that she begins to understand what makes him tick. With the covertly discovered information of Aidan's mutual crush, she hatches a daring scheme involving both her human and cat forms in order to get him to open up.

With Aidan's secrets unlocked can Faelene make a move in time to see if he's her true love? Or will she be doomed to be a cat forever?

About the Author



K. Iwancio has been an interior designer, graphic designer, artist, teacher, volunteer, and now an independently published author. She has visited far-off planets, been on movie sets, and even checked some things off her Bucket List. One of her secret talents is her vast knowledge of Star Wars trivia. She lives in South Central Pennsylvania.

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