



THE NEW YORK
BOOK SEVEN
NIGHTHAWKS
- SERIES -

CHANGE OF POSSESSION

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR
FIONA DAVENPORT

CHANGE OF POSSESSION

FIONA DAVENPORT

Copyright © 2023 by Fiona Davenport

Cover designed by Elle Christensen

Edited by Jenny Sims (Editing4Indies)

All rights reserved.

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

 Created with Vellum

CONTENTS

Change of Possession

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

Chapter 11

Chapter 12

Chapter 13

Epilogue

Epilogue

About the Author

CHANGE OF POSSESSION

Rigby Hunt thought he found the woman who was meant for him in Cleo Fox. But then the grumpy punter saw her on a date with another man and figured he had it all wrong.

Cleo couldn't figure out why Rigby gave her the cold shoulder...until she saw how something innocent had been spun by the media. Now she just had to get him to listen to the truth.

I pulled the hood of my sweatshirt up as I stepped outside of my building into the cool November air. After returning home from an away game this afternoon and dealing with team business the rest of the day, I hadn't had a chance to put in a grocery delivery order. So when I got back to my penthouse, I was starving and had nothing to eat.

In the mood for home cooking, I decided to run to the store and grab the ingredients for a healthy chicken stir-fry.

Keeping my head down, I jogged the block to Butler's Grocery, mindful that the paparazzi sometimes hung around right after a big win. Not that they took an interest in me very often. Despite being a punter for the wildly popular New York Nighthawks, I wasn't what people would call "personable." *Is it my fault most people annoy me?*

As I strolled through the automated double doors, I uncovered my head and lifted my chin at George, the manager, who returned my greeting with a wave. "Nice win," he called in a thick British accent. Then he smirked and winked. "I guess you walked into the right locker room this time," he quipped, referring to a T-shirt he'd bought for me last Christmas that said, "Kickers: Soccer players that walked into the wrong locker room."

Grinning, I rolled my eyes and snarked, "I'd crush it in either locker room."

I'd first visited the store the day I moved into my apartment, which I bought early in my first year with the Nighthawks. They'd given me a four-season contract, then a year ago, they signed me for another six when the first was about to expire. So I'd been coming to this store for over half a decade.

George, his wife, and kids had become like family to me. His daughter had even lived with my parents in Wisconsin during her first year of college.

He laughed and tipped an imaginary hat. “Touché.”

I grabbed a cart and ambled over to the dairy aisle to grab a gallon of milk before making my way to the produce. I’d put in a full order of groceries later, but for now, I just needed the stuff for dinner and some staples.

When my basket was full, I turned with the intent to head to the register, but I was stopped in my tracks by the sexiest ass I’d ever seen.

The woman was bent over, studying the products on the bottom shelf. I admired the view, and to my surprise, the sight of that heart-shaped ass made my pants fit tighter. It was a foreign reaction because I hadn’t been interested in a woman in a long time. And that had suited me just fine since my focus was on my career.

She brushed a waterfall of bright-pink hair back over her shoulder when she stood. It fell in waves to the small of her back, and I pictured wrapping it around my fist as I pumped into her from behind.

I shook my head, trying to clear away the fog of lust clouding my mind. Now was not the time to think about sex. I’d barely managed to take control of my thoughts when she turned around, and my imagination went wild again.

Her long, pink bangs were swept to the side and tucked behind her ear, revealing striking green eyes surrounded by thick, dark lashes. A subtle sprinkling of freckles dotted the bridge of her nose and cheeks, and her plump lips made my mouth water at the thought of tasting them.

My eyes continued to travel south, taking in a lavender sweater that hugged her high, round tits that would spill out of my palms. The bottom sat just above the waistline of her pants, giving me a tantalizing glimpse of her smooth skin and cute belly button. Her jeans were molded to her curvy hips and endless legs, prompting thoughts about what they would feel like wrapped around me.

I was broken out of my stupor when she crossed the aisle and went up on her tiptoes, stretching her arm up to a high shelf she couldn’t reach.

A grin split my face as I recognized the opportunity for what it was and quickly sauntered over to her. “Hi,” I murmured.

I stifled a laugh when she jumped and whirled around, dropping her head back to look up at me. At six foot, three inches, I towered over her smaller

frame, and I found that it made me feel protective of her. Although I suspected her body would fit perfectly against mine.

I put on my most charming smile, and her green eyes darted to my lips before meeting my gaze again. A pretty pink blush dusted her cheeks, and her lips curled up. “Um...hi.”

“Which one are you going for?”

“The vanilla extract,” she mumbled, seemingly a little dazed. I silently cheered because she appeared to be as affected by me as I was by her.

I plucked the box she requested off the top shelf and handed it to her. When she took it, I held on just long enough to ensure our fingers brushed together. Electricity sparked between us, and her blush deepened as her eyes widened.

“Thank you.”

“Glad I could help,” I replied with a wink.

She laughed ruefully and gestured to the shelving. “I never had this much trouble growing up, but everything in New York gets taller instead of wider.”

I cocked my head to the side and tried to place her subtle accent. “Where are you from?”

“Illinois.”

I smiled and crossed my arms over my chest. “What a coincidence. I happen to be from Wisconsin. We’re basically neighbors. And neighbors should know each other’s names.” I held out my hand but turned it palm up rather than the traditional offer of a handshake. “Rigby Hunt.”

She placed her small, soft hand in mine, and another frisson of electricity shot up my arm and down my body, straight to my dick. My fingers closed around hers, and I contemplated how to prolong our time together so I didn’t have to let go.

“I’m Cleo Fox,” she told me, glancing down at our joined hands.

To my delight, she didn’t try to pull back, and I gave her a lopsided grin. “It’s nice to meet you, neighbor.”

Cleo giggled, her eyes twinkling as she bobbed her head up and down once. “Ditto.”

I didn’t want to press my luck, so I reluctantly loosened my hold and gently dropped her hand. When hesitancy flashed across her beautiful face, I fought the urge to grab her hand again and pull her against my body.

“Did you just move to the neighborhood?” I asked, trying to distract myself while learning more about her.

Cleo shook her head—then nodded before laughing. “I mean, I didn’t just move into the neighborhood, but I just moved to New York in the fall.”

She gestured in a random direction and added, “I’m a student at Tisch. I live in the dorms there, but a friend of mine is only two blocks from here. I’m visiting her for the night, and we decided we needed cookies.”

I chuckled before turning my lips down into a fake pout that made her giggle. “Damn, I was hoping to run into you more often.”

Cleo raised an eyebrow and cocked her head to the side. “There are many ways to run into people. Like say, at a specific date, time, and place.”

I laughed again, surprised at how thoroughly I enjoyed her company. Normally, the only women I was comfortable around were my sister and my teammates’ wives, who were like family. Not that I spent much time around anyone...being surrounded by too many people tended to make me irritable.

Plus, most of the women I’d met who looked like Cleo were as fake as all the body parts they’d had nipped and tucked in order to be that way.

However, Cleo was a mesmerizing mixture of beautiful, sweet, sassy, and fun.

“You have a point, baby.” I tapped my chin in fake contemplation. “Why don’t you give me your number, and we can plan to run into each other again?”

Cleo beamed at me and nodded. “I’d love that.”

I took my cell out of my pocket and handed it to her so she could enter her information into my contacts.

“I’ll call you,” I said softly as I took the device back and gave her hand a gentle squeeze.

Cleo blushed again and nodded. “I hope so,” she murmured before turning to walk away.

It hit me right then that not only hadn’t she fawned all over me, but she also hadn’t made a single reference to my career or who I was.

Curious, I called out, “Are you a fan of football?”

Cleo halted and pivoted around, her lips forming a smirk. “I’ve been a Nighthawks fan all my life. My dad is originally from Long Island.”

My brow rose to my hairline. “So you know who I am?”

Cleo grinned. “Of course, you’re my new neighbor.”

She spun around, and I dropped my head back to laugh before admiring her swaying hips and sexy ass as she sauntered down the aisle.

After a few moments, I hurried to check out, then jogged out front and

down the sidewalk to catch up with her.

“I know you’re a New Yorker now and all,” I teased, “but I’m still not going to let you walk back by yourself this late at night.”

Cleo ducked her head, then looked up at me with color blooming on her cheeks and a pretty smile curving her lips. “Thank you.”

“Any time.” And I meant it.

After making sure she arrived at her friend’s apartment building safely, I waited until she was inside before making the trek back to my place. This time, as I walked, I was oblivious to the cold because my body was running extremely hot. Once I was home and had put everything away, I hopped into an ice-cold shower.

The arctic conditions did the trick...mostly...so I got out and dried off, then donned a pair of boxers. As I padded out to my kitchen, I debated how early I could call Cleo without seeming too eager. Except I didn’t give a fuck about appearing overly interested in her, so I decided I would call first thing in the morning and make a date for that night.

I had just climbed into bed when my cell phone rang, and I glanced over, hope rising in my chest until I remembered that I hadn’t given Cleo my number.

It was my baby sister’s face flashing on the screen though, so I hit accept and put the phone on speaker.

“What’s up, Nat?”

“Soooo...” Natalie stopped and sighed. I knew her well enough to recognize she was about to ask me for a favor I wouldn’t be happy about.

“Raymond canceled on me.”

I flopped back onto my pillows and rolled my eyes but held in my grumble of disgust at the name of her co-star.

Natalie was an actress and had just wrapped up acting in and producing a miniseries in London before returning to New York to star in the hottest musical on Broadway. Raymond was a pompous ass and had nearly driven her to quit. However, she was a professional and refused to let him ruin her career. Unfortunately, they shared an agent who frequently booked them at the same events, then talked them into attending together to keep them in the tabloids with rumors about their “relationship.”

In this case, however, Natalie and her show had been nominated, and she would also present an award. I wasn’t surprised to hear that her ego-driven, narcissistic co-star had backed out on attending with her. All the limelight

would be on his date.

“Please come with me, Rigby,” she begged. “I can’t go alone. If they see him out with another starlet, and I’m at the award ceremony alone, I’ll have to deal with all of the bullshit tabloids saying I’m heartbroken over him and blah, blah, blah.”

I hated celebrity bullshit, and I rarely used the perks that came with being a famous football player. I preferred not to be in the spotlight unless I was on the field.

And I didn’t like most people—which would be harder to hide if I was under the microscope of the press.

I would do anything for my little sister, though, so I swallowed my growl of frustration and grumbled, “Fine.”

Natalie squealed happily, and I pulled the phone away from my ear to keep my eardrum from bursting. “Thank you! Thank you! I owe you, big time!”

“Yes, you do,” I muttered. “And I’m going to collect.”

She laughed, knowing that my payment was usually in the form of home-cooked meals. “You have a tux fitting at nine tomorrow morning. Then we’ll go to the pre-luncheon and a press conference before heading to the award ceremony. We have to be there early enough to walk the red carpet before I’m briefed on the award I’ll present.”

Fuck. That meant my entire day was being hijacked. I couldn’t take Cleo out, and I had a late practice the following afternoon. Our date would have to wait until later in the week, which made me even grouchier.

“You’re going to have to suck it up and pretend not to be such a grump,” Natalie warned.

“No promises, sis,” I grunted. “Just be glad I’m agreeing to go at all.”

“I’ll take it!” she chirped. “Love you. See you at the fitting tomorrow.”

“Love you, too,” I murmured before hanging up. I put my hands behind my head and stared up at the ceiling.

At least the next couple of days would be busy. I hoped it would help keep my mind off the woman who was suddenly all I could think about. Until I could do something about it anyway.

Going to college in New York City presented tons of amazing opportunities for majors in drama and design. Not only was the Tisch School of the Arts one of the top arts programs in the country, but it also provided some incredible chances to network with people in the industry.

Being a seat filler was another way for me to network, and I loved attending the award ceremonies like the one I was going to tonight. The International Emmy Awards were a huge deal, recognizing the best television programs initially produced and aired outside the United States. There were fifteen categories, and the nominees were from over twenty countries.

I was so excited to experience the event from the audience, even with all the standing around I needed to do before the ceremony began. I arrived hours ago with my hair and makeup done, and dressed in a black ball gown as directed. I waited in line after line and was finally shown into the banquet hall only fifteen minutes before the ceremony began.

The woman in charge of the seat fillers gripped my elbow and led me toward the front of the ballroom. Her voice was low as she informed me, “See that empty seat? You’ll be there.”

Having been instructed multiple times to be as quiet as possible, I simply nodded to let her know I heard her. When she released my elbow, I started to make my way toward the table she’d pointed out. But my steps slowed as I neared the empty seat. I’d done the seat filler gig before, but the closest I’d been assigned to a major celebrity had been up a row and several seats down. This time, Gustavo Duarte was sprawled in the chair next to where I’d been directed to sit.

The Brazilian star had played a major role on a wildly popular telenovela for the past five years. There had been a ton of media coverage about who would attend the ceremony with him because he had recently ended a long-term relationship and his show was up for the Best Telenovela award again this year. Since the woman on his other side was old enough to be his mother, I assumed the empty spot was his current girlfriend's, and I would only be there until she arrived.

Determined not to fangirl too much, I flashed him a small smile as I sat down. With his dark hair and eyes, square jawline, and athletic build, Gustavo Duarte was more attractive in person than on-screen...but he did nothing for me. The only man who I felt that magnetic pull toward still hadn't called me.

Rigby Hunt had been on my mind ever since we met at the store yesterday. Although I had watched more Nighthawks games with my dad than I could count, it took me a minute to recognize him since I was too busy drooling over the tattoo on his veiny forearm. Then I had to properly appreciate his broad chest, neck tattoo, five o'clock shadow, plush lips, blue eyes, and dark hair. And how freaking tall he was.

It wasn't until I had finished checking him out and got a good look at his face that I realized the guy I'd been ogling was the punter for the Nighthawks. When he'd offered to help me and then struck up a conversation, I almost fell over from shock since Rigby had a reputation for being a grump who rarely spoke to fans. Then he'd been all flirty, asked for my number, and walked me back to Meredith's apartment. I thought for sure he'd call or text me today. But there wasn't a single missed call or message on my phone any time I'd checked, which was a lot more often than I should have.

My thoughts were so focused on Rigby that I didn't notice Gustavo had leaned forward until he whispered, "I hope you don't mind staying in the same seat for the duration of the ceremony, *linda*."

I turned my head and blinked a few times, trying to make sense of what he just said. "The whole event?"

"*Sim*." He nodded with a shrug. "I cannot be seen attending by myself, so I asked for a beautiful companion to stop questions from the media."

"What about your date?" I wanted to snatch the words back as soon as I asked the question. Seat fillers were supposed to be seen and not heard, and digging into the personal life of one of the nominees was definitely against

the rules.

Luckily, Gustavo didn't seem to mind. "We had an argument, and Beatriz was still angry when it was time to come. She is...how do you say it? *Impulsiva.*"

I grimaced, thinking about how awful it must be for all of your romantic relationships to play out for the entire world to see. "I'm sorry to hear that. Maybe she'll arrive just a little late?"

He shook his head. "*Não*, she is still in Rio. She called while I was on the plane to the States and broke up with me because I left without her."

"Ouch." Thinking about the articles I'd read that tossed out names of who his mysterious girlfriend could be, I grimaced. "Breakups are never fun, but that sounds especially awful considering the circumstances. I'm sorry."

"We weren't together for long." He waved off my concern. "And once her anger dies down, Beatriz will probably want to take back her angry words."

I smoothed down the skirt of my dress. "I hope it all works out when you get home."

"If not, at least she signed the papers not to speak to the press." He gestured toward the man seated two chairs away on his other side. "I am sure my agent will ask you to sign them too, now that I've told you all this. He will not want more stories to come out."

I mimicked turning a key in a lock over my mouth. "No need to worry, my lips are sealed."

"Delightful." Gustavo lifted my hand to brush a kiss against my knuckles, making me blush. "I am a lucky man to have a woman as beautiful as you at my side all evening."

I laughed and shook my head. "I'm the lucky one since I don't have to pop around the room filling empty seats all night. And I'll get to jump up and clap for you when your show wins. Maybe I'll even be caught on camera, and my professors will see me. I'm a student at Tisch, so they'd be impressed for sure."

Gustavo tilted his head to the side. "You act, too?"

"Not even close." I shook my head with a smile. "I stick behind the scenes doing set design."

"Such a shame with how beautiful you are." He patted my hand. "But you are helping me, so I will introduce you to some people who can help with that later."

His offer was incredibly generous. “Thank you.”

The music playing in the background lowered, and the host strode toward the center of the stage. I sat on the edge of my chair, awed by the show they put on for the attendees. It was a seamless production as they moved from one award category to another with entertaining acts between.

I had attended other awards shows as a seat filler, but the experience was different being up this close while surrounded by A-list celebrities. And it got even better when the Best Telenovela category was called.

“The winner is...*Dias de Amor no Rio!*”

I clapped as Gustavo and several others at our table got to their feet and headed toward the stage to accept their award. It was surreal to have spent the past hour chatting with a celebrity who had just received recognition at this level yet again. And it was wild to think that after the ceremony, he would help me network with industry professionals I never would've had the opportunity to meet.

The tux fitting was as boring as I'd expected, and I nearly broke a tooth holding back my desire to tell the prattling man to shut the hell up.

At least the pre-luncheon would have food, I told myself. I forgot that it was a bunch of celebrities who lived on fad diets and kale, though. I was a healthy guy, but that didn't mean I was a fucking rabbit. I needed more than lettuce to sustain me. Instead, I had to nibble on a plate of veggies while I listened to mostly shallow, self-absorbed people waxing on about what they'd done and who they knew.

Luckily, the press conference was catered, and the reporters cared more about sustenance than their waistlines. So while Natalie and her team answered questions, I filled my stomach. It was a good thing, because I probably wouldn't have made it through the rest of the night if I'd been hungry and aggravated.

By the time Natalie and I arrived at the awards ceremony, I was exhausted and reaching the limit of my tolerance for stupid people.

"Would you stop looking like somebody just insulted the Nighthawks and kicked you in the balls?" Natalie whispered, elbowing me in the side.

"Ouch," I mumbled, then mentally grinned when—despite all the cameras—she turned her head to roll her eyes at me before facing forward once more.

They were doing a musical number on the stage, but I barely noticed. My mind replayed my interaction with Cleo—as it had been all day—and I planned on what I would say when I called to make our date.

When the number ended, the host came back to the microphone and introduced the next presenter. The category was Natalie's final nomination—

Best Performance by an Actress. She sat ramrod straight in her seat, and I put my arm around her, giving her a gentle hug to show my support.

Her show had been nominated for Best TV Movie/Miniseries and Best Drama Series, one of which had gone to a show produced by a woman who was supremely less talented and well known for sleeping her way to the top. The other had gone to a show directed by a man rumored to have bought every one of his nominations over the years.

I watched the large screen that zoomed in on the announcer. He made a joke, and the audience was riddled with laughter, causing the cameras to pan around the room.

My breath caught in my throat, and rage exploded inside my chest when I spotted a familiar head of pink hair. Her profile was to the camera and her hair fell forward, forming a curtain that hid her face as she leaned in to speak to the man in the seat beside her—Gustavo Duarte.

They looked intimate and cozy, and I prayed that I was mistaken. But then he grinned and said something that made her throw her head back and laugh. I watched in fury as Cleo smiled brightly at her companion before he bent his head to brush a kiss over her cheek, causing her to blush.

What the fuck?

It took all my strength not to jump out of my seat, run over there, and put my fist through pretty boy's face before I dragged Cleo off to my lair like a fucking caveman.

A heavy blanket of disappointment also settled over me as I realized she was nothing like I'd thought. I would *never* be interested in someone who would cheat. I normally had pretty good judgment about people, and it irritated me that I hadn't once suspected that she wasn't as genuine as she'd seemed.

Clenching my fists so hard my knuckles cracked caught Natalie's attention. She leaned in and whispered, "What's wrong?"

I shook my head and gritted, "Nothing. Just nervous for you."

Natalie's expression turned soft, and she squeezed my arm before returning her gaze to the stage.

Five minutes later, Cleo was momentarily forgotten as I jumped to my feet and clapped like a madman while my sister slowly rose from her seat, her expression dazed. I laughed and caught her elbow, encouraging her to make her way to the aisle and up to the stage.

She accepted her award with humility and grace, but when she returned to

her seat and the cameras were focused on the next nominees, she slapped her hands over her mouth and screamed. I chuckled and hugged her again. “Way to go, baby sis. I’m so proud of you.”

The excitement of her win began to ebb, and unfortunately, my mind returned to the pink-haired beauty. I’d already been miserable enough sitting through this fucking show, but then I spent the rest of the night fuming over my poor judgment and the fact that despite knowing Cleo was with another man, I still wanted her.

When the ceremony ended, I took Natalie’s arm, and we walked up the aisle to the back of the room. Her agent came bustling over and grabbed her hand, dragging her away to talk to “influential people.”

I wandered off to the side and leaned against a wall, crossing my ankles and folding my arms over my chest. Ducking my head down, I kept my eyes on the ground. My body language clearly said “fuck off” so nobody would bother me while I waited for my sister to finish.

“Rigby?”

My whole body froze at the sound of the sweet, seductive voice I hadn’t been able to eradicate from my mind. I silently shouted at my cock to stand down, but the traitor didn’t give a shit about what my mind wanted.

Slowly, my eyes located a pair of silver shoes and then traveled up a floor-length, satiny black gown, pausing on the strapless top that showed off more cleavage than I was happy about until they reached sparkling green eyes.

Cleo smiled brightly and took a step closer, only to halt when she clocked the unwelcome expression on my face.

“Hi, neighbor...” she said softly, with a hopeful smile.

My eyes narrowed, and I canted my head to the side. “Neighbor?”

Cleo looked confused for a moment, then her shoulders drooped, and her expression turned sad. “You don’t remember me?”

I’d never been dishonest, and despite how angry I was, I wouldn’t lie to her. “I remember you, Cleo, but I obviously was mistaken about being neighbors. I’d like to think that neighbors would be honest with each other.”

She blinked a few times, her expression puzzled, as if trying to understand my meaning. It pricked my temper even further that she was a good enough actress to make it seem as though she had no idea what I was talking about.

“Cleo,” a masculine voice called, and we both turned our attention to the

Brazilian actor who was dangerously close to a broken jaw. I curled my fingers into my palms and tucked my arms tighter against my body to keep from giving in to temptation.

He walked over and put a hand on Cleo's arm, giving me a perfunctory nod before turning all of his attention to her. "Come. I have people to introduce you to."

I didn't wait for her response to the handsome star. I pushed off the wall and dropped my hands to my sides. "Good night," I growled before stalking off, my eyes darting around the room until I spotted my sister's dark curls and purple dress.

She stood with her agent, a young couple, and two of the male actors from her show. As I approached, their discussion faded and Natalie glanced at me, her mouth curling down into a frown. "Do you think you could tone down the badass glare and try to appear at least a little pleasant?" she sighed.

It was as though she didn't know me at all...

"Rigby Hunt?" I glanced at the young couple, and my brow furrowed at the excited expression on the man's face. "I'm a huge fan."

I grunted in acknowledgment, then focused on my sister. "Are you ready?"

Natalie rolled her eyes and smiled apologetically at the group. "I'm terribly sorry for my brother. He's kind of a grouch when..." She trailed off, then shrugged. "Well, always."

Laughter tittered through the cluster, and I ran a frustrated hand through my hair. "I'll wait for you outside."

"It's freezing!" Natalie's agent exclaimed as she set her hand on my arm. I shook it off, tossing her a warning glance.

Whenever I bumped into her with Natalie, she made it very clear that she was available, and I always did my best to dissuade her. However, I didn't want to ruin her relationship with my sister, so I hadn't outright told her to back the fuck off. Seeing as how I was already at the limit of my bullshit meter, her action pushed me over the line.

"*Not interested,*" I ground out through clenched teeth. "Not now, not ever. So have some self-respect and stop fucking throwing yourself at me." Then I yanked my arm away and stomped out the door into the cold air.

Nice going, Hunt. Fuck. Natalie was going to be pissed.

Unfortunately, when I stepped out into the cold night, the wind whipping around me and sinking into my bones did nothing to put out the fire burning

furiously inside me.

Last night turned out to be equal parts amazing and awful. Gustavo had followed through on his promise and introduced me to several industry bigwigs, including the production manager who oversaw the below-the-line crew for his show. He even told his agent that he should meet with me...and not just so that I would sign a nondisclosure agreement about anything personal the celebrity had shared with me. Networking with a big-time agent while I was still doing my undergraduate studies would be a major coup.

But even with as amazing as all of that was, I was devastated by Rigby's reaction when I tried to say hello to him. I had no idea what he meant when he'd said he was wrong about us being neighbors, or being dishonest, and I wasn't sure that I'd ever be able to find out because he hadn't given me his phone number. Judging by the iciness in his blue gaze and his blank face, I didn't expect he would ever call me.

It was hard for me to regret walking away with Gustavo when Rigby had been icing me out, but I did wish that his timing had been a little better. Maybe then, I could have gotten some answers from Rigby and wouldn't have to wonder what the heck changed between meeting him in the grocery store last night and the awards ceremony today.

Instead of celebrating all the connections I made, I spent the night tossing and turning while racking my brain about what possibly could have gone wrong with Rigby. I still hadn't figured it out when I crawled out of bed in the morning, bleary-eyed and exhausted from lack of sleep. Stumbling into the bathroom, I was on autopilot as I went through my morning routine. It was a good thing I didn't have a test today because I wasn't sure I'd even be

able to make it through my set and film drawing lecture, and it was my favorite class this semester. Normally, I looked forward to whatever I would learn during class, but I just wanted to crawl back in bed and pull the blankets over my head so I could pretend Rigby hadn't blown me off last night.

As I finished getting dressed, my cell phone rang. Squinting at the screen, I saw that Meredith was calling and answered, "Hey."

"You sound exhausted."

I heaved a deep sigh. "Yeah, because I am."

"Mm-hmm, I'm sure you are after last night."

Meredith had suggested I apply for the seat filler gig, and she knew firsthand how tiring those long days could be. Since I wasn't ready to talk about what had happened with Rigby, I didn't explain that my tiredness wasn't just from all the standing around I'd done yesterday leading up to the awards ceremony. I'd fill her in on everything later once I got over the disappointment that nothing would develop between Rigby and me even though the chemistry between us was explosive. "And I barely got any sleep."

"I was hoping it was something like that. Girl, I don't know what you're doing differently lately, but you need to fill me in on your secret."

My brows drew together as I tilted my head to the side. "What are you talking about?"

"Oh, sure." Her laughter drifted through the line. "Play dumb so you don't have to share your secret with your best friend in all of New York City."

My tired mind was searching for an explanation for her reply, but it confused me more. "No, really. I have no idea what you mean."

"Seriously? Did whatever you got up to with the Brazilian hottie last night kill too many brain cells?" she teased.

"Brazilian hottie?" I echoed softly, my stomach starting to knot as a sneaking suspicion finally dawned.

"Gustavo Duarte is ridiculously hot and so is the football player you met at the grocery store. Where I shop on the regular and have never met anyone who's caught my eye." She let out a low whistle. "You really do have all of the luck, to have not one but two hot and famous men panting after you. Maybe I should dye my hair pink. Do you think it'll improve my odds with the guys too? Or maybe purple would look better on me."

"Meredith," I snapped, knowing how she got when she was on a roll.

“Stop talking about your hair color and tell me what the heck you heard about Gustavo and me and where you saw it.”

“I know it isn’t one hundred percent true since you were there as a seat filler, but the story about you being his mysterious date to the International Emmys is literally everywhere, Cleo,” she explained. “The paps haven’t identified you yet, but they’re saying he has excellent taste in women since you’re hotter and younger than his last girlfriend.”

“Holy crap,” I whispered, my hand shaking as I ran over to my desk and flipped open my laptop. After typing Gustavo’s name into the search engine, a ton of results came up...and the ones at the top all included a picture of me. It must have been taken when he came back to the table after receiving his award. I had leaned forward to congratulate him again on the win, and he said something silly about me being his good luck charm. Then he’d surprised me by kissing my cheek.

I didn’t think Gustavo had meant anything by it since the kiss had been the barest of touches against my cheek. But the photo was a snapshot at the worst time because it didn’t look innocent, especially when taken in conjunction with the stories that had been circling about who Gustavo was bringing to the event.

Then I remembered the screens behind the stage and how the cameras had panned toward us several times during the evening. I hadn’t been paying attention to them, but it would make sense to focus on Gustavo’s group as they returned to the table. And if they had...Rigby probably saw that meaningless kiss and assumed the same thing everyone else had. “Oh, no. No, no, no,” I cried.

“I know you don’t like to be in front of the camera, but don’t freak out. Even though you’re into set design, this is still a good thing for your career. People will be curious about you, which will help when you’re trying to land a summer internship when the time comes.”

“You don’t understand. Nothing happened with Gustavo, and I’m not even the tiniest bit interested in him. But Rigby was there, and when I bumped into him after the award ceremony, he acted as though he couldn’t stand the sight of me. What if he saw the same thing last night and thinks that I’m the kind of girl who’d cheat on her boyfriend...with him?”

“Ohhh.” There was a long pause before she added, “Yeah, I hate to tell you this, but that doesn’t bode well for you on the romantic front.”

I buried my face in my hands and mumbled, “It really doesn’t. I don’t

even have his phone number since I gave him mine.”

“Crap.”

“Yeah,” I sniffled.

There was some tapping on her end of the line while I threw myself a little pity party. “Okay, I just looked up the Nighthawks on social media, and it looks like they’re at the stadium for practice right now. You should head over and see if you can catch him when he leaves.”

I lifted my head, my eyes going wide. “Just sit around like a stalker until he comes out?”

“Yup, a girl’s gotta do what she’s gotta do,” she quipped. “Plus, fans do stuff like this all the time, so it’s not as though you waiting for him will be creepy. And if you want the guy to ever talk to you again, you’ll have to find him so you can explain he’s got the situation with Gustavo all wrong.”

I got to my feet with a nod. “Yeah, you’re probably right.”

“Girl, there’s no probably about it. I know I’m right,” she insisted. “Now go get your man.”

Grateful that I hadn’t missed a class yet, I quickly emailed my professor to let him know I wouldn’t be there today. The syllabus allowed for three absences over the semester before it impacted my grade, so at least I didn’t have to worry about tanking my grade point average as I rushed over to the stadium.

I wasn’t even sure if I would be able to talk to Rigby since I couldn’t just stroll past security to get to him, but I couldn’t think of any other way when I didn’t have his phone number and had no idea where he lived except that it was somewhere in the vicinity of Meredith’s apartment. My only other option was hoping I’d bump into him again when I visited her, but that was even more of a long shot than hanging out at the stadium when he left after practice.

I dropped the ball and kicked it before it hit the ground, sending it spiraling downfield toward the opposing squad's endzone. We were playing a scrimmage game for practice, so the coach had broken us up into two teams.

Hale Bucannon, one of football's top wide receivers, ran to catch the ball, but I'd put a fuck ton of power behind it and it sailed over forty-seven yards. He missed the catch by inches...but he still missed it.

When he stood and looked back at me, I pumped my fist. "Almost, old man!"

Hale shook his head with a grin and got back to the play. He was getting ready to retire, but he was still at the top of his game.

We jogged to the tunnel when practice was over, and I glanced up into the stands. I paused for half a second when I thought I saw Cleo, then silently berated myself for being a pussy since the bleachers were fucking empty. Irritated at myself because I couldn't get her off my mind, I hurried to the locker room hoping to find a distraction.

I sat down on the bench, and as I removed my gear, Prentice clapped me on the shoulder. "Great play out there, man."

I lifted my chin in acknowledgment, and one corner of my mouth kicked up. He smiled and walked away. A lot of people would have seen my reaction as a brush-off, but my teammates knew that it was practically the same as a three-paragraph letter, effusing how grateful I was for his compliment.

Once I had everything off, I wrapped a towel around my waist and trudged into the showers. It had been a hell of a practice, and I was aching

everywhere. At first, the steam and the pounding of the hot water felt good on my muscles. But then my thoughts drifted to a certain curvy, pink-haired pixie, so I reached for the handle and twisted it all the way to the other side.

When I'd managed to calm my body and clean up, I shut off the shower and headed back to the locker room to get dressed. After I changed into a T-shirt and jeans, I grabbed my phone and a New York Nighthawks baseball cap, then set them beside me on the bench so I could shove my feet into my shoes. As I laced up and tied them, I noticed that I had a text from Natalie, so I swiped the screen to open it.

Nat: Thanks again for going with me last night. You're my favorite brother!

Me: I'm your only brother, brat. And you're welcome.

Then I grinned and shot off another message with my order for the next time she cooked for me.

Me: Spare ribs, twice baked potatoes, and cherry cheesecake.

Nat: LOL How about the Friday after Thanksgiving?

Me: So you can talk Mom into making it?

Nat: Busted. Love you, bro.

Me: Me too.

I was about to set my phone down when another message from her came through with a link. It was an article about Natalie's win. The picture showed us together right after her name was announced.

Nat: See how handsome you can be when you don't look like you want to murder someone?

I laughed and shook my head, then my eyes strayed to another headline on the sidebar, and my amusement quickly faded.

Gustavo's mystery date!

Obviously, I was a glutton for punishment because I clicked on the story. There were several pictures of Gustavo and Cleo throughout the night, all looking happy and intimate. The article was all about the heartthrob's

mystery date and speculation about his relationship with her. Apparently, he'd been tight-lipped about his date, and once they saw her, they assumed it was because he'd been keeping their relationship a secret. It made me wonder how long he and Cleo had been together. Maybe they hadn't been exclusive when we met? I closed my eyes and mentally groaned at myself. Do not go down the what-if rabbit hole, Hunt.

I sighed as my eyes scanned the locker room. The Nighthawks had a strict morality clause, but that didn't account for the number of teammates wearing wedding rings. It seemed like something was in the water...but I never thought it would happen to me. Before now, I hadn't cared. My attention had always been fixated on my career. I'd never met anyone who had been able to penetrate my focus.

Until Cleo.

Something told me that she would have been worth it. Worth anything.

Anything except cheating. No woman would ever be worth that.

I looked back at the pictures of Cleo and felt profound regret that I hadn't found her before that Brazilian pretty boy.

There were links to more articles, but I was pissed enough at myself for even reading the first one. So I welcomed the distraction when Ames, one of our offensive linemen, muttered, "Seriously, D," as he plopped down on the bench in front of the locker between mine and Dempsey Tate's, our starting wide receiver. "What's got your panties in a twist?"

"Best Sports," Dempsey grumbled.

"They go with someone else?" Ames asked, suddenly serious.

Best Sports was a huge sponsor, and they'd been looking at Dempsey. We were all confident that they would offer him a contract, so I understood Ames's shift in attitude at Dempsey's frustrated tone.

"Not yet, but Gil called in a favor and found out that they have some conditions I don't meet."

"Conditions?" Ames asked.

"Apparently, they're looking for a family man."

"I'm guessing they mean a serious relationship?"

"Like rings and a picket fence," Dempsey confirmed.

Having heard enough, I put down my phone and twisted to look at Dempsey. "So make it happen," I stated matter of factly.

Dempsey gaped at me for a moment, then sputtered, "Make it happen? Like get married?"

I nodded and stood, retrieving my keys and wallet from my locker before shoving them in my pocket. “Yeah. If you’re serious about this gig, do what it takes, man.”

If it were possible, I would do whatever it took to make Cleo mine. If Dempsey really wanted this contract, then he needed to get his ass in gear and go for it. I clapped him on the shoulder and walked out.

After adding my phone to my pocket, I put the ball cap on my head and pulled the bill low over my eyes. It wouldn’t keep the paps from recognizing me, but it helped me to evade their questions and ignore them.

When I walked into the hallway, I spotted one of our kickers and a good friend, Roan, holding his one-year-old daughter on his hip. He laughed and slung his arm around his pregnant wife and kissed her temple as they watched their four-year-old little girl do a victory dance.

I tamped down the sudden jealousy blooming inside me. It was an unwelcome feeling, and I silently cursed Cleo and the day that I met her. Even though a little part of me would always be grateful for those few minutes I’d spent with her. Perhaps someday, they would just be a fond memory when I met the right woman. Although, knowing how rare a connection like that was, I didn’t see it ever happening with someone else.

I hurried to the exit and barged through the door, stomping out into the parking lot. The crisp fall air felt good on my heated skin. There were some press gathered there, but security was keeping them corralled so I tucked my cap even lower and ignored anyone calling my name. I turned to the right and headed straight to my car with a single-minded goal. However, I’d only made it a couple of steps when my focus was shattered by the sound of my name being shouted in a familiar voice. One that sent a shot of desire straight to my dick, followed by a surge of anger at myself for being affected by it.

My feet froze in place for a few seconds, then I slowly twisted my head around and immediately spotted Cleo, standing off to the side of the press, but behind the security rope line. Even if I’d been looking at them before she called out to me, I probably would have missed her because she’d worn a sweatshirt and had the hood up, hiding her very noticeable hair.

"Rigby! I know what you think, but there’s been a misunderstanding. Please, can we talk for just a minute?"

I shrugged and shook my head. "There’s nothing to say. You’re with—"

"I’m not!" she argued vehemently. "It’s a misunderstanding. Please, just give me a chance to explain."

I'd never been a guy who played games off the field, and I wasn't about to start. I also wouldn't give advice that I wasn't willing to follow. So like I'd told Dempsey, if there was any chance that I could have what I wanted, I was going to take it. And there was no denying that I wanted Cleo.

However, I was wary from past experiences—way, way past. Although I was generally a good judge of character, there were always snakes in the grass. Just like all of my teammates, I'd been burned by social climbing, money grubbing people at one point in time.

But I also appreciated that Cleo was keeping a low profile with the press. So while I wasn't ready to give her the benefit of the doubt, I was willing to listen.

“Jimmy,” I addressed the guard standing closest to my gi—Cleo. “Let her through,” I ordered. With raised eyebrows he pointed at Cleo, and I nodded. I understood his shock, I never spoke to the press unless the coach or front office forced me to. And in the five years that I'd been with the Nighthawks, I'd never been seen with a woman who wasn't related to me.

Jimmy raised the rope, and Cleo ducked beneath it before swiftly walking toward me. I waited until she was a foot away, then jerked my chin at her and spun around. The last thing I wanted was to be overheard by the press and give them any fodder for a story.

She followed me around the corner to a spot with relative privacy, partially due to a wall that blocked us from anyone's view.

I was nervous and excited, like a teenage boy on prom night about to ask his girl if they can go all the way—instead of a badass football player who could get any woman he wanted.

Except, I didn't want just any woman. Only this one.

Folding my arms over my chest, I leaned back against the wall and raised an eyebrow. “A misunderstanding?”

My heart felt as though it was about to beat through my chest and my palms were sweaty, but my nerves were a small price to pay for the chance to set things straight with Rigby. I twisted my hands together as I faced him, my gaze trapped by his icy blue eyes as he crossed his arms over his broad chest.

Steeling my spine, I pushed my hood off my head and nodded. “Yes, a horrible misunderstanding.”

He pulled his phone out of the pocket of his jeans, tapped the screen, and turned it my way to show me one of the articles I’d seen before I headed to the stadium. “Not sure what I could be mistaken about when the entire world is talking about you being that asshole’s mystery girlfriend. Let’s also not forget that I saw you two together with my own damn eyes.”

The plan I’d come up with when I was waiting for him flew out of my head and I blurted, “Have you ever heard of seat fillers?”

His brows drew together, and his hand dropped to his side with his phone clenched in his fist so hard that his knuckles were white. “No.”

“Remember how I told you that I’m a student at Tisch?”

He nodded, and I plowed ahead. “Well, one of my friends told me about becoming a seat filler because of the incredible networking opportunities by attending award ceremonies filled with industry professionals. Even if you’re just there to fill an empty seat while someone important steps away for a moment.” I finally forced myself to stop jabbering and waited.

He was quiet for a few heartbeats, but his expression was thoughtful, like he was simply absorbing all I’d said. “So you’re saying you weren’t there for

personal reasons? It was just a job?" he eventually clarified.

I could've sworn that I spotted the faintest hint of hope in his eyes, and it helped settle my nerves a little. "I didn't walk the red carpet or even go in through the front door for the event. I was very much there as a member of the staff, not an invited guest."

His muscles loosened, but he still pointed out, "You looked close to that guy when they caught you on camera."

I'd thought it had been such good luck to be assigned to one spot for the entire event, but now I wished I'd played musical chairs like usual. Sore feet were much easier to handle than the mess I found myself in. "I am not close to Gustavo Duarte, and I'm certainly not his girlfriend. I'd never even met him until last night. The only time I saw him before I sat down at his table was on the television or in the press."

"So all those stories about him bringing his new girlfriend were just bullshit made up by the media?" he asked.

I pressed my lips together, frustrated by the fact that I wasn't supposed to share personal details about anything I had seen or heard last night. "I can't speak to what's going on in his life because I don't really know him except for the short amount of time I spent sitting next to him at the event. But the same people are calling me his girlfriend now without any confirmation, so I'm not sure how much you can trust anything they put out there."

"That's a fair point," he conceded. "They get all sorts of shit wrong about my teammates, too."

His words send a jolt of hope through my body. "You believe me then?"

He slipped his phone back in his pocket and crossed his arms over his chest again. "You weren't just at his table, though. You went with him when he came to get you while we were talking."

I grimaced. "I get how that might look bad, but he had promised to introduce me to some people because I'd helped him out by sitting next to him all evening. That way, he didn't look bad by having an empty seat by him when everyone was expecting him to have a date. You were completely icing me out, and I didn't want to make a scene, so it seemed like the right idea at the time."

"I didn't like seeing you walk away with him, even though I thought you were playing me," he admitted.

"I swear, it wasn't anything like that." I yanked my phone out of my purse and held it out toward him. "You can check for yourself. I don't have

his number, and I didn't give him mine when he asked."

A muscle jumped in his jaw as he asked, "He asked for your number?"

His nostrils flared, and butterflies swirled in my belly as I wondered if his reaction last night stemmed from jealousy and not just thinking that I was a lying cheater. "Yeah, but I really do think that it was more about him being nice than anything else. The timing of that photo sucks so bad because the kiss on the cheek he gave me was the only thing that could've been misconstrued. Other than when I got there and he let me know he'd asked for a seat filler to remain in that spot all night and when I congratulated him on his win, we didn't even say much to each other all night."

His chin jutted out, and his eyes narrowed as they scanned my face. "Except for when he walked you around the room and introduced you to everyone, like a good boyfriend would do."

"Only because he was helping me network." I tugged on the end of my ponytail, and several pink strands fell against my lips. Blowing out a breath to get them off my mouth, I huffed, "He told everyone I was a student and never called me his girlfriend. Didn't even hint at a relationship between us of any kind."

He pushed away from the wall and began to pace back and forth, shooting me a glance from the corner of his eye as he muttered beneath his breath. Even though I didn't really know Rigby, I felt as though so much was at stake while he tried to decide whether I was telling the truth or not. I had never been attracted to another man the way I was to him. As wild as it sounded, I could too easily picture us having a future together and we'd only talked a grand total of three times—one of which barely counted as a conversation since it had just been him blowing me off.

I practically held my breath while I waited for him to make up his mind. My gaze darted away from him as I took a deep breath in an attempt to settle my nerves. I couldn't help but take in our surroundings and think that the set had been well staged for our conversation. The sun was setting and the corner he'd led me to was dark because it was in the shadow of the stadium. There was a brick wall blocking us from the view of the guard and any of Rigby's teammates as they headed to their cars—and the darn paparazzi who were camped out in the lot with their cameras aimed at the exit to catch photos of the players.

If Rigby decided that he couldn't trust me, I was sorely tempted to go over there and give them a piece of my mind. But that wouldn't accomplish

anything besides embarrassing me even more since I was sure they'd take pictures of me yelling and make up another story once they recognized me as the woman in the photos with Gustavo. I'd done my best to stay out of their line of sight while I was waiting for Rigby to come out of the stadium, but my luck could only hold for so long.

Heaving a deep sigh, I turned back toward Rigby and braced myself for his verdict. He was staring at me with an odd gleam in his eyes that I couldn't quite figure out. "How did you get here?"

My stomach clenched as my breath hitched in disappointment. I'd tried my best, but that darn story with the photo painted a picture that was difficult to defend against. Shoulders slumping, I whispered, "I didn't want to waste time changing buses since I wasn't sure what time you'd be done with practice, so I took a rideshare."

He wrapped his fingers around my wrist and led me out of our hiding spot and into the fading light.

"Get in my truck." He jerked his chin toward a black Ford F150 Raptor. "I want privacy for the rest of this conversation."

I wasn't sure if that was good or bad. It could just be that he wanted to yell at me but didn't want to do it where anyone might overhear. Or even worse, catch it on camera. "Where do you want to go?"

"My place."

Rigby had a reputation for being private. No way would he bring me to his home unless he believed my explanation. My eyes filled with tears as relief coursed through my system. Nodding, I walked over to the passenger side and said, "Your place sounds perfect to me."

My hands clutched the steering wheel so hard my knuckles were bleached of color. For the fifth time, my eyes slid over to admire Cleo's generous tits stretching the fabric of her sweatshirt before dropping down to her curvy thighs, half of which were on display because her skirt had ridden up.

I hadn't been about to let her take a rideshare, but when I opened my mouth to offer her a ride, I demanded she come home with me instead. She'd readily agreed, giving me hope that she was feeling this connection as strongly as I was.

The drive was silent, other than the mental argument I was having where I told myself we would talk and then I would take her home while the horny devil inside me laughed hysterically. But despite the quiet, it was comfortable. Cleo was as easy to be with as I remembered.

Soon, I pulled into my designated parking spot, shut off the truck, and unbuckled my seat belt. However, I didn't make a move to get out. I turned in my seat and met Cleo's beautiful green orbs.

"I'd like to tell you that I'm going to be a gentleman. That we're going to talk, and I'm going to feed you dinner, and then make plans for a real date before taking you home. But my reputation for being a grumpy asshole is well deserved. And now that I've met you, you can add selfish to the rolling list of my faults, because I'm only going to give you one chance to hit the brakes. I'm warning you right now, if you come upstairs with me, you won't be leaving tonight."

Cleo's emerald pools darkened, and she pressed her lips together, but I didn't miss the small shudder that wracked her body. We sat in charged

silence for what seemed like hours, then she finally raised her eyebrows and cocked her head to the side. “Does this mean I have to get my own door?”

I stared at her in shock for a beat, then tossed my head back and laughed heartily. The sound of her sweet giggles joining in sent another wave of desire through me, and my mirth quickly faded away. Smiling, I shook my head. “I might not be gentleman enough to wait before taking you to bed, but my mama would have my head if she thought I’d ditched my Midwestern manners.”

Still grinning, I opened my door and climbed out of my truck before slamming it shut and jogging around to help Cleo out. Keeping her hand tucked tightly into mine, I used my other to hit the fob remote and lock the vehicle as I guided her toward the elevator. We were alone when we stepped inside the lift, and it took a monumental amount of strength not to press her back against the wall and devour her plump lips. I nearly lost the battle when she looked up at me through her eyelashes in a naturally seductive way. Luckily, we reached the penthouse before I lost control, and I breathed a sigh of relief as the doors slid open.

While I was sorely tempted to throw her over my shoulder and go straight back to the bedroom, I knew we needed to talk. Also, we needed to eat if we were going to be able to keep up with all the things I had planned for the rest of the night.

I gestured to the couch situated in the middle of the spacious living room. “I’m going to drop my shit in my room and change, then I’ll make us something to eat.”

One corner of Cleo’s mouth tipped up, and she asked, “Rigby Hunt, do you know how to cook?”

I jabbed my chest with my thumb and grinned. “Hell yeah. My mama insisted that all her kids be able to take care of themselves before we left home.”

Cleo’s lips spread into a beautiful smile. “Sounds like a smart woman.”

I winked and stalked down the hallway that led to the primary suite. Before I was too far away, I looked back at her over my shoulder and drawled, “She also taught me to know a good thing when I found it and never let her go.”

Without waiting for her reaction, I resumed my trek to the bedroom. After dumping my bag in my closet, I quickly changed into a T-shirt and a pair of athletic shorts, then walked back toward the kitchen with my bare feet

slapping against the travertine tiles.

I found Cleo standing in front of one of the walls of windows that looked out over the city. They were floor to ceiling and took up the entirety of two full walls in my apartment. The view was a major selling point when I'd decided to buy the place.

Although, once we had kids, it was probably more practical to buy a house in the suburbs and use this place as a getaway. *Whoa*. Where the fuck did that thought come from? I expected to feel panic when my mind catapulted into the future. Instead, I felt...excitement.

Cleo must've heard me enter the room because she pivoted and remarked, "That is an amazing view."

"I've never seen one more beautiful," I murmured, never taking my eyes off her. A pretty pink blush bloomed on her cheeks, and I fought the urge to sweep her off her feet and spread her out on the couch...or the floor...or take her to bed.

Fucking hell. I averted my gaze and imagined my teammates in tutus until the tent that had been growing in my shorts deflated a little.

The kitchen, living room, and dining room were all one open space, separated by a long, L-shaped island that had the sink and the stove built into it. I padded over to the fridge and opened it, scanning through the items I'd had delivered earlier that morning. It didn't take long to gather the things I needed for spaghetti with chicken, roasted broccoli, and a salad.

"Come and talk to me." I beckoned Cleo to join me, and when she was close enough, lifted her up and set her on the counter. She laughed and tucked her legs into a crisscross position.

"So you're studying drama?" I prompted.

"Yes...well, sort of. I'm in the Department of Design for Stage and Film. I want to work behind the scenes, mostly for the stage. I've always been fascinated by the design and construction of the sets. I can't wait for my first internship next year. Tisch has an amazing internship office, and they get all kinds of calls for interns in the industry. I'm hoping to snag one in a Broadway theatre."

Impressed, I murmured, "That's amazing. I'll have to make sure to come see you at one of your shows."

Cleo giggled. "You won't see me since I'll be working with the production staff."

I shrugged. "But I'll see your work."

She beamed at me, her emerald eyes sparkling. “Okay,” she agreed sweetly. “I’ll let you know when one of my projects makes it on the stage.”

The food was done and plated, so I carried our meal over and set it on the dining room table. Then I returned and helped Cleo off the counter before opening a cabinet to grab two wineglasses. As I was about to look through my wine selection, I paused as something occurred to me. I turned around, glasses in hand, and my eyes landed on my girl.

I didn’t know her age, but she was definitely younger than me. I doubted they used people under eighteen as seat fillers, so I was probably safe there. Still... “Are you twenty-one?”

Cleo shook her head. “I just turned nineteen a couple of months ago.”

“No problem,” I replied with a smile. I set the glasses down on the counter and moved toward the cabinet to retrieve a couple of regular cups.

“I don’t mind if you drink,” she insisted.

I shrugged, not at all bothered. “I rarely drink anyway.” As I walked past her, I hesitated long enough to bend down and whisper, “I’m not one who likes to give up control.”

There was a wealth of innuendo and a dash of warning in that statement, but she seemed so innocent that I wasn’t sure she fully understood my meaning.

I filled the glasses with water and took them to the table, then pulled out a chair and waited for Cleo to slide into it before scooting it forward. We chatted through the meal, getting to know each other better, and with every tidbit she shared, I grew more determined to keep her.

After the meal, I told her to relax while I cleaned up, but she insisted on helping me. We moved in sync as if she’d always been here, and we did this together every night. As we worked side by side, I enjoyed the picture we painted, one that hopefully reflected our future.

I led Cleo over to the couch and dropped down onto the cushions. She glanced at the opposite end, and I grunted before tugging her down next to me.

“How about a movie?”

Cleo nodded and looked down at her lap, but not before I spied the flare of disappointment in her eyes. It broke any resolve I had left. I hauled her into my arms and positioned her to straddle my lap.

“Rigby,” she breathed before I crashed my mouth onto hers.

My hands slipped beneath her top, gliding up the silky skin of her back. Her tits pillowed against my chest as I pulled her in even closer, and I groaned when her hot little pussy rubbed over the large bulge in my shorts.

Her mouth tasted like sugar and spice. It was addictive, and I wondered if her pussy would be just as sweet.

I removed one hand from under her shirt and pulled off the rubber band holding her pink locks. Then I palmed the back of her skull before making a fist in her hair. Using my grip, I angled her head, and she opened her mouth with a quick gasp that allowed me to slide my tongue inside. “Fuck,” I mumbled against her lips before tangling my tongue with hers.

After a few minutes of making out, Cleo’s chest was heaving. The feel of her hard nipples rubbing against my chest made my mouth water. I broke the kiss so I could whip her shirt over her head. I had no idea where it ended up because I focused on removing the last barrier to her incredible tits.

I put my mouth on her neck as I worked the clasp on her bra, and she dropped her head back, moaning while I left hot, wet kisses along the column

of her throat. When the catch released, I sat up to watch as her bra fell away and her breasts bounced with each of her choppy breaths.

“Fucking gorgeous,” I murmured, my voice filled with awe. I snapped out of it thirty seconds later and dropped my head to take one of her tight buds between my teeth.

Cleo moaned and arched her back, pushing her tit farther into my mouth. “Rigby...”

Hearing her say my name in that breathy tone was my undoing. I slipped my hands under her ass and held her firmly against me as I jumped to my feet. While I made my way to the bedroom, I released her nipple with a pop and latched onto the other one.

I kicked the door to my room open wide and carried Cleo over to the bed before releasing her rigid bud to lay her on the mattress.

My eyes devoured her gorgeous body, her pink hair spread over the dark comforter, her dusky nipples and passion-flushed skin. I was dying to feel her pressed against my body, to sink inside her and lose myself, but I remained glued to my spot and asked, “Are you sure about this, baby?” I silently begged her to say yes. But I would find the strength if she needed to put on the brakes. “We don’t have to do anything you’re not ready for.”

Cleo’s cheeks bloomed crimson, but she smiled and nodded. “Yes, I’m sure.”

Before I took her at her word, I needed to clarify something. “I want to be very clear about this, Cleo. Once you give yourself to me, there will be no going back. You’ll be mine. I won’t ever let you go. So if you need time to think—”

“Rigby?”

“Yeah?”

“Shut up and kiss me.”

A grin split my face. “Yes, ma’am.”

I bent over and captured her lips in a deep, hungry kiss. But before I got too lost, I pulled back. Cleo pouted, and I chuckled. “Relax, baby. I want to see all of you.”

Her face flushed, but she didn’t stop me when I unsnapped her jeans and dragged them down her legs, then tossed them to the side. She’d kicked off her shoes when she curled up on the couch, so I removed her socks, then paused as I stared at her underwear. The baby blue, silky panties barely covered her pussy, and the soaked fabric was plastered onto her skin. It was

smooth...*oh, fuck.*

Without thought, I clutched the fabric and ripped it away like a fucking caveman.

“Fuck,” I breathed as I stared at her glistening folds. “You’re fucking bare.”

Cleo’s expression turned a little uncertain, and her hands moved toward her center. I grabbed her wrists and pushed her arms up over her head, holding them there with one of my hands while the other glided down her front until I cupped her dripping pussy.

“Sexiest fucking thing I’ve ever seen,” I rasped, dipping my middle finger into her channel and groaning. “Fuck, you’re tight.”

Her mouth formed a little O, and I gave her a swift kiss before releasing her so I could stand and strip. I was quickly losing the battle for control over my desire. Once I was naked in front of her, all the color drained from her face as she stared at my long, thick shaft. My dick stood straight up, and when I stepped toward the bed, it smacked against my abs, leaving a smear of precome.

“Stop worrying, baby,” I said in a soothing tone as I slowly climbed onto the bed. “You were made for me. I’m gonna have to be really careful, but I promise, it will fit.”

She glanced at my face with a dubious frown, and I swallowed a smile. She was too fucking adorable.

“Will you trust me?” I asked softly.

Something in my demeanor seemed to resonate with her because her tension began to ease, and she nodded. “Okay.”

I gave her a grateful kiss, then maneuvered my body until I hovered over her on my hands and knees. As I lowered myself down and our hot skin pressed together, I dropped my head into the crook of her neck and groaned.

Cleo’s hands had come to my biceps, but they began to roam, slowly exploring my arms, chest, and back. “You’re so hard,” she whispered, and I couldn’t help laughing.

“That’s the idea,” I drawled.

She blushed but rolled her eyes and muttered, “You know what I mean.”

I grinned and began to kiss my way down her body until I reached the apex of her thighs. Gently, I pushed her legs open, licking my lips when her folds parted to expose her swollen pink pussy. “Soaked,” I grunted. “Fuck, I need to taste you.”

After lying on my stomach and wedging my shoulders between her thighs, I licked her center from bottom to top. Cleo cried out, and her hands moved to cling to my hair as she bucked her hips, searching for more.

Her juices filled my mouth, turning me into an instant addict. There was no way I would ever get enough of Cleo. I licked her into a frenzied state, then added a finger, working it into her tight hole while I nibbled her clit.

Eventually, I was able to stretch it enough to sink in a second digit. I sucked hard as I scraped the pads of my fingers over her G-spot, and she detonated with a scream.

“Yes!”

I grunted and pushed my hips into the bed, trying to hold off my own climax. I wanted to come inside her the first time.

My fingers worked and stretched her, but I was a hell of a lot bigger than that, so I pushed to another orgasm and managed to add a third finger. Hopefully, it would be enough for me to work my big cock into her tight heat.

I didn't wait for her climax to pass before I surged up until I covered her body from head to toe. My patience had officially run out.

Cleo tensed when I lodged the tip of my dick at her entrance. “Relax, baby,” I murmured, dropping my head to suck on one of her diamond-hard nipples.

I pushed in just an inch and circled my hips, getting her used to the feel of me. When I switched to the other peak, I slid in a little farther. “Fuck,” I rasped when her muscles clenched around me.

“Rigby,” she gasped, and I froze.

“Am I hurting you?”

She jerked her head from side to side, then nodded. “A little, but it feels...don't stop.”

Her voice was breathy, and I felt it in my core, causing my shaft to throb with need. Figuring it would be best to get it over with, I put her legs around my waist, then palmed her ass and drove balls deep inside her.

“Oh fuck! Cleo!” I shouted. It was so snug, I nearly lost it right then. But the tears sparkling on her cheeks brought my worry to the surface, overriding my hunger...for the moment.

“Baby, are you okay?”

She bit her lip, then looked up at me through her lashes and smiled. “It hurt for a second, but now...” Her cheeks turned pink, and I used a finger

under her chin to force her head back so she was looking directly up at me.

“Now?”

“I feel...stretched, and I, um, want you to move.”

“Thank fuck,” I groaned.

Carefully, I withdrew about halfway, then slid home once more.

“More,” Cleo moaned.

I brushed my lips over hers, then smirked as I teased, “You want me hard, Cleo?”

Cleo’s cheeks darkened, but she smiled and purred, “Hard and fast, Rigby. Don’t hold back.”

“Oh fuck, baby,” I grunted as I dropped my face into the crook of her neck. “Don’t say shit like that to me right now. I’m barely hanging on to my control.”

“What if I don’t want you to be in control?”

Her inner muscles clamped down, and she dug her fingernails into the skin of my back. All sanity fled, and I was lost to my urges. I needed to fuck Cleo like I needed to breathe.

I withdrew, then slammed back in.

“Yes!” Cleo cried out as she squeezed the fuck out of my cock.

“So fucking tight,” I groaned. “That’s it, baby. Milk my cock. Fuck, yes!”

My body took over, and I pounded in and out, rutting between her thighs like an animal intent on breeding its mate. That thought spurred me even more, and the headboard repeatedly banged into the wall.

Suddenly, I realized there wasn’t anything between us. “Fuck, I’m inside you bare,” I rasped. “Are you on birth control?”

Cleo pressed her lips together and shook her head. “I haven’t needed it since...”

The reminder that I was her first—and last—pushed all thoughts of condoms and birth control from my mind. I sealed my lips over hers and fed on her taste while returning to fucking her hard and deep.

I ignored the tiny little voice in the back of my head that was cheering on my boys, encouraging them to knock up my woman.

After a few thrusts, she ripped her lips from mine and cried out, “Oh, yes! Yes, Rigby! Yes! Yes!”

She was close, thank fuck, because I couldn’t hold out much longer.

“Come, baby,” I demanded. “Squeeze that pussy. Yes! Fuck!”

She immediately bore down, then threw her head back and screamed my

name as she shattered in my arms.

My spine tingled, and my balls drew up tight. I knew I should pull out, but instead, I shoved my cock as deep as it would go and roared in ecstasy as I exploded inside her unprotected womb.

I curled my arms around her and muttered, "Mine," as my climax rolled through me in waves of bliss.

Waking up wrapped in Rigby's arms in his killer apartment about eleven billion times bigger than my dorm room was surreal. It was hard to wrap my head around how much had changed in such a short amount of time. Only twenty-four hours ago, I thought I'd never get him to even talk to me again... and now he'd taken my virginity. Bare. And didn't seem the slightest bit worried that I could end up pregnant since I wasn't on birth control.

I wasn't sure what to think about the possibility of having a baby before I finished my degree, but a part of me was excited by the idea of starting a family with Rigby. The chemistry between us must have addled my brain because it was too soon for me to think anything like that. Although he'd touched and tasted every inch of my skin last night, we still had so much to learn about each other.

"Are you up?" he rasped, rubbing the scruff on his chin against my shoulder.

Twisting my neck, I beamed him a sleepy smile. "That depends. Are you going to bring me breakfast in bed before I have to leave for school if I'm not?"

"Doesn't matter how awake you are. If that's what you want, it's what you're gonna get."

I squinted my eyes at him. "Man, reporters get all sorts of things wrong. And not just the ones who write trash for the gossip columns like those stories about me. The sports broadcasters talk about how grumpy you are, but you've been so darn sweet to me now that we've worked everything out."

His nostrils flared as he slid his palm up my spine and pulled me closer.

“Don’t wanna hear about that bullshit again.”

“Too soon to tease you about anything to do with the media?” I asked.

“Only because it fucking sucked to think that you belonged to someone else when you were supposed to be mine, even if you cleared everything up for me in less than a day,” he growled.

“See?” I brushed my lips over his and whispered, “There you go being all sweet again. You’ll have to tone that down if you don’t want everyone to talk about what a marshmallow you are on the inside.”

He shook his head with a deep chuckle. “Only with you, baby.”

My heart melted at his gruff confession, but then my stomach growled and ruined the moment. Rigby flashed me a sexy grin that would have drenched my panties if I wore any. “Stay right here, and I’ll get to work on that breakfast in bed.”

“Mmm, I like the sound of that.” I stared as he climbed off the mattress, taking in all of his bunching muscles and black ink on tanned skin before my gaze dropped to his dick—which was almost as hard as it had been when he took me last night. I pressed my thighs together, reminding me I was still a mess from our mixed releases. “But I really should get up and take a shower so I’m not all dirty.”

“Or I could dirty you up in there again before you get clean.” His gaze heated as it drifted down my body.

I tugged the sheet up to my chest before he could tempt me to take him up on his suggestion. “That’s going to happen sometime soon, but I have a feeling I’ll lose all track of time with your sexiness in the shower with me. Then I’d miss class, and you wouldn’t make it to practice.”

“I suppose you have a point.” He bent down and grabbed his shorts off the floor and tugged them on, reminding me of an important detail that I hadn’t considered until now.

“Oh no.”

“What’s wrong?” he growled, stalking back to the side of the bed.

I pressed my lips together as I wiggled the sheet. “I don’t have any clean clothes to wear to school. My skirt and top have been lying somewhere in a heap on your floor all night, so they’re probably all wrinkled. And as hot as it was when you tore off my panties, they’re ruined.”

“You can wear one of my shirts and a pair of my boxers with your skirt.” He smirked. “I like the idea of you in my clothes.”

“There’s just one problem.” I quirked a brow and pointed back and forth

between us. “You’re like twice my size. I’d end up swimming in anything of yours.”

“Give me a second.” He strode into his walk-in closet and returned with a hunter-green dress shirt. “You can tie the ends of the bottom of this together and roll up the sleeves. Trust me, you’ll look hot as fuck in it.”

“That just might work,” I agreed, staring at his butt as he left the room.

When I padded into the kitchen after my shower, Rigby’s eyes widened. He raked his fingers through his hair and grumbled, “I was right about how good you’d look in my shirt. Too fucking hot to be on a college campus with a bunch of assholes who’ll try to stare at your tits all day.”

“It’s a good thing you’re the only asshole I see,” I quipped with a grin.

“I better be,” he grunted.

My stomach let out a loud growl when the scent of bacon hit my nostrils, and Rigby dished the food out for us. I wasn’t normally a big breakfast eater, but we’d worked off dinner in the bedroom, and I’d only munched on some snacks while I waited for him yesterday.

“Mmm, delicious,” I murmured as I pushed my empty plate away after devouring the scrambled eggs, whole wheat toast, and bacon he’d made.

“Glad you enjoyed it.” Rigby got to his feet and started collecting the dishes to bring them over to the sink.

I followed with our glasses. Once everything was cleaned up, we headed to his truck so he could drive me to campus.

“Do you need anything from your dorm for your class?” he asked when we were a block away from Tisch.

“Nope.” I lifted my purse and jiggled it. “Luckily, I have my drawing tablet, and my textbook is accessible on my phone, so I’ll be fine for today.”

He pulled up at the curb in front of the building and put the truck in park. Before he could climb out to open my door, I leaned over and gave him a quick kiss. “I’m good. No need to get out and risk having a cop pull up, wanting to give you a ticket or something.”

“Okay, baby.” He fisted my hair at the back of my head and claimed my mouth in a deep kiss that left me breathless. “Have a good class. See you tonight.”

“Uh-huh,” I breathed before stumbling out of the vehicle in a sensual fog.

Three girls I was friendly with—but not super close to—waited for me on the sidewalk after Rigby’s truck pulled away. Maria stepped forward, her lips curved into a smirk. “Please tell me you’re a sneaky bitch who’s been dating

Gustavo Duarte all this time without telling us.”

Ana’s nose wrinkled as she shook her head. “I don’t know. I’ve been watching *Dias de Amor no Rio* for years, and that guy looked way too big to be Gustavo.”

Stephanie nodded. “Yeah, and I’ve always pictured him driving something slicker than that, like a sports car of some kind. But maybe he’s just different in real life from the character he plays on the show.”

I rolled my eyes with a deep sigh. “You can’t believe even half of what you read online.”

“Except it wasn’t just on the internet,” Maria retorted. Slinging her backpack off her shoulder, she unzipped it to pull out a copy of the *New York Post*. “Your picture made it into Page Six, too.”

“I don’t know what to tell you.” My fingers itched to yank the paper out of her hands and rip it to shreds after all the trouble those photos caused between Rigby and me. “Whoever wrote that article didn’t bother to do any fact checking because I was just a seat filler at the event.”

Ana crossed her arms over her ample chest. “Then who was that guy? You’ve never talked about dating anyone before, and suddenly some dude is dropping you off on campus right after all this is happening.”

“It’s kind of hard to believe that’s just a coincidence,” Stephanie agreed.

“There is a guy in my life, but it’s not Gustavo,” I reluctantly admitted. “And that’s all I have to say right now because it’s very new. I don’t want to mess things up with him just as they’ve gotten started.”

All three of them still looked skeptical, but I didn’t owe them—or anyone else—an explanation about what was going on. My private life wasn’t their business...no matter how many inaccurate articles were written about me.

RIGBY

“Yo, Rigby, what’s up with you?” Dempsey asked as he knocked his shoulder into mine.

“What do you mean?” I growled, irritated because I already knew what he was referring to.

“I’ve never seen you so distracted at practice.”

He wasn’t wrong. I was distracted thinking about how much it had bothered me to drop my girl off at school this morning. I didn’t like knowing she’d be headed back to her dorm after classes. I wanted Cleo in my space permanently and was determined to make that happen as soon as possible. So while running plays, I’d been running scenarios on how to get her moved in with me immediately. And replaying the night before.

I glanced at Dempsey with one corner of my mouth kicked up. “I took my own advice.”

Dempsey’s brow furrowed as he tried to puzzle out what I meant.

I chuckled, and when the sound made his expression morph into utter shock, I laughed even harder, which drew the attention of most of my teammates. *Did I truly laugh that rarely?* I supposed it wasn’t surprising, considering I hadn’t had Cleo to bring sunshine into my life.

“I figured out what I really wanted and made it happen.”

The words sparked Dempsey’s memories of our conversation from the day before.

Stunned, he asked, “You’re getting married?”

“Not today. But sooner rather than later,” I confirmed. “I found my woman and claimed her. No fucking way am I letting her go.”

I was taken aback by the envious gleam in Dempsey's eyes and cut my head to the side. "What about you?"

He shrugged and cupped the back of his neck. "I'm working on it."

"Don't take no for an answer," I told him before I made my way to my locker and gathered up my things for a shower. The other reason I'd been so distracted was from excitement. Tonight would be my first real date with Cleo.

I hurried to get ready, then once I was in my truck, I sent a quick text to Cleo.

Me: Bring an overnight bag.

The little dots jumped for only half a second before her reply came through.

Cleo: That's awfully presumptuous, Mr. Hunt.

I smirked as I typed my reply.

Me: Be ready with a bag when I get there, baby. Or I'll come in and pack one myself.

Before she could reply, I shot off another message.

Me: Then again, if you don't bring any clothes, that's fine with me. You won't need them.

Cleo: You'd let me leave the house naked??

She sent it with a laughing emoji.

Me: Hell to the motherfucking no! You can wear something of mine again.

Cleo sent back a heart, and I grinned as I put my truck into drive and headed out to pick up my girl.

She waited for me at the end of the sidewalk when I pulled up, and she jumped into the vehicle, tossing her bag over the seat before I could open her door.

I frowned at her. "I get that you're a gorgeous, powerful woman, but give the Midwestern boy in me a break and let me at least open your car door."

Cleo looked contrite when she responded, "The girls in my dorm are

really nosy. I didn't want you to have to deal with the game of twenty inappropriate questions."

In a rare moment of insecurity, I asked, "Are you ashamed to be seen with me?"

Cleo shook her head jerkily. "Oh no!" Then she blushed hard as she admitted, "I'm just not ready to share you."

A giant smile spread across my face, and I grabbed her around the back of the neck and pulled her toward me so I could take her lips in a deep, passionate kiss.

By the time we separated, I was sorely tempted to simply take her back to my place and have my wicked way with her. However, I wanted to be able to tell our kids that we dated, which meant taking her out at least once. Besides, the thought of spending time with Cleo out of the bedroom was just as appealing as in it.

I turned in my seat to face forward, keeping my eyes straight ahead because I knew I would lose my resolve if I saw her kiss-swollen lips and hazy bedroom eyes.

That didn't mean I didn't break a few speed records getting us to the restaurant. The sooner the date started, the faster it would end.

I brought her to a small Italian place frequented by celebrities because they were discreet and private. And by private, I meant that the host led us to a booth surrounded by big dark curtains. It was round, so I helped Cleo get situated and slid in right after her so we sat side by side.

Cleo looked at me curiously when the host drew the curtains shut, and I smirked. "Not ready to share you either, baby."

Her cheeks turned pink, and her lips curved into a pleased smile.

The server appeared and took our drink orders, then left us alone. I relaxed against the seat and curled my arm around Cleo's waist, pulling her into my side.

I waited until she dropped her head back to look up at me before rubbing my nose against hers and whispering, "I missed you today."

She flushed and melted into my side with a dreamy smile. "I missed you, too. How was practice?"

Before I could answer, the server returned with our drinks and took our food order. Once he walked away, we resumed our conversation. I regaled her with stories about my teammates, and she told me about her classes. Talking to her was easy and comfortable as if we'd known each other all our

lives.

Eventually, our food arrived, and we ate as our conversation delved into getting to know each other. I discovered that she loved to sing and dance, hated black licorice, and had grown up watching football with her dad and three brothers.

I told her I also disliked black licorice, loved anything strawberry flavored, and only attempted to sing in the shower.

“You’ll have to show me that sometime,” she snickered with a cheeky grin.

Damn, she was amazing. My desire for her simmered under the surface, but I enjoyed the date so much that I was almost sad to see it end.

Almost.

But we had a lifetime for more nights like this.

After paying the check, I helped her out of the booth and slipped my arm around her waist as I swiftly guided her back out to the truck.

CLEO

I had enjoyed my dinner tremendously—the pasta was the best I’d ever had—but what I liked best about our date was that I had Rigby all to myself. The booth he’d gotten for us was so private, it had felt as though we were in our own little bubble. But the curtain didn’t offer enough protection for him to act on the heat in his blue orbs all night.

I was in complete agreement when he practically dragged me to his truck and drove like a bat out of hell back to his place. It took much less time than it should have, but I still practically threw myself into his arms when he opened my door. “Finally.”

“Tell me about it,” he grunted, swinging me up and kicking the door shut before he stomped through the parking garage toward the elevator. “My cock is so damn hard that it’s about to punch through my zipper.”

I patted his chest and teased, “You say the sweetest things.”

He glanced down, his hold on me tightening. “Sorry, baby. I’m lucky I can string a full sentence together. My control is that thin.”

Knowing I got to this big, strong man so much humbled me. Beaming a smile at him, I murmured, “I don’t need pretty words when you say stuff like that.”

“Plan on hearing a fuck of a lot more because you’re always hell on my self-restraint.”

For a guy with a reputation for being tight-lipped, Rigby had proven to have a way with words when it came to me. I loved that he didn’t show this side of himself to other people. It made me feel so special.

When we got to his apartment, he headed straight for the bedroom and set

me in the center of the bed. While he ripped his shirt over his head, I crawled to the edge of the mattress and flicked open the button of his pants. I had never given a blow job before, but I was curious about what it would feel like to have his thick dick in my mouth. But before I slipped my hand inside, he wrapped his fingers around my wrist.

I peeked up at him, and my cheeks filled with heat as I asked, “Don’t you want...”

He gave me a jerky nod and pressed my palm against his hard length. “Want isn’t a strong enough word, but if you wrap those perfect lips around my cock, I won’t last long enough to make you scream. You’re going to have to wait until I’m not dying to sink my cock inside your sweet pussy to give me a blow job. Maybe during round two tonight you can sit on my face while you suck my dick.”

“Round two?” I echoed on a gasp, my inner walls fluttering at his dirty talk.

Yanking off my shoes after kicking off his own, he nodded. “As long as you’re not too sore, I plan to be inside you as often as possible tonight.”

“Whoa,” I breathed, lifting off the mattress so he could get me out of my skirt.

His thumb brushed against my inner thigh as he asked, “You like the sound of that plan?”

I nodded. “Uh-huh.”

“Thank fuck. Feeling your tight pussy wrapped around me is just about all I could think about today,” he admitted with a soft chuckle. “I can’t tell you how many times I fucked up during practice because I wasn’t paying enough attention to know what was going on.”

I bit my bottom lip when he shoved his pants down his thick thighs. “I didn’t fare much better during class. Any time I moved in my seat, it felt as though I could feel exactly where you’d been the night before.”

“Damn, that’s hot.”

I traced my fingers over the dark tattoo on his forearm. “So are you.”

“It’s a damn good thing you think so because you’re stuck with me now, baby.”

The sensual threat in his deep voice sent a thrill down my spine, and I helped him quickly strip me out of my clothes so he could make good on it. Which he didn’t waste any time doing.

Crawling onto the mattress, he covered my body with his, staring down at

me with heated eyes as he waited for me to spread my legs so he could settle between my thighs. Then he lowered his head and captured my mouth in a deep kiss. The silken slide of his tongue against mine made me whimper in need, and a low groan rumbled up his chest.

Cradling his waist with my knees, I wrapped my arms around his shoulders while he kissed me breathless. When he finally lifted his head, I let out a little mewl of complaint and raised mine in an attempt to get his mouth back.

“Don’t worry, baby. I’m not done kissing you yet,” he promised, trailing his lips down my neck. “I just have a different kind in mind because I want your taste in my mouth when I take you.”

My inner walls clenched as he licked and sucked his way down my body before wedging his shoulders between my thighs. The warmth of his breath fluttering over my sex made me whimper again, and when his tongue stroked through my wetness, I gasped.

I rocked my hips as he devoured me like a starving man. His groans of approval ratcheted up my pleasure. Then he dipped his tongue inside my channel while he circled my clit with his thumb, and I threaded my hands in his hair, tugging on the strands as waves of pleasure crested over my body.

“Yes, oh yes! Rigby!”

“That’s it, baby. Come for me,” he encouraged, his breath hot against my core as I flew apart.

He ate me through my release, waiting until the shudders subsided to crawl back up my body and notch the tip of his dick at my entrance. His blue gaze locked on my face as he asked, “Ready for more?”

Desperate to feel him inside me again, I dug my nails in his shoulders and nodded. “Uh-huh.”

“Thank fuck,” he growled, slamming his hips forward to fill me completely.

It didn’t take me long to adjust to his invasion this time, and I was lifting my hips to meet his next thrust. “So good.”

“Damn straight,” he grunted. “Your pussy was made to take me, baby.”

I fisted the comforter at my side in one hand and held on to him with the other while he worked his dick in and out of me at a furious pace. All of the flirting during our date had been like foreplay, getting us both more than ready for sex.

“Fuck, you’re getting close, aren’t you?” he crooned, picking up his pace.

“I can feel you clamping down on me, ready to milk my come from my cock until I fill every inch of you.”

“Rigby.” I gasped for air as he took me closer to the edge, thrust by thrust, with his hard length dragging against my inner walls over and over again.

When my release finally hit, I arched my back and screamed his name again. Rigby followed me into the abyss, his cock jerking inside me as we got lost in the pleasure together.

We hadn’t bothered with a condom again, but I refused to worry about the possibility of getting pregnant after such an amazing night. Instead, I snuggled into his arms and let my eyes drift shut to rest up for the next round.

RIGBY HAD MADE good on his promise to be inside me as many times as I could handle. I had lost track at some point during the night, but I was pretty sure I’d only gotten maybe a grand total of two or three hours of sleep between the dozen or so orgasms he’d given me. So I was sore and exhausted when his alarm went off even though it was already midmorning.

Burying my face in the pillow, I mumbled, “I don’t want to get up. Maybe I should quit school to become your sex slave. It seems it’d be a solid career choice with fantastic perks of the orgasmic kind.”

“If that’s what you want, you won’t hear any complaints from me,” he murmured, reaching out to silence his phone.

I turned to look at him, expecting to find him grinning at me, but instead, he looked completely serious. Unsure what to do with his seemingly easy acceptance of a future where I depended on him for everything, I mentally urged the butterflies in my belly to stop swirling so I could think clearly. Not that I would ever be able to do that when Rigby had his naked body pressed against mine.

Before I could explore my feelings, he stole my wits with a deep kiss and then slid out of bed to get ready to go. Since we didn’t have as much time as yesterday, breakfast consisted of a banana and granola bar for me and a protein shake for him.

Leaving Rigby’s place was harder this morning, probably because I didn’t get the extra time in the car with him before we started our day. Although he

did give me a heck of a kiss goodbye when the driver pulled up to the curb in front of his building. He had insisted on using a private car service since he couldn't take me himself because my class and his practice started at the same time. And at least I had my own clothes this time...which turned out to be lucky, all things considered.

RIGBY

The only thing better than the high from winning a game, especially at home, was watching Cleo fall apart in my arms.

The atmosphere in the locker room was rowdy and victorious. I was even drawn into it and exchanged a few congratulatory words with my teammates.

When things died down, I undressed and hit the showers, in a rush to get ready because I was anxious to collect my girl and get back to my apartment, where we could celebrate alone. As I grabbed my phone, I saw a news alert and my mood darkened. After the last misunderstanding, I'd set a crawler for any articles mentioning Cleo's name with mine, or Gustavo's. I wasn't about to let the world interfere in our relationship again.

So when I scanned the headlines, rage ignited inside me and I gripped my phone so hard I was surprised it didn't break.

Gustavo's mystery date revealed when caught cheating!

Will Rigby and Gustavo come to blows over being the other man?

Gustavo's mystery woman caught cheating! Will he let Rigby steal her from him?

Cheating triangle! Who knew about who?

I quickly skimmed a couple of the articles to get the gist of things. Most of them showed a picture of me kissing Cleo at seven this morning when I put her in a black cab.

Son of a bitch.

The articles portrayed Cleo as a social-climbing bitch who cheated on her

movie star boyfriend with me. I was pissed as fuck, but I was also worried about my girl. Cleo was bound to be devastated at being accused of something like that. And knowing how this could affect my career if my coach and team owner didn't know me so well, I was concerned about what this scandal might do to Cleo's future. There was a reason overdramatic and judgy people were called drama queens.

On a split-second decision, I stomped out of the locker room and made my way directly to the exit where I knew the press would be camped out. The crowd would be larger than usual since we'd just won, which was fine with me.

However, before I could open the door, a firm hand landed on my arm, and I whipped around to see Ames watching me with his brow furrowed.

"Are you sure you want to go out there right now?" he asked quietly. "I've never seen you talk to the press unless you have to, and I've never seen you this furious. Seems like that might be a bad combination."

I balled my hands into fists at my sides to keep from snatching his hand off my arm and shoving him backward. Instead, I clenched my teeth and gritted out, "Are you telling me not to go out there and defend my woman? Or to claim her as mine once and for all so people stop painting her as a money-hungry whore? When I know damn fucking well that it's all bullshit? Should I just let the press make a villain out of the most beautiful, sweet, and honest person I know?"

Ames's eyes widened, and he shook his head as he took a step back. Then he walked to the door and opened it, gesturing for me to walk through and gave me a nod of solidarity. "Do what you gotta do, man. We'll all back you up if shit goes sideways."

As I stepped out into the open, I was momentarily blinded by the flashing lights and bombarded by a cacophony of questions. It was hard to single out any one query, but as I tried to get my bearings, I realized they weren't all directed at me. Glancing behind me, I saw that several of my teammates had followed me out. At first, I thought they'd come to ensure I kept my cool, but they stood with their legs wide apart and arms crossed over their chests, with frightening expressions on their faces.

Just like they did on the field, my mates were there to back me up. The shouting subsided when the press didn't receive answers out of any of us. Finally, I took a few steps forward and waited while they stared at me in disbelief, trying to make sense of what was happening.

Then the crowd exploded.

“How do you feel about being the other man?”

“Did you know Cleo was cheating with you?”

“How could you be with a cheater?”

“Have you talked to Gustavo about stealing his woman?”

“Will you stay with Cleo after stealing her from Gustavo?”

And on and on until I held up my hand, causing them to go silent once more.

“I’ve got one thing to say about this, so listen up because it’s the last I’m going to talk about it. I will not be answering any further questions. And no, Cleo will not be available for comment. Ever.”

Microphones stretched out in my direction, and a few more flashes of cameras went off. But no one spoke as they waited for me to continue.

“Cleo never cheated. On Gustavo or anyone else. She was never with him in the first place. As usual, the media twisted what they saw into a bullshit story, and I refuse to let you drag my girl through the mud. We didn’t set the record straight earlier because it was none of your damn business. The only reason I’m talking to you now is because Cleo deserves better than your baseless accusations. She is everything that is good, honest, and beautiful in this world. So let me be clear one last time. There was no change of possession, she’s always been mine.”

They barely waited a breath before hurling more questions at me. I rolled my eyes before spinning on my heel and stomping back to my teammates, who still looked ready to commit murder should I give the word.

I raised my chin at them in gratitude, and they parted to let me walk through the door before filing in after me.

“Never thought I’d see the day,” drawled Brady—a second string quarterback I’d known since his rookie season.

“Love does crazy things to a man,” Prentice remarked with a chuckle. “Just wait until it’s your turn.”

Brady scoffed and rolled his eyes. “Yeah, I don’t think so.”

I shook my head as I walked away. After a few steps, I tossed over my shoulder, “Famous last words.”

Several of the players chuckled, but I didn’t wait around to see Brady’s reaction. I had one thing on my mind, and that was getting to Cleo. I wanted to make sure she was all right. She was in a study session for an upcoming test for most of my game, so I didn’t know if she’d seen the article or my

impromptu press conference.

Cleo didn't answer when I called, so once I was in my truck and headed toward campus, I dialed my agent and asked him to get me in touch with Gustavo's rep.

Less than five minutes later, my phone rang with an unknown number. I wouldn't normally answer, but I assumed Alfonzo's publicist was calling me directly. To my surprise, when I answered, it was Gustavo on the line.

"*Me desculpa*, Rigby," he immediately apologized.

"It's not your fault," I grunted. Although it would have been convenient for my rage if he'd been to blame.

"*Merda*. I tried to quash the rumors after the first article, but it seems I made the mistake of underestimating Beatriz. She is...*Ela é a rainha do drama*...a drama queen? I didn't speak to her after the article about me and Cleo came out. But the second my agent saw the news today, she was on top of things. It took very little time to discover that Beatriz was the source behind the story. She found out who Cleo was and paid someone to follow her until they found something she could use against me. I've already scheduled a press conference to clear things up from my end, and I doubt Beatriz will be trusted by the press in the future."

I was impressed by Gustavo's integrity and swift action—which irritated me because I really wanted to hate the guy. "Thank you. I appreciate that you got out in front of this."

Gustavo chuckled. "I can't say that my motives were entirely *altruísta*. No man wants to be seen as a *chifrudo*...I think you would use the word, cuckold? Stories of being cheated on by my girlfriend won't help my image."

Amused, I muttered, "Anything I can do to help your image?"

"Perhaps if Cleo has a sister..."

He trailed off, then laughed when I growled, "Anything but letting you anywhere near my woman."

"I figured as much. *Tchau*."

"*Tchau*."

I was close to Cleo's campus when we hung up, so I focused on finding a parking spot near her dorm, figuring it was the best place to start looking for her.

CLEO

I was already grouchy from lack of sleep and nervous about my test tomorrow. So when Ana and Maria started whispering while looking at me, I shot them a glare from the other end of the table where our group was studying. Then Stephanie leaned halfway out of her seat to see what they were staring at on Ana's phone. Her eyes widened, and I couldn't help but wonder if they were talking about those ridiculous stories again. Ana had been irritated when I refused to say anything about my mystery guy in the truck when she asked about him before class started, and she struck me as the kind of girl who would be petty like that. Which was why I wasn't that close with her little trio—I didn't need to get sucked back into the high school mentality.

I did my best to ignore them when we finished up our test prep session a few minutes later, but Ana made it impossible when she hurried out of her seat and blocked the study room door from me. Planting my hands on my hips, I heaved a deep sigh and asked, "What do you want?"

She cocked her head to the side. "The guy in the truck was a football player?"

Ugh. There must've been new stories out there about me, but at least they got it right this time if they were talking about Rigby and me. "Yeah, the guy I'm dating plays for the New York Nighthawks."

I didn't understand why her nose wrinkled at my answer until Maria huffed, "How could you cheat on Gustavo with him?"

My brows drew together as I shook my head. "I already told you that those stories were bogus. Remember?"

Stephanie rolled her eyes. “So you’re saying that they got it all wrong... again?”

Again?

I shoved my hand into my purse to grab my cell, my stomach churning as I pulled up the web browser and did a quick search of my name. I gasped when I saw the result, tears filling my eyes. The picture of Rigby and I kissing before he put me into the car this morning made my heart swell because of how amazing we looked together. But the headline was pure crap.

“Yes, this is just as inaccurate as those other stories,” I insisted, shouldering past Ana to race to my dorm before the press realized I was a student at Tisch. The only thing on my mind was getting to a place where I could be by myself while I reacted to the newest round of articles because they were even worse than the first ones.

“Cleo!”

I was so upset, it took me a moment to realize the deep voice calling my name was Rigby’s. My head swiveled, and I found him jumping out of his truck, which was parked right in front of my dorm. Seeing him made the tears stream down my cheeks even more.

His hands wrapped around my biceps, and he peered down at my face. “Why are you crying, baby?”

My breath caught in my chest as I struggled to find the right words to tell him about the awful stories circulating about us. For a moment, I worried that he would wonder if they were true—even if only for a second. It would be understandable for him to have doubts since we hadn’t known each other long, but I wasn’t sure my heart could take the hit. “Have you...um...seen what...”

Luckily, he knew what I was talking about without me needing to say more. Wrapping his arms around my back, he pulled me close and murmured, “Everything is going to be fine, baby. I already talked to the press and took care of the bullshit they were spewing.”

He already knew...and he didn’t ask if they were true before he made a statement. He believed in me that much.

My head jerked back so I could stare up at him with wide eyes as a surge of relief coursed through my system. “What did you say?”

“That you were never Gustavo’s.” He cupped my cheeks with his large palms, brushing his thumb over my bottom lip. “And he said that he’s going to back us up in the press.”

My brows arched. “You talked to him?”

“Yeah, he called me,” he gritted out, a muscle jumping in his jaw.

Rigby didn’t have any reason to be jealous when it came to me, but his reaction anytime the subject of Gustavo came up gave me a little flutter of feminine satisfaction. And it wasn’t as though I didn’t have similar feelings when it came to him—although his name hadn’t been linked in the press with another woman in ages.

Stroking my palms up his chest, I murmured, “I don’t care about him, but I do want to know what you had to say about all of this. You never talk to the press.”

“No way in fuck was I going to let them say shit about you,” he growled. Lifting his head, he glanced around, and his brow furrowed. “C’mon, get in my truck. I don’t want to have this conversation out in the open where anyone could walk up and snap pics of us or, even worse, take a video.”

“Okay,” I readily agreed, not thrilled by the possibility of having more ugly stories written about me because one of my peers decided to sell me out.

I thought he meant that we were going to talk in his truck, but instead, he threaded his fingers through mine and drove toward his place. Once we were in the privacy of his apartment, he pulled me against his chest. “I’m so fucking sorry, Cleo. This is why I keep my mouth shut. The media twists shit and rarely gets the story right.”

“Hopefully, this will all blow over soon with Gustavo backing us up and whatever it was that you told the press...” I trailed off, waiting for him to satisfy my curiosity.

He laughed softly and shook his head. “I’m sure clips of it are online already.”

“I’d rather hear it straight from you.” I twined my arms around his neck. “Please.”

“I didn’t say much, baby. Just that they got the story all wrong and you’re the furthest thing from a cheater. You’re everything that is good, honest, and beautiful in this world.”

My breath caught in my throat at his answer. “You really think that about me?”

“Of course, I do.” He brushed his lips against mine in a gentle kiss, his blue eyes softening. “I love you, baby.”

“You love me?” I whispered, happy tears filling my eyes.

He nodded. “And I want you to come home with me for Thanksgiving.

It's our bye week, and I've had my flight booked ever since the team schedule came out since it's hard to get back when we're in season."

"I'd really love that." I sniffled. "As long as you don't mind leaving Wednesday night or Thursday morning. My break is only four days, which is why I didn't bother trying to go see my parents for the holiday."

"I'll take care of all the arrangements," he promised. "But first I want to hear you say something else you love other than our upcoming trip."

Between the lack of sleep and everything that had just happened, it took me a moment to realize what he was hinting at. "Oh, I guess I should use that particular four-letter word another way now that you've said it first, huh?"

His jaw clenched, and he muttered, "Only if you mean it."

Rigby was such a strong and silent type that it was incredible how vulnerable he let himself be with me. Beaming him a soft smile, I nodded. "Of course, I love you, Rigby. I knew there could be something special between us the moment we met, and that feeling was just reinforced when I thought you weren't interested anymore."

"Thank fuck," he rasped, kissing me again.

I was surprised that he'd been worried I would give him a different answer, but I understood—there was no guarding against love. "I might still be young, but I know you're the right man for me."

"Good, baby. Because no other guy will ever get the chance to be with you. You're mine and only mine."

I loved the sound of that and couldn't wait to see what the future held for us.

EPILOGUE

RIGBY

“They already love you, baby,” I assured Cleo as I tucked her hand into the crook of my arm. I guided her up to my parents’ front porch and shot her an encouraging smile as I reached for the doorknob.

I’d managed to talk her into spending Thanksgiving with my family even though we’d been together less than three weeks. In order to change the travel plan to make it for two, we had to travel on Thanksgiving Day, so we arrived just before dinner.

Despite having met my sister and video chatted with my parents a few times—just as I had with her family, including her three brothers who were almost as intimidating as I was—Cleo was still nervous about meeting them in person. Even though my mom had practically broken my eardrum with her scream of delight—a talent Nat had obviously inherited from her—when I told her I was bringing Cleo home.

I hoped she would be more at ease when she discovered my first surprise.

Before I could twist the handle, the door flew open and my mom rushed out and wrapped herself around Cleo. “You’re here!” she squealed happily, hugging her tight.

“Hello to you too, Mom,” I joked.

“You know I’m always happy you’re home, dear,” she answered without taking her eyes off Cleo. “You are even more beautiful in person! Come in! Come in!”

Cleo shot me a look that demanded I save her when my mom began dragging her inside.

“Mom. Think you could tone it down about ten notches?” I groaned.

“You’re going to scare her away before I can get my ring on her finger.”

Cleo’s gaze flew back to my face, and I winked at her, but she had no more time to react because her own mother came rushing out of the kitchen.

“Mom?” Cleo gasped as she was engulfed in another hug.

“Rigby thought you’d be more comfortable if we all met for the holiday, so he flew your dad and I up here yesterday.”

Cleo’s eyes filled with tears, and as soon as her mom released her, she threw herself into my arms. “Thank you. That was so thoughtful,” she sniffled.

Fuck. Had I screwed up? I gently grasped her hair and pulled her head out of my chest so I could see her face. “Are you sure you’re okay with this?”

She bobbed her head and smiled, despite the tears streaming down her cheeks. “Happy tears.” Then she blushed and shrugged. “I don’t know why I’m feeling so emotional. Weary from travel, I guess.”

I wasn’t totally convinced, but she stopped crying as I wiped the moisture away, so I tried to let it go. “Paula,” I greeted Cleo’s mother with a one-armed hug. “Where are Rob and my dad?” I had a hunch.

“Oh, you know,” my mother said with a careless wave. “Checking out your dad’s fishing gear, of course.”

Yup. Right on the money.

“I’ll go and let them know you’re here and dinner is about ready,” Paula offered with a bright smile. “You two go get settled in.”

My mom gestured for us to follow her, then spun around and led us up to the second floor where the bedrooms, other than the primary, were located. “I put you in your old room, but we bought you a queen-sized bed so you wouldn’t have to deal with the double that was here.”

I tried to hide my grimace, but she caught it and shrugged. “The room isn’t big enough for a king, Rig.”

“It’s great,” Cleo jumped in. “We’ll just have to snuggle...doesn’t sound like a bad thing to me.”

I grinned and kissed the top of her head. “It’ll save room if we aren’t wearing clothes,” I mused.

Cleo gasped, and her face turned bright red, making my mother snicker as she walked back out into the hall. “Don’t worry, Cleo. His dad and I save room by sleeping naked, too.”

“What the fuck, Mom?” I choked as I clapped my hands over my ears. “I don’t want to hear that shit.”

Cleo burst out laughing, and my mom simply skipped out the door and down the hall.

“I think I’m going to throw up,” I grumbled.

Cleo opened her mouth to respond, then froze for a second before muttering, “I know you were kidding, but I think I’m actually going to be sick.” Then she bolted to the bathroom in the hall.

I was hot on her heels, and she barely made it in enough time for me to pull her hair back while she bent over the bowl and lost her lunch.

Later, when she’d finished heaving, had some water, and brushed her teeth, I set her on the counter and caged her between my arms. “You told me it was just a bug,” I growled.

Cleo ducked her head, and I grasped her chin, forcing her gaze back up to meet mine. “I thought it was,” she admitted softly.

She’d been waking up feeling sick for the past several days and had thrown up a couple of times. I’d been worried that she should see a doctor, but she’d sworn it was just something she’d picked up around campus that would quickly go away. She hadn’t been sick this morning when she woke up with me before I headed to the stadium, so I assumed she’d been correct.

“Did you throw up this morning, Cleo?” I demanded.

She sighed. “Maybe a little.”

“What the fuck, baby? I’m calling the doctor.”

Before I could take a step, she wrapped her arms and legs around me to keep me in place. “I will, I promise. But...I don’t think we need to worry about it today.”

I stared into her gorgeous emerald orbs and debated whether I could be patient. Since I had big plans for the evening, and I didn’t want to ruin her holiday, I reluctantly agreed. “But tomorrow, we will call the doctor first thing.”

“Absolutely,” Cleo agreed, beaming at me with such beauty that it took my breath away.

“I love you so fucking much,” I told her as I cupped her face and rubbed my nose against hers.

“I love you, too,” she replied sweetly.

“Come on. Dinner is probably waiting for us.”

I helped her back onto her feet, then we walked hand in hand down the stairs and to the formal living room where our parents and my sister were waiting.

The meal was fantastic, but I was even happier to see how much our families seemed to enjoy each other's company. Especially because Cleo became more and more relaxed, having fun instead of being nervous.

When the supper dishes were cleared, I jumped up and announced, "I'll help with dessert."

Our mothers tried to contain their excitement, but they were doing a piss poor job of it until I glared at them. My dad grinned at me, and Rob pointed a warning finger at me, waiting for me to nod before he was all smiles too.

When I called to invite Cleo's parents to Thanksgiving, I'd asked to speak to Rob alone. I'd been prepared for a fight when I asked for his daughter's hand in marriage, partially because we'd only been a couple for such a short amount of time.

To my surprise, he told me that he'd swept Paula off her feet after one date and convinced her to marry him the next day.

"Love has no timeline, son," he'd drawled.

"So I have your blessing to propose?"

"As long as you promise to treat her like she deserves."

"Without question," I responded.

"And you don't do anything to fuck up the Nighthawks' chance at a ring this year."

I wasn't sure what to say to that...so I just agreed. "Okay."

"Then you've got my blessing."

It was a good thing we'd won that morning, or I wasn't sure if her dad would still have been as agreeable about what I was about to do.

I popped into the kitchen and retrieved a small blue box from the pocket of my sport coat, then grabbed the trays that held slices from all of the different pies and returned to the dining room.

"Why don't we all go around the room and say what we're grateful for?" my mom suggested, as scripted.

"What a lovely idea," Cleo sighed.

"I'll start," I volunteered as I pulled my chair away from the table. I turned Cleo's to the side and got down on one knee in front of her. "Baby, there is nothing on this earth that I am more grateful for than you. You bring joy and sunshine with you wherever you go, and I'm a selfish bastard, so I want to keep it in my life forever. I love you with all that I am, and I'd be even more grateful if you'd agree to be my wife."

I pulled out the box and flipped the lid to reveal a platinum ring with a

four carat, marquis cut, pink diamond.

Cleo burst into tears, but since she was smiling, I didn't freak out.

"Baby?"

"Yes!" she screamed as she launched herself at me, nearly knocking us both over. "I love you, Rigby. Absolutely! Yes!! I—"

I cut her off when I sealed my mouth over hers and kissed her with all the love and passion in me. "Thank you," I mumbled against her lips.

Cleo pulled back, and she glowed with happiness as I slipped the ring on her finger. "It's beautiful."

"So are you," I said softly.

"Okay, okay. Enough of this mushy shit and crying," my dad grumbled as he passed a hand over his suspiciously shiny eyes. "Let's eat. This pumpkin pie looks—"

"Oh, crap!" Cleo slapped her hand over her mouth and sprinted from the room.

As I hurried after her, my mother followed me, saying, "There are tests under the sink in the upstairs bathroom."

"Tests?" I repeated with a frown as I knelt behind my fiancée and gathered her long, pink hair into my hands.

Cleo had finished dry heaving and flopped back against me. "Tests?" she echoed.

"Pregnancy tests. I bought some and put them in the bathroom upstairs," my mom stated...as if it was normal for a postmenopausal woman with no children living at home to stock pregnancy tests.

We gaped at her, and she shrugged. "What? I want grandkids."

"Judith, having the tests on hand won't get her pregnant," Cleo's mom said, her tone exasperated. "If you really want grandkids right away, we can ___"

"Oh my word, stop!" Cleo sputtered. "I'm not..."

She trailed off and looked up at me, her green eyes wide with shock.

I raised an eyebrow at her, and she blushed. We hadn't used a single condom in all the times we'd fucked...and we'd been fucking like bunnies for two weeks.

"I'll go grab one!" my mom trilled as she dashed out of the bathroom.

Ten minutes later, four positive pregnancy tests stared up at us from the counter.

Our mothers cried and chattered excitedly, so I gently pushed them out of

the room, then shut and locked the door.

“Are you okay?” I asked Cleo softly as I brushed some bright pink strands behind her ear.

“I’m...I’m amazing,” she breathed as she looked up at me. Her eyes were filled with joy, and I was suddenly overwhelmed with love for my soon-to-be wife and our little one. Speaking of soon-to-be...

“Why don’t I take you upstairs so you can rest while I make arrangements for this weekend?”

I turned to unlock the door but stopped when Cleo placed her hand on my arm. “Arrangements?”

“For our wedding.”

Cleo chuckled. “We have time...wait. Did you say this weekend? We can’t possibly get married that fast.”

I jerked my thumb over my shoulder in the direction of our parents, who all stood on the other side of the door. “How long do you think your dad will let me live if I’m not married to his pregnant daughter?” As excuses went, it was lame, but it was the best one I had at the moment.

Cleo laughed, and I prepared to argue with her, but it turned out she didn’t need any more convincing. “Okay. This weekend.”

I whooped as I grabbed her up and spun her around but quickly stopped when her face turned a little green again.

“I love you, Cleo Hunt,” I said, trying out the name.

Cleo grinned. “That has a nice ring to it.” Then she put her arms around my neck and laid her head on my chest, with her cheek resting over my heart. “I love you too, Rigby. Forever.”

EPILOGUE

“**Y**ou did it, baby.”

Rigby flung his arm around my shoulders and brushed a kiss against the top of my head. We were seated in the front row of the audience for a musical that I’d worked on, one starring his sister. It was due to start in just a few minutes, and the entire theatre was packed. “I really did.”

I hadn’t been sure I’d ever see one of my set designs anywhere other than on a school stage. Finishing my degree after getting pregnant during my freshman year hadn’t been easy, even though my professors had been surprisingly understanding. Probably because I was carrying the giant baby of a six-foot-three, two-hundred-and-twenty-pound professional football player who glowered at anyone he thought might even consider crossing me.

Luckily, the timing had allowed me to pick my studies back up in the fall after having Ryan in early July. My mom came and stayed with us for the first few months, then Judith had taken over grandmother duties for the next three. Their help got me through that first semester, and then the other football wives pitched in to watch our baby boy while I was in class, working on projects, or studying for tests.

Although I had been a football fan since I was a little girl, I had no idea the team was like one big family until my wedding day when half of the guys—and a bunch of wives, fiancées, and girlfriends—flew out to Wisconsin to see us get married on such short notice. And they’d continued to prove each day since then that they were more than willing to pitch in if we needed anything.

Judith turned to grin at me as she tugged on Rigby’s wrist. “Don’t get too

handsy with your wife. You might send her into early labor with all of this excitement.”

My mom and dad were babysitting for us, and his had come to the theatre since Natalie was the show's star. They'd all come in for opening night...or at least that was the excuse they gave us. Since they planned to stay for two weeks, I figured it had more to do with my looming due date and them wanting to be around when their second grandchild was born.

Rigby's startled gaze jumped to my face, and his hold on me tightened. “Are you okay, baby? Are you having contractions? Do we need to leave?”

His parents chuckled as I shook my head with a sigh. Reaching over to grab his other hand, I placed it over my rounded belly. “I'm fine, see? No contractions or anything like that.”

“I was just teasing you,” his mom added.

“You can't blame him for being on edge with how pregnant she is and after how quickly the last delivery went,” Tony pointed out.

Rigby sent his dad a grateful look and nodded. “First pregnancies are supposed to take longer, and I don't want you to give birth in the back of a car on the way to the hospital.”

Judith and I shared a humorous glance. As the only two people in our little group who had actually given birth to a human, we didn't need a reminder about what to expect. But I'd gotten all sorts of advice from Rigby since he had read even more pregnancy books this time around than he had with Ryan.

I knew he was nervous about getting me to the hospital in time. Last week, he insisted on packing my labor and delivery bag and keeping it in the car.

Although, his worries weren't completely irrational considering the traffic in Manhattan. Getting to a hospital wasn't just a quick drive, which was why I wasn't crazy enough to pretend I wasn't in labor when it happened.

Turning to Judith, I murmured, “Don't tease him. He's already on edge enough that I wouldn't be surprised if he swept me into his arms and carried me out of here out of abundance of caution...before I got to see all of my hard work put to good use.”

She winked at me with a smile. “Only because you're the one asking, dear.”

Rigby chuckled and pulled me against his side to whisper, “And you didn't believe me when I told you that you were my mom's favorite.”

I giggled as the curtain raised and watched in awe as my set design was revealed to the audience. Unfortunately, I only got to enjoy my sense of accomplishment for a few minutes. We had apparently jinxed me with the talk about going into labor.

There was a gushing sensation between my legs, and I gasped. “My water just broke!”

Rigby jumped from his seat and did just as I predicted, carrying me past shocked faces all the way through the theatre.

It turned out to be a good thing he was prepared because his mom almost had to help deliver our little girl. Clara was born only fifteen short minutes after we arrived at the hospital.

Curious about Ames? He gets his story in [False Start!](#)

And if you join our [newsletter](#), you’ll get an email from us with a link to claim a FREE copy of The Virgin’s Guardian, which is no longer available on Amazon.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The writing duo of Elle Christensen and Rochelle Paige team up under the Fiona Davenport pen name to bring you sexy, insta-love stories filled with alpha males. If you want a quick & dirty read with a guaranteed happily ever after, then give Fiona Davenport a try!

Don't miss out on new release news and giveaways; sign up for our [newsletter](#)!