



Baxter
Bites

Windsor
SECURITIES
BOOK TWO

Curves
AND CODING
KAT BAXTER

CURVES AND CODING

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Curves and Coding

Kat Baxter

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CURVES AND CODING

FROM THE AUTHOR *of Real Men Love Curves comes your next sweet and steamy read about co-workers who want each other and the secrets that might keep them apart.*

Code monkey. Programmer. Computer nerd. Hacker. I've been called them all. They're all true. But so is convicted felon. It doesn't matter that I hacked that system to protect a friend.

It's why I can't have Samantha, despite the fact that I want her more than anything. She's sweet and funny and her sexy curves keep me up at night.

But then I kissed her. I couldn't help myself. One night, it's all I can give her because I don't want her to know the truth about who I am.

Who am I kidding? One night with her will never be enough.

*Curves and Coding is the second book in the new Windsor Securities series. If you love **bad boy nerds with filthy mouths and curvy, adorkable heroines**, then you'll LOVE Kat Baxter's newest release. BUY now or read for FREE on Kindle Unlimited.*

***Author's guarantee: no cheating and HEA.*

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CHAPTER 1

JASON

The office is dark, and I'm all alone, but I prefer it this way. It's when I get my best work done. I'm the main tech guy for an elite security company so I spend a lot of my time downloading, upgrading and coding. Which means I have access to everyone's computers.

I'm currently sitting at the main reception desk and I've had to raise the chair to the highest setting because Sam—she's our receptionist—is pocket-sized. Well, in height. In every way that counts, she's full and lush and so fucking sexy I have a hard time thinking straight when we're in the same room.

The first week she was here, I couldn't be around her at all because I had a constant hard-on. The number of times I had to lock myself in one of the bathrooms to jerk off was embarrassing. Like I was a goddamn teenage virgin. I haven't been a virgin in a long damn time. I might not have the same game as a lot of the ex-military dudes I work with. But plenty of pretty girls like nerds.

Just not Sam. Sam, who liked everyone, who joked and teased and flirted with every guy who walked through the front doors, clammed up and went silent whenever I was around.

Because that was just my fucking luck.

It's already distracting enough sitting here in her chair, surrounded by her intoxicating scent and all of her personal things. The picture of her family,

the stack of weird stuffed toys. They're shaped like beans, but I think they're supposed to be characters from Star Wars. Tsum-Tsums I think they're called. For someone as pretty and decidedly not nerdy as she is, she sure has a thing for Star Wars. She even has tiny Kylo Ren and Rey figurines. Don't even get me started on all her colored pens. The woman is obsessed with pens of varying colors.

I push my glasses up my nose and focus on my task.

I login and move through the screens to get where I need to go, but something grabs my attention. I double-click the icon on the file labeled "forbidden."

I scan through the first several pages until I realize what I'm reading. This is a story of some sort and I can only assume part of Sam's secret fantasies.

The rain pours down around us, but I can't feel the cold or the dampness. All I feel is the intense arousal that flows through me whenever he's close to me. He crowds into me, pressing my back to the bricked wall behind me.

"So you have any idea how much I want you?" his voice is low and growly.

My core tightens as his deep blue eyes search my face.

"Fuck, Sidney, I'm hard all the time around you." His finger drags along the edge of my low-cut sweater. "You wear things like this to tease me, don't you, baby?"

"I can stop if it bothers you," I say. I slide my hands up his hard chest. The rain is pure background at this point and my lips are dying for him to kiss them. My breasts ache for his hands.

His hand slides along my neck to cup the back of my head, then he's kissing me. Long and deep and hard. His tongue is magic as it spears into my mouth and slides against my own. I know I'm whimpering. I know I'm rubbing against him like a cat in heat, but I don't even care. I've wanted him for so long and finally—FINALLY—his mouth is on mine.

I look away from the document and adjust my pants which are noticeably tighter than they were before. I shouldn't be reading this. It's her own private intellectual property.

I've heard her talk about the fact that she's a writer, but I never knew what kind of writing she did.

My impression of Sam has always been that she's a good girl. She doesn't dress provocatively, she's friendly to everyone, and she's hilarious. This bit that I read though suggests there might be more going on than I expected.

I know Sam is too good for me. I'm a reformed convicted hacker, and I'm not gentle in the bedroom. I'm not a romantic guy. I'm not a relationship guy. I'm the stereotypical geeky loner who stays home with his laptop and video games. When I get the urge, I find a willing woman and we're one and done. She knows what she's signing up for.

But Samantha, she's a forever kind of girl and I have zero things to offer a woman like that. Doesn't make me not want her though. Doesn't make me not go home and think of her rocking curves when I'm in bed alone.

I'm not even a good guy. Case in point, I'm violating her privacy by reading this. Even acknowledging that, I don't close the document, I read the whole damn thing.

And a couple days later when I rescue her on the side of the road when her car breaks down...yeah, any good guy could do that without kissing her. That is not how I handled it.

CHAPTER 2

SAMANTHA

I'm shutting down my computer for the day and getting ready to leave the office when the front door opens. The owner comes in, tall and broad and ridiculously handsome—as all the men who work here are. He walks with a slight limp because he has a prosthetic leg from the knee down.

“Hey bossman, I didn't think you'd be back until tomorrow.”

It's then that I see the red-headed bombshell behind him.

He smiles widely at me and it's not that Cade isn't a smiler, but he's not really a smiler. But that grin is big and effortless and one hundred percent authentic.

He grabs the woman and pulls her close to him. “I wanted to show Summer the offices and introduce her to everyone.” He kisses the woman's cheek. “Sugar, this is Sam, she keeps us all in line and makes sure everything runs smoothly.”

I stand and walk around the desk to shake the woman's hand. “Nice to meet you, Summer, was it?”

“Yes, it's Summer. And the pleasure is all mine.” She glances around the open space that acts as a lobby for Windsor Securities.

“If you're on your way out, I don't want to keep you. Just wanted to show off my girl,” Cade says.

“I didn't realize you'd been seeing anyone,” I say.

“It's new,” Summer says at the exact same time as Cade says, “it's

forever.”

Interesting. “Oh hey, how was your brother’s wedding?”

The couple in front of me crack up and I know I’m missing the joke.

“It’s a story for another day.”

“Sounds like it.” I watch from my desk at reception as Cade shows Summer around making introductions.

I feel a spike of longing as I watch them interact, not because I have a crush on Cade or anything like that, but they are so obviously crazy about one another. I can’t imagine they’ve been together long—because surely he would have mentioned a girl before now. Plus, his entire demeanor is different.

Still, this is the stuff of romance novels. It’s the kind of love I write about. The kind of love I dream about for myself—when I let myself dream about that kind of thing.

Of their own volition, my eyes scan the bull pen of desks to land on the familiar chiseled jaw and tousled brown hair of Jason Murphey.

He’s standing by his desk, shaking hands with Summer. Those sex-god, pouty lips of his tugging into a rare genuine smile as he chats with her.

I say rare, because Jason isn’t much of a smiler. Or much of a chatter, for that matter. If you’re lucky, you can get a smirk out of him and a sarcastic comment. If you’re me, you get a scowl and an annoyed grumble. And that’s on a good day. On an average day, I get glazed dead-eyes that look right past me and stony silence.

Hey, I get it.

He’s smart.

Like, crazy smart. Scary smart.

In an office full of pretty smart guys (all ex-military except for Jason), he’s a computer hacker who puts us all to shame. He was top of his class at MIT for God’s sake before he dropped out for mysterious reasons.

And then there’s me. The lowly receptionist.

I don’t mind being the lowly receptionist. Most people at Windsor Security are great. No one treats me like shit because I’ve never served my country. Almost no one rolls their eyes at my (largely unused) degree in psychology. Mostly I answer the phones and greet any clients who might happen to visit our fourth floor offices. I keep the Keurig well-stocked and make small talk with the clients.

That’s enough for everyone in the office. Well, nearly everyone.

Mostly, I love that this job keeps my brain empty and stays here when I leave. Allowing me plenty of time to write in the evenings and weekends.

And if that's not good enough for a certain brilliant programmer? ... Well, he can bite me.

It's just that I can't stop wishing ... well, that he would actually bite me.

Somewhere interesting, like the inside of my thigh. Or maybe my ass cheek.

Great.

And now, I'm flushed (and probably splotchy) and my pants are definitely wet.

Because the list of things I wish that man would do to me is long and detailed and more X-rated than the books I write.

Okay, *as* X-rated.

Since Jason either doesn't know I exist or doesn't like me, the whole perennially damp panties situation is a little out of control. And, yes, I know. It's very unlikely that he doesn't know I exist when I've worked here for nearly year. I know.

But it's easier to pretend that's a possibility than to face the fact that my dream guy thinks I'm a useless airhead.

Don't judge me.

You can leave that to me, because trust me when I tell you I am not proud of how obsessed I am with Jason.

Who will never in a million years look at me the way Cade is currently looking at Summer.

Before I dissolve into a puddle of self-indulgent goo, I look down and realize that it's time for me to head out.

I call out a general goodbye, ignoring the stab of pain when Jason meets my gaze for an instant, his scowl deepening before he looks away. I grab my bag off the floor. "Well, I'll see y'all later."

"Hey Sam, be careful out there. It's really started to rain," Cade says.

I walk back to my desk and grab my umbrella. "Thanks for the warning."

Twenty minutes later I'm sitting on the side of the road in a downpour and the front passenger side tire is a mangled mess. At least, I assume it is. I'd known for a while I needed new tires, but I'd been putting it off.

As soon as my car hit the mid-forties, I'd heard a loud pop, whooosh, flunk, flunk, flunk. I knew instantly it was blowout because ... well, hello? ... writers research everything and Kate Wallace, the heroine in my first book

had a blowout. It's why she didn't catch the bad guy until the third act.

My phone isn't getting a signal for some mysterious reason and my stomach is growling. I wrote during my lunch break and munched on nuts and cheese instead of having a full meal. Basically, I have three choices. I could drive home on the flat tire and probably ruin my wheel. I could change it myself (Hey, I have mad skills.), but it's raining and I don't wanna. Or I can walk back to the office, which is only a five-minute drive away, but probably at least twenty minutes on foot. In the rain.

Just when I thought I couldn't hate today anymore, a car slows behind me.

Great. And now I will be murdered by a serial killer. This isn't even the most dangerous highway in Texas for serial killers! That's Interstate 45. Where Kate eventually got cornered by the killer and then rescued by the hero.

I'm already mentally preparing myself to fight off a serial killer with what I have in the car when I realize it's Jason. Despite that, I jump when he knocks on my window. Of course my power window doesn't work so I crack my door open.

"You okay?" he asks in that growly voice I find so irresistible.

The rain has slowed some, but it's still pelting down on him. He's got droplets on his glasses and his tightly cropped beard is as damp as is his short brown hair.

Sweet baby Jesus, how does he look even hotter wet than he does dry?

I nod in answer to his question. Then quickly shake my head when his scowl deepens, because—duh!—obviously I am not okay.

"Need a ride somewhere?"

"Yes!" I grab my stuff, open my door and keys, then step outside. "That would be great, thank you."

He puts his hand at the small of my back and guides me over to his passenger seat. I try not to shiver or melt into goo or otherwise embarrass myself. Not entirely sure I'm successful. After all, this is the first time he's actually touched me and I feel the heat of his hand through my rapidly dampening dress.

He drives a nice car. It's sleek and black and no doubt has fancy leather seats. He opens the door for me, but I hesitate to get in.

I'm about to ask for a towel or something to sit on, but I make the mistake of looking up at his face and he's staring at me intently. My sister told me

once she thought Jason was in love with me, but I'm sure she's crazy. Still, in this moment, Jason is rocking the sexy nerd thing. Glasses, plain conservative clothes, except on Friday's when he wears those jeans that make his ass look like a national treasure and those geeky shirts that make me laugh.

Something in his expression changes and suddenly he steps closer to me.

There's a moment I'm sure he's going to kiss me. So sure. I even bob up on my toes a little.

But instead he leans down and says, a little loudly to be heard over the rain, "Are you gonna get in?"

"I—" Oh, shit. I drop back on my heels. Great. Now I look like an idiot. "Do you have a towel or something? I don't want to ruin your seats."

He cocks an eyebrow in the direction of the open door and I realize the rain has been getting in while I stood here.

"Just get in," he mutters.

I scramble in, wincing at the water and mud I bring in on my feet, wishing I had some hard surface to bang my head on.

Of course he wasn't going to kiss me! It's raining and we're standing on the side of the road. Oh, and he hates me and thinks I'm an idiot.

Besides which, it's not like he knows I've had this fantasy of being kissed in the rain on repeat since that one Spiderman movie. Or that in my fantasy he's my Spiderman.

"Where to?" he asks, his voice deep and husky.

I rattle off my address and he nods, types into the GPS in his dash, checks his mirrors, then pulls out into traffic.

"Thanks for rescuing me," I say.

"Anytime," he grumbles and I can feel the annoyance radiating off him.

Ignore it! I tell myself.

So what? He doesn't like me. It's not a big deal. Not everyone has to like me. Still ...

"I really appreciate it."

He gives me that look. The one that implies he thinks I'm an idiot.

Which I can ignore. He's just giving me a ride home. It doesn't matter if he glares at me. I can totally let this go.

Except I don't. Because I'm me.

"I'm just saying, I really appreciate it."

"It's not a big deal," he says, as if every word is made of shards of glass and speaking to me actually hurts him.

“Sure. Right. But it’s not *not* a big deal. I mean, you’ll have to go out of your way. I’m all wet.”

He shoots me an unreadable, dark look.

“My clothes are all wet!” I blurt. “I’m not wet. I mean, my skin is wet. And my hair. From the rain. And I’m getting your car wet. That’s the point. Water is getting your car wet.”

“Just stop talking,” he snaps.

“Right. Absolutely. Silence is golden. Good call.”

Gah.

I always do this around him. I get nervous and babble-y and sound all squeaky. And then say really goofy things—because I’m cool like that.

The silence stretches between us. I look at the GPS map on his dash. We’re still fourteen minutes away from my apartment complex. How is that possible?

I clench my hands in front of me.

I unclench them.

Maybe I need to do some deep breathing exercises. Yeah. That will calm me down. I’ll just inhale and ...

Shit.

Abort! Abort!

Deep breaths smell like him. Yummy and manly and ... lickable.

Okay. Only shallow breaths from now on. Or no breathing at all.

Or...

“I asked you not to talk. I didn’t say you couldn’t breathe.”

I exhale. Loudly.

Oh dear Lord. This is so much worse than babbling.

“I was just trying to say thank you. That’s all. You didn’t have to stop to pick me up and you did. So I’m grateful.”

“Jesus.” He practically growls the word. “You’re my co-worker. And you were stranded by the side of the road with a flat tire. In the rain. Of course I was going to stop. How much of an asshole do you think I am?”

“I know you’re not an asshole!” Once I literally watched him help an old lady cross the street in front of our building. Not that I’m a stalker who watches his every move or anything. “It’s just I know you don’t—”

I break off, not quite sure how to finish.

“I don’t what?”

Okay, there is no easy way to say this.

So I just blurt, “I know you don’t like me.” I’m staring out the front windshield with laser focus, but from the corner of my eye, I still see him shoot a look at me. “Not that everyone has to like me. It’s fine. Totally fine.”

“You think I don’t like you?” he asks, his voice slow and even.

And, maybe if I’m being generous, slightly less growly than normal.

Something inside of me uncoils just a little, relaxes, and I let myself look at him.

This close, alone in the car with him—with all those yummy, Jason smells I can’t not breathe in—it’s almost too much. He’s too lean and ragged. Too many hard angles I might cut myself on.

“It really is okay,” I say and for the first time since opening my car door, I sound like myself. Not like some nervous, high-pitched cartoon version of me.

After a long moment he asks, “Why do you think I don’t like you?”

I give a shrug, realize he probably didn’t see it since he’s driving, and then explain. “You never talk to me. You leave any room I walk into. You glower a lot when I’m around.”

“I don’t glower.”

“You glower. Or brood. Whatever. It’s pretty obvious that I annoy you.”

I hope this all sounds way more chill to him than it does to me.

Somehow, I doubt it.

He probably thinks I’m a stalker. Which, I am perilously close to being.

“You don’t—” he starts, but then cuts himself off as he turns into my apartment complex. He mutters something I don’t quite catch, but that definitely has the f-word dropped in there. Then he asks, “Which one?”

When I look at him now, I can see him more clearly under the security lights. His ever-present scowl is even deeper than normal and it takes me a second to break free of his laser focus to answer his question.

“I’m in Building D. At the back and to the left.”

He drives deeper into the parking lot, following my directions to my building. When we reach Building D, he pulls into one of the spots for visitors.

He slides the car into park and shifts to look at me. “You don’t annoy me, Sam.”

The sound of my name on his lips does delicious things to me. Delicious, but bittersweet. I’m almost smiling as I point out, “We’ve worked together for almost a year and this is the first time we’ve had an actual conversation. I

think it's pretty obvious that I do annoy you."

"Ten months, three weeks."

"What?"

"You started at Windsor ten months and three weeks ago."

"Oh. That's specific. I guess because you have a head for numbers. Being a computer guy and all."

He lets out a huff of laughter.

The sound is so sexy I nearly jump him. Instead, I blurt, "Anyway, thanks for the ride!" before flinging open the door and throwing myself out.

I'm making a run for the stairs when I hear him calling my name.

I don't slow down, but he catches me, grabbing my arm and turning me to face him.

"Sam, I don't find you annoying."

"Please don't make this more awkward than it is, Jason. It's okay, truly."

He shakes his head. "You don't understand."

Awesome. He wants to tell me WHY he doesn't like me. This should be fun.

"I can't look at you," he starts and he's searching my face, probably looking for a gentler way to tell me he thinks I'm a troll. "I can't look at you, Samantha, because you're so goddamn beautiful that once I start looking I won't stop."

Wait, what?

His grip on my arm loosens, but he doesn't release me. Instead his thumb works slow circles onto my skin. He licks his lips and the movement is so pornographic and sexy I nearly groan. I am such a goner for this man.

"So, you don't think I'm an idiot?"

He gives a low chuckle that hits me hard in the gut. "No. I think you're smart and funny and stronger than you know."

"Then why don't you even talk to me?"

"I *can't* talk to you. I can't talk to you because I'm afraid once I start, then everything I want to say to you will come tumbling out."

"Like what?" I ask.

"Like how much I want to see your body, worship every curve with my tongue."

I think my brain has shut off. I'm just gaping at him. This is not at all what I thought he was thinking when he looked at me.

"I want to do filthy things to you. I want to bend you over your desk at

work and eat you out from behind. I want to spend all night fucking you so good you won't remember any other man has touched you."

He jerks me to him and slants his mouth over mine. His kiss is intense and possessive. For one moment, I'm too shocked to even move, because—hello Jason/Spiderman fantasy!—and then I snap out of my stupor. I meet him with every stroke until we're both soaked and panting.

His pale green eyes are darker now and he's still staring at my mouth. "You should get inside."

My body is pretty much made of lust at this point. My panties are soaked and it has nothing to do with the rain.

I'm totally going to ask him inside my apartment. It would be the nice thing to do because his clothes are all wet. That and I totally want to jump him.

I summon my courage and turn to face him. "Do you want to come inside?"

"Yes." He threads our fingers together, then we walk to my door.

I hold the door open for him and he hesitates, standing on my tiny porch.

"Jason?"

His eyes draw to mine.

"I want you to come inside with me," I tell him.

That gets him moving.

"Let me get you a towel."

I come back from my bathroom with a towel and he's standing in my entryway without a shirt.

Holy fuckballs! First off, there are muscles. So many muscles that are normally hidden under his unassuming clothes. Secondly, accenting those sexy muscles are several tattoos. It's just black ink, no color, mostly words with a few symbols. I'm too distracted by the muscles though to look too thoroughly at the tats.

I swallow and step towards him.

"You kissed me," I say, because I have so much game. I resist the urge to roll my eyes at myself.

"I did. You kissed me back."

I run my hand down his chest, using my finger to outline those six defined abs. Then I use both hands to slide against the perfect "V" he has that disappears into his pants.

"Adonis's belt."

“What?”

“That’s what they call that “V” thing on men.” I crook my finger at him so he leans down to me. “It makes me wet,” I whisper.

He picks me up, grabbing my ass and presses my back to my front door.

“You have no idea how much I want you, Samantha.”

“Show me.”

His lips collide with mine and it’s a battle of teeth, tongues and lips. It’s hot and wet and I’m so turned on I think I could come just like this.

“Bedroom,” I gasp as I pull away from the kiss. “That way.” I point down the hall and he makes quick work of my hallway.

My cat meows lazily from the bed, then jumps off with a hiss and runs out of the room.

“She’s not very nice to anyone so don’t take it personally.”

He lowers me to the floor letting my body slide against his. I’m not a tall woman and I’ve got curves to spare; big hips, big boobs and a squishy belly. But judging from the giant erection I felt rub against me, Jason has no qualms about my less than perfect body.

Once my feet hit the floor I pull my blouse off and toss it behind me, then follow suit with my wet slacks. I wasn’t planning to entertain tonight so my undies and bra don’t match, but they’re both cute so I’m calling it a win.

He’s just standing there, those green eyes of his watching my every move.

I reach behind me and unhook my bra, then let it fall down my arms to the floor.

“Damn, Samantha, you’re so beautiful.”

I unfasten his belt, then his trousers and yank them down his legs. He’s barely contained in a pair of Dr. Who boxer briefs.

How is it even possible that he got hotter just by that?

I fall to my knees and pull out his cock. It’s big. The biggest one I’ve ever seen, long and thick with the slightest curve. It’s so damn sexy.

I look up at him and lean forward and lick up the underside of his shaft.

“Fuck,” he hisses.

He wraps my hair around his hand and I take him fully in my mouth, at least as much of him as I can fit. He’s salty and warm and I can’t wait to feel him inside my pussy. I reach between my legs, circling my clit through my panties.

“Stop!” he commands. “That pussy is mine. Get on the bed.”

I'm shocked by his authoritative voice, but it turns me on even more so I crawl up into the center of the bed.

He finishes undressing; removing his shoes and socks, his boxers and setting his glasses on my dresser.

He's a sight to behold. Thick, muscular thighs and that perfectly sculpted torso. He's got a thin line of hair that goes straight through his belly button down to the trimmed thatch at his balls.

He puts one knee on the bed and then the other.

"Let me see that pretty pussy, Samantha. Let me see how wet you are for me."

Never would I have imagined that quiet, nerdy Jason had a bossy, filthy mouth in the bedroom.

I am here for it.

He pulls my panties down and brings them to his nose and inhales. His eyes close, and then he licks his lips.

He is so sexy I'm pretty sure all he'll have to do is blow on my clit and I'll come all over him.

His thumb slides through my folds and he pushes my legs wider apart.

"Look at this pretty pink pussy. Fuck, Samantha, you've been hiding this from me the whole time. All those times I had to go the bathroom and fuck my fist so you wouldn't see how hard you made me. I knew your pussy would be perfect." He uses both hands to spread my lips apart.

I'm too turned on to be self-conscious.

He slides two fingers inside me. "So tight and wet." He curves those fingers up and slides them against my g-spot.

I've only ever been able to find that with a toy. It's been a no-man zone until now, literally.

"I want to eat that pussy, but I need to see you come for the first time. I need to watch you fall apart."

I nod, unsure of what I'm actually agreeing to, because my body is spiraling higher and tighter.

He uses his other hand and brings a finger to my clit, tracing the delicate skin around it before finally circling the sensitive nub. His hands work in tandem and my orgasm bursts forth like an explosion. My back arches up and I'm pretty sure I get a whole new surge of liquid between my thighs. The pleasure rocks through me, beading my nipples into tight nearly painful tips.

I think I call out his name, but I might have blacked out there for a

minute. I've never come that hard.

He grabs a condom wrapper from the bed that I never even saw him retrieve. He tears it open.

"I really want to fuck you raw."

"Do it. I'm on the pill."

His hands still and he looks me in the eyes. "You need to mean those words, Samantha. That's not something you can take back."

"I want it, Jason. I don't want anything between us. And I'm clean. It's been over a year since I had a boyfriend and I've been tested since then."

"Fuck. You're going to ruin me." He sits back on his knees and grabs my hips and pulls me to him, tilting me so that my ass is resting against his bent legs.

Then he presses down on his dick, notches at my entrance and surges forward.

"Oh god!" I cry out. Talk about ruining people. I'll never want another man after Jason, I feel that in my bones.

"I wish you could see us from this angle, Samantha. Your greedy pussy swallowing up my cock." He begins to fuck me in earnest now, thrusting in and out of me and he's hitting every magic spot in my body.

"This pussy was made for me." He grips one of my tits and plays with my nipple. "Say it."

"My pussy belongs to you."

"Fucking right it does."

CHAPTER 3

JASON

Mine. Mine. Mine.

That thought runs through my head with every thrust I make. She's slick and hot and gripping me like a goddamn vice and I'm going through the periodic table to try to stave off my orgasm.

I want to feel her come around my cock.

She's so damn beautiful, spread out like this for me. I know I'll never want another woman. I'm ready to put a baby in Sam and a ring on her finger.

"Yes, Jason, I'm going to come." Her hands squeeze my thighs as she cries out and her pussy clenches around my dick.

I shift so she's flat on the bed and I can lean over her. I kiss her deep all the while fucking her hard. I've got to keep my mouth on hers before I say something stupid like ask her to marry me or promise my undying love. It wouldn't be a lie. None of it would be.

Still she's not ready for that.

I break our kiss for a second. "Wrap your legs around me, Samantha." She does and the feel of her thick thighs circling me nearly makes me lose it. Just a little more.

With her opened like this I know I'm rocking against her clit. Her moaning tells me that's true. I kiss her again and every nerve in my body is on fire. She's breathing life into my cold, dead heart.

She pulls away from the kiss as her orgasm rocks through her body. She chants my name and I bury my face in her neck as I pour myself inside her.

When we've both come down from our climaxes, I stay inside her and look down into her eyes.

"That was fucking perfect," I tell her. Then I stand and find my way to her bathroom, clean myself off.

It's not until I'm in her bathroom, washing my dick off with one of her pristine white washcloths, that I force myself to take a hard look in the mirror.

"What the fuck are you doing?" I mutter, barely able to even meet my own gaze.

What *am* I doing?

This is Samantha for fuck's sake. Fucking her may have been a wet dream come true, but I won't get to keep her.

She's the nicest person I know. She's sweet and funny and ... okay, yes, sexy as fuck. And not afraid to rub her clit while she blows me, which may have been the sexiest thing I've ever seen.

I'm nearly hard again just thinking about it.

Jesus Christ. I'm so fucked.

Because she deserves better than me.

I'm a fucking criminal.

If it was just that, maybe I could get past it. After all, I did the right thing, even if it meant breaking the law. I would do it again. Hell, I have done it again, I was just a lot subtler and better at hiding my tracks the second time, so I've only been caught and convicted the one time.

So, yeah, if it was just about my record, I could talk myself past it.

But the way Sam acted in the car? The things she said?

Her words fucking slayed me.

She thought I hated her. She actually thanked me for stopping to pick her up.

That's how much of an asshole I normally am.

I'm the dick who watched her from afar for ten months without ever saying a civil word to her, who hacked her computer and read her personal shit, who fucked her raw at the first opportunity.

And now I'm the asshole who's going to walk away from her.

I rinse off the washcloth, then run the water long enough to warm it up for her before bringing the damp towel out to her to wipe my seed from

between her legs.

Which about fucking kills me. Because what I really want to do is bury my head between her thighs and lick my cum off of her.

Instead, I grab my clothes and put them on. I know I can't stay. I can't spend the night holding her or I'll never let her go and she deserves someone better than me.

She pulls the sheet up to cover her body. "You're leaving?"

"Yeah, you need to get some sleep. I'll come pick you up in the morning so you don't need to worry about getting a ride to work."

She frowns, pushing herself up onto her elbows. "Are you sure? Because I can call my sister or a ride share?"

For a second, I imagine walking into the office, my arm around her shoulder, her body close to mine. I imagine kissing her on the forehead in front of everybody, the way Cade kissed Summer today as he introduced her around. And then I imagine the questions. The looks of shock.

Because seriously. What would a sweet woman like Sam being doing with a surly asshole like me?

Still, there's no way I'm letting her take a fucking ride share to work after tonight.

"Positive." I kiss her forehead. I do it now, while I still can. Then I cup her face. "We should probably keep this to ourselves, right?"

There's a flash of something unreadable in her eyes. Maybe it's pain, but maybe it's relief.

It's there and gone so fast, I doubt I'd be able to guess what she was feeling even if I was good at that shit. Which I'm not.

She nods fiercely. "Absolutely. Wouldn't want things to get awkward at work. Uh, thanks for rescuing me. And for the orgasms."

I chuckle awkwardly, then turn to go.

She was hurt.

I may be a dumbass, but even I can recognize the pain in her eyes. She thinks I'm rejecting her. But it's for her own damn good. If she knew how much I already cared about her, she'd get it.

Now I just need to stay away from her.

CHAPTER 4

SAMANTHA

Despite my instinct to huddle under the covers for the next several hours—or months—I get up and take a quick shower. By the time I’m done, it’s time for my regular video chat with my critique partner so I sign in because I know if I don’t she will freak out. I might as well talk to her. Normally I’d go to my sister for advice, but she’s on a romantic getaway with Sebastian and I refuse to interrupt that. She waited way too long for them to get together.

Poppy’s face comes into view, with her wheat-colored hair and wide brown eyes. That gap-toothed smile that I simply adore, but the moment she lays eyes on me her smile fades.

“What’s the matter, love?”

And then the second I hear her soothing, familiar British accent, I burst into tears. Not big, ugly sobs (I got that out of my system in the shower), but even I can see the red in my eyes and nose in my tiny Zoom picture. I blow out a breath.

“You’ve been crying, Sam, what happened?”

“I don’t actually understand what just happened. I had the single most intense and satisfying and hot sex of my life and then he just left.” I blow my nose not caring that I’m red faced and snotty. This is my best friend and even though we’ve never met face-to-face, we’ve been through everything together.

“I’m going to need more details on the hot sex, but not until you’re not

sad anymore. Can I ask who we're talking about?"

"This guy I work with. My car broke down and it was raining and he rescued me and brought me home. But he kissed me first in the rain and it was hot so I invited him inside. I really thought we were connecting, you know?"

She nods sagely. "I'm assuming this is Jason."

I pause, frown. "How did you know?"

"Because you talk about him all the time."

I do? "Wait, I talk about him? Like more than the other guys I work with?"

"Yes." She waves her hand dismissively. "Tell me what happened after the sex."

I take a cleansing breath and blow my nose one more time. "He cleaned me up, got dressed and left."

"He didn't say anything?"

"He told me it was perfect and that he'd pick me up in the morning so I didn't have to worry about finding a ride. Then he told me we should keep this a secret from the people at work."

Poppy's eyes narrow to murderous slits. "Bugger."

"Exactly. I thought it meant something more than just a hookup, because he said all these things."

"What kind of things?"

"About how he couldn't stop thinking about me. Stuff like that." When I say it out loud, I hear how stupid it sounds. So I might as well say the rest of the stupid shit running through my head.

"It was clearly a line. Just a thing he says to get laid. He's probably said those same words to a dozen other women. Given how hot he looked without a shirt on, maybe he's said those words to hundreds of women."

How could I have fallen for such an epic line of bullshit?

Well, the answer to that is obvious.

I fell for his bullshit because I'm a romance writer. And that kind of bullshit is exactly the kind of thing a hero would say to a heroine.

Except—you know—he would mean it.

He wouldn't say it, fuck her brains out, and then causally be like, "Hey see you at work tomorrow where I'm going to pretend not to know you."

"It's my own damn fault," I mutter out loud. "I get too attached with sex. I just can't do casual."

“That does not make this your fault. Casual sex is tricky. And you obviously like this man.”

I can't even argue with her. Because I totally do. I work with a veritable line up of hot men, but quiet, nerdy Jason is the one that has all my attention. There's something soulful about his eyes.

I sigh. “Well, I guess I can chalk up the experience to research for my next love scene. Let me just say that his dirty talking skills were on point.”

There's that wide grin of hers. “I still want more details, but for now, shall we move into work talk? Or do you want to trash talk him for being an arse first?”

I chuckle. It's not as boisterous as my normal laugh, but it's real. “We can talk work. I'll let you know if I need to say anything else about Jason.” I take a breath. “Oh, I will say this, I will not be riding with him to work tomorrow. That's some bullshit right there.”

“Agreed. If I was closer, I'd take you.”

“On your bicycle? Poppy, you don't drive, remember?”

“Pah, it can't be that difficult. Millions of people do it every day.”

“I adore you, I hope you know that.”

“Likewise, love. Now, let me tell you about this most recent email I got from a reader.”

We chat for a while longer and set our writing goals for the week. Then I make myself a cup of chamomile tea and shoot a text off to my boss. He's a car guy. He'll know where I can have mine towed to get fixed. Which he totally does. And he offers to come and pick me up. Perfect solution all around.

I send a quick text to Jason letting him know I don't need a ride, then I power off my phone so I don't see any responses from him.

I don't sleep worth a damn. I keep replaying every moment with Jason over and over again. No man has ever kissed me like that. Like he owned me. Like my body was his to command.

Thankfully Cade is an early riser and gets us into the office before anyone else arrives. I switch on my phone and don't see any messages from Jason. It shows that he read mine though.

Jackass. He's just not at all who I thought he was, which makes me so damn sad.

When he comes into the building I make sure I'm conveniently on the phone assisting an imaginary new customer, answering all the questions and staring intently on my computer. I know he's standing behind me at my desk. I can feel the intensity of his gaze.

But I keep up my charade until he heads for his desk on the other side of the open room.

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CHAPTER 5

JASON

She has been ignoring me all day. Hasn't even looked my way. Completely ignored the fact that on my way back in from lunch, I brought her back her favorite cupcake. I just set it on her desk before heading to my desk.

This is unacceptable. I need her to talk to me, look at me, something. I feel like I'm dying inside without her smile aimed in my direction. Like someone turned off the goddamn sun.

For ten months, I pined for her like a fucking school boy with his first hard on. But I stayed away and kept my dick in my pants. We didn't interact much (or at all if her assessment from last night was correct), but it was bearable. But she was always there, at the edges of my awareness, quietly being her beautiful, sunny self.

Now, she's shutting me out entirely and I feel like I've been gutted.

I know what I need to do and it's the perfect time to make it happen. I hack into the system and set everything up. Then I wait until she gets up from her desk at 10:45. It's time for her morning coffee run.

I wait until she's grabbed her bag, then catch her right as she goes into the elevator. Her eyes go wide as I step into the elevator beside her, but then her gaze skitters away. We're closed in, alone, and this is exactly what I wanted, even though I hate that she's not looking at me.

She looks so pretty today with her bright yellow shirt and black skirt. We go down two floors and right on schedule the elevator stops. I just want a

chance to talk to her. Maybe I can figure out a way to stop being a dick to her. Maybe we can be friends.

She looks up at the ceiling, then frowns at the display panel.

I move so that I'm in front of her. She's so petite, even in heels and I tower over her.

"You've been ignoring me, Samantha."

She gives me a fake smile and it damn near breaks my heart. "I thought that's what you wanted."

Of course that isn't what I want. I want all of her. Every scrap she's willing to give me, but I don't deserve any of it.

I lean in and run my nose up her throat. I shouldn't have done it. I shouldn't have touched her or gotten close enough to smell her sweet scent because now I want her. I feel her gasp against the top of my head, feel the shudder that goes through her body. "I'll tell you what I fucking want."

She whimpers. "Yes," she whispers.

I turn her body around to face the wall, and I put her hands on the hand rail. "Hold on tight to this." I unzip my pants and the click-click sound is so loud, it's nearly obscene in the enclosed space.

I grab the sides of her skirt and wiggle it up over her plump ass. "I've been thinking about burying myself in this perfect pussy all damn day. I haven't gotten any work done."

She whimpers in response and leans her ass back into me.

I pull the scrap of silk to the side and swipe my thumb through her folds. She's soaked. I pull out my cock and press myself into her entrance. Her warmth and wetness welcome me and we both groan as I seat myself all the way in.

"Fuck, Samantha." I grab her hip, then reach around with my other hand to play with her clit. This is going to have to be fast. We don't have much time before the elevator starts working again.

She tilts her head back so it rests on my chest as I fuck her. The sounds of our skin slapping together is so damn hot, I know I won't last long.

I keep the steady rhythm circling her clit as I thrust into her g-spot.

"Yes!" she moans, then her pussy walls clench around my cock pulling my own climax from me. This time I don't have any way of cleaning my orgasm from between her thighs and I find myself feeling very caveman about the whole thing. Like I've branded her and she'll be walking around the rest of the day with me leaking out of her.

It's primal and hot.

I kiss her neck, then reluctantly withdraw from her. I've barely zipped myself back up before she's straightened her skirt and whipped around to face me.

"That's so not fair, Jason!" Her eyes are lit with anger.

"What's not fair?"

"Turning on that sexy alpha thing and taking advantage of my weakness towards it." She jabs a finger into my chest. "You've told me I'm stronger than I think I am. And you know what, you're right. I will not quietly stand by and be your side piece because you're too damn ashamed to tell people you're fucking the receptionist. Or the chubby girl. Or whatever the hell your problem is with me." More jabs into my chest.

She's glorious when she's angry. But I don't even have time to process everything she's said because the elevator started working and now she's storming out the doors. I go after her, calling her name, but she completely ignores me. Again!

"Goddamnit!"

"Whoa there, Jace, what crawled up your ass and died?"

I turn to find Noah, my closest friend at the office, eyeing me with a knowing grin.

"Fuck off, Noah."

He holds his hands up in surrender. "Let me give you a little advice on the ladies. When you want to be with them, making them so angry they storm off isn't the way to go."

"No shit."

"And if you're going to fuck in the elevator then at least spray some air freshener so it doesn't smell like sex when I get in."

I just stare at him.

"What? I worked in intelligence, remember?" He tilts his head. "What are y'all fighting about anyways?"

"I'm an asshole."

"Everyone knows that."

I shake my head. "I'm not handling her right."

"You're not supposed to handle her. She's not a horse. Did you tell her how you feel?"

"No, and I'm not going to."

"Sounds like you're less of an asshole and more of a dumbass."

“She deserves better than a fucking criminal like me.”

He rolls his eyes.

“It’s true. No one else here has a record. The rest of you are all fucking heroes.”

“You did one thing. When you were a teenager. I’m betting Sam wouldn’t care.”

I shake my head again. “Doesn’t matter. She still deserves better.”

“Women always deserve better. Men are chronic fuck-ups.”

“Well, aren’t you just full of advice today?”

“I’m always full of advice. Cowboy is wise. Cowboy is —”

“Annoying,” I finish for him.

He tugs on my arm. “Come on. I’ll buy you a beer and we’ll figure out a way to get your head out of your ass.”

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CHAPTER 6

SAMANTHA

“I can’t believe you’re really here.” I smile broadly at my dear friend who surprised me today by flying in to see me. All the way from London.

Poppy grins at me, then grabs my hands across the sticky wood bar table. “It was past time for a visit. I can’t believe how close you are to the ocean.”

“Yeah. Texas isn’t really known for our pretty beaches, but I still love it. It’s definitely home.”

“I’ve only been here for part of a day and I’ve had so much sun exposure I feel like a new woman.”

Movement at the front door catches my eye and then I watch the entirety of Windsor Securities amble in.

“Oh my,” Poppy says. “It’s like a fireman’s calendar on parade.”

Several of the guys wave at me. My friend turns her wide eyes to me. “Those are my co-workers.”

“Bugger me. How do you work with that much hotness on a regular basis. Do you keep a vibrator in your desk?”

I bark out a laugh, but I know that Poppy is one hundred percent serious in her question.

“They’re all hot. I recognize that. Several of them are married or have girlfriends.”

She waves her hand at me. “Which one is Jason?”

“Tall, unassuming boring clothes, black-rimmed glasses, perfect ass and

the most attractive dick I've ever seen."

"Sadly they're not waving their dangly bits around so I can't comment on that last one. But I see him. I would have been able to pick him out though even if I hadn't asked. He hasn't stopped staring at you since they walked in." She pauses a moment. "He looks very intense."

"He is, in some ways. Mostly he just doesn't have great social skills. He's one of those people that's too brilliant for his own good. Maybe he's even on the spectrum." I shrug. "I don't know. But something about him draws me in." I take a sip of my drink and fiddle with my straw. "He shut down the elevator today."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean we ended up in the elevator together and he hacked the system to make it stop."

"Did you see him do that?"

"No, but I know it was him." I blow out a breath. "Then we had crazy hot, super fast sex. I got pissed afterwards and walked out and about that time is when you showed up."

"You slept with him again?" she asks. There's no judgment in her tone, it's merely a question.

I drop my head into my hands. "He makes me weak. But I told him afterwards that I wouldn't be his dirty little secret."

"Good for you, love. You did the right thing. He just needs to get his head out of his arse and figure out that he'll never find a better woman than you."

"Aww, thanks. Not for the first time in our friendship, I wish I swung that way because we would be perfect together."

She holds her glass up in a cheers. "That we would. Too bad we both love the big D too much."

I swallow a swig of my drink. "So how long are you in town?"

"However long I want. I'm on a tourist visa, but my father can pull some strings if I want to stay longer."

"I can clean out my home office and we can make it a guest room."

"Nonsense. I have a lovely room at The Montgomery."

My eyes widen. "Swanky."

"It is very nice and I'm told it has a lovely brunch on the weekends." Poppy squeals then grabs her phone. "I nearly forgot. I got my new covers for my next trilogy." She swipes against her screen, then holds the phone out to me. "Check out this hotness."

Sweet, unassuming Poppy with her posh British accent writes filthy science fiction romance about wicked aliens and the human females they rescue from the evil space sex trade industry. She's brilliant and so talented. The covers are super sexy and very eye catching.

"They're awesome. You'll sell a billion copies."

"That would be bloody brilliant."

"Did you fix your plot hole?" she asks me.

"No. I think I've got the hero all wrong. That's got to be the problem. I might need to go back to the drawing board, recast his entire character."

She nods. "I've had to do that. Once just changing his name helped unlock him for me. Sometimes characters are bothersome like that."

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CHAPTER 7

JASON

I'm having a hard damn time focusing on my buddies and coworkers at happy hour. Mostly because Sam and some other woman are sitting across the bar in a side booth.

I can't stop watching her. Wondering if they're talking about me and what Sam and I did in the elevator. I shift in my seat. Now is not the fucking time to get an erection when I'm at the bar with all of my co-workers.

"Who's that with Sam?" Gabe asks.

I glare at him.

"It's a friend of hers from England," Cade answers.

"Well, she's cute, whoever she is," Gabe says.

"Cute?" Noah scoffs. "Son, you're blind. Both of those women are hot as fuck. Did you see Sam's pretty yellow shirt today?"

I think I might have just growled at my friend. But the fucker knows how I feel about Sam.

"I've always thought Sam was hot, but I thought she was off limits," Gabe says.

"She is," I bark.

Cade chuckles. "Jason and Sam are together."

"No, they're not," Noah says with a smirk.

"I just assumed." Cade shrugs and downs his beer. "I'm not staying too much longer, fellas, I gotta get home to my woman."

“If she’s not off limits, I’m going to ask her out,” Gabe muses.

“Do it and I’ll fucking rip out your throat.” I realize I’ve grabbed onto the man’s shirt. I loosen my grip and shove him backwards.

Gabe holds his hands up and grins widely at me.

Noah leans over to me like he’s going to share a secret with me, but doesn’t bother whispering. “You do know you just threatened a former Green Beret.”

I don’t stop glaring at Gabe.

“Well, I’m going to go talk to them.” Noah stands and leaves the table.

I watch him walk over to Sam’s table and she stands and gives him a hug. I nearly break the glass in my hand.

Cade stands to leave and bends down to say just to me. “Word of advice, don’t wait too long before you tell her how you feel. She won’t wait around forever.” He pats me on the shoulder, then turns to go.

I follow after him. “Cade.”

He stops to face me. “Need something?”

“It’s just that don’t you think she deserves someone better than me. Someone without my past transgressions?”

“You’ll have to ask her that. But don’t you think she should get to make that decision? Not you making it for her?”

“Yeah, but then I’ll have to tell her the truth about who I am. What I’ve done.”

He claps me on the shoulder. “Jason, she already knows. She’s read your personnel file. She’s read all of them. She’s office manager, that’s part of her job.”

“She knows?”

He nods, squeezes my shoulder, then walks off.

Why didn’t she ever say anything? Because I never gave her a chance to.

I storm across the room and make my way to Sam’s booth. “We need to talk,” I say directly to her.

“Well, hello Jason, this is my friend, Poppy. In case it has escaped your attention that I’m not alone.”

I glance at the woman across from Sam. Noah is sitting next to her looking pretty damn cozy. “Nice to meet you,” I say. Then I shove my way onto the bench seat next to Sam. I put my hand on her thigh and squeeze. “We need to talk,” I say again.

“I can’t tonight. You’ll have to wait. I’m having a girl’s night out.”

“With Noah? I don’t fucking think so.”

Sam’s phone rings and she digs into her purse until she pulls it out. A glance at the screen shows it’s her sister calling. “I’ve got to take this.” She answers with a swipe. “Rachel?” She frowns. “Wait, I can’t hear you. Let me go outside.”

I stand to let her out and I’m about to follow her because she shouldn’t stand outside of a bar alone at night.

“Jason, stay please. I’d like to chat,” Poppy says. “I’m sure Noah will go outside and keep an eye on Sam to ensure her safety.”

Noah nods and stands and I’m reluctant, but I let him go. Because if Sam’s best friend wants to talk to me, something tells me I should listen. I sit back in the booth and meet the woman’s gaze.

“I’m assuming you want to tell me what an asshole I am,” I say.

She gives me a slight nod. “I don’t think I can tell you anything you haven’t considered yourself where that’s concerned. What I want to know is how you feel about my girl Sam.”

I know she means it in a friendship way, but hearing someone else call Sam their girl irritates the fuck out of me.

“How I feel about her is irrelevant.”

“Well, I hardly think that’s true. I can tell you that as a fellow romance author, Sam and I are all about feelings and emotion. We’re in the business of feelings and emotions. Romance readers read for that very reason. They want to feel. They want to fall in love again and again.”

“Doesn’t that imply that their own love-lives aren’t fulfilling enough?”

“Of course not. It’s a statistical fact that women who read romance have more sex and more sexually satisfying sex with their partners and the majority of them are married.”

“Then why the need to fall in love repeatedly?”

“It’s the rush of it. The way your skin feels tight when you see Sam walk into a room. Or the way your heart pounds with a mere glimpse of her smile. Searching lotions and shampoos at the store to try to pinpoint the exact scent she wears.” Poppy smiles widely. “Sweaty palms, pervasive thoughts that interrupt everyday activities...”

“Wait,” I hold up a hand because I’m beginning to panic that this little British woman is actually a spy with MI6. “How do you know all of that?” I know that every time I’ve sniffed shampoo bottles at the drugstore I checked to make sure I was alone.

She reaches across the table and squeezes my hand. “Jason, it is so obvious how much you love her.”

“But how did you know all of those things?”

She chuckles, clearly amused, but not maliciously. “Because I know love. What I don’t know is if you are going to do anything about it.”

I shake my head. “She deserves better than me.”

“Of course she does. All men are idiots when it comes to expressing their feelings. Don’t be a stereotype, Jason. What she truly deserves is a man who lets her make her own damn decisions and doesn’t tell her what she does and doesn’t need.”

“You don’t understand.” I blow out a breath. “There are things about me that you don’t know.”

It’s her turn to hold up her hand. “And I don’t need to. That’s between you and Sam.”

Her words are like a kick to my gut. Especially in light of what Cade told me—that Sam already knew about my history. But, even if that were true, even if she doesn’t care that I’m a criminal, Sam still deserves someone better than me. Someone who hasn’t already hurt her.

I scrub a hand on the back of my neck. “I’ve been such an ass to her. In my efforts to stay away to keep her away from me, I was a dick to her. She didn’t even think I liked her.”

“Will you treat her well?”

“Of course,” I say automatically. Jesus, if I had a chance with Sam, in a real relationship, I’d do everything I could to make her happy. “What I did already ... I never imagined that that would hurt her. I was trying to protect her from me.”

“You were being the big strong man and deciding what was best for her.” Poppy gives an exaggerated eye roll. “Stop doing that. She’s a strong woman. She’s smart and accomplished and so talented. She doesn’t need you to make choices for her. And I feel certain when I say that if you don’t treat her right or you act like an arse, she will be the first to tell you that.”

“So how am I supposed to convince her now that I love her? That I want to be with her even recognizing that she deserves better?”

“Make a grand gesture.”

“What?”

“You know at the end of every romantic comedy and romance novel there is a grand gesture. The big sweeping gesture from one character—the one

who has fucked up—that tells the other character how much they love them, how they want to be with them, how they’re sorry for being said fuckup and it won’t happen again.”

Poppy grins at me, she’s got one of those pleasing faces, just round and happy with a gap between her two front teeth. “Now buck up, Casanova, because she’s heading back to the table.”

Sam’s all smiles when she sits back down, this time on the other side of me. “I’m gonna be an aunt. Rachel’s pregnant.”

“Well that’s brilliant, congratulations Auntie Sam,” Poppy says. Then she glances at me and winks, then gives an exaggerated yawn. “I’m actually quite tired, love. The jet lag you know. I think I’ll just pop on back to the hotel and get a good night’s sleep. Think you can finish this celebration without me?”

Sam frowns at her friend. “Are you sure? Because there’s no reason to let this asshole scare you off.”

Poppy chuckles. “I’m positive. And Jason and I are good friends now, aren’t we?”

I nod quickly. “Yes.”

Poppy looks at Noah. “Do you think you could give me a ride to The Montgomery?”

“Sure darlin’, I’d love to,” he says. He stands and holds his arm out to her.

Sam points a finger at Noah. “Make sure she’s safe. Poppy, please text me when you get to your room.”

“Of course I will. Jason, it was nice to finally meet you. I’ve heard a lot about you.”

Sam stands and I grab her hand, then stand next to her. “Where are you going?”

“I want to go home.”

“I’ll take you. I know your car is still in the shop.”

“I’m angry with you,” she hisses.

“I can see that. It’s fucking hot.”

She spins around and pokes a finger into my chest. “No, we’re not playing that game. I told you I don’t want to be your secret.”

“I know that.” Staring down into her beautiful face, I almost can’t breathe. Sam is everything I’ll ever want. Everything it feels like I can’t have. And despite what her friend said, there’s a good chance I’ve already fucked this up too much and that she won’t forgive me.

All I know is that if there's any chance—any chance at all—that I haven't fucked this up beyond repair, then I have to go for it. I have to try.

Now that I've had Sam, there's no way I could go back to living without her. Not willingly, not without fighting for her.

"Come'er," I tell her. "I need to show you something." I drag her to the long wooden bar across the room. I nod to the owner, Luke. "You can charge me later if I break anything," I tell him. His brows rise, but he doesn't say anything. "Please just stay right here," I tell Sam.

Then I climb up onto the barstool and step onto the bar. I have to position myself so I'm between some of the hanging glass racks so I don't actually break anything.

"Can I have everyone's attention?" I yell.

Someone taps a spoon against a glass. Ding, ding. Ding. I glance up and realize it's Gabe still sitting with the rest of our coworkers.

The bar finally quiets enough. "Yeah, um, I'm Jason and I have an announcement to make."

"What are you doing?" Sam hisses at me. She grabs onto the bottom of my pants and tugs on me.

I just smile at her.

"I have been nothing but a complete ass to this beautiful woman standing in front of me. Samantha, wave at all the people. And I did it for stupid reasons, trying to protect her. Someone dropped some wisdom on me tonight, told me that it's not my job to make decisions for Sam, that she's a capable enough woman to do that herself."

I look down at Sam, at her lovely face, glowing with residual happiness from her sister's call. I want her to glow like that because of me. "The truth is," I take a deep breath. "The truth is I love you. I'm wildly in love with you. I've sniffed shampoo bottles for you. And I know I don't deserve you, but I still want a chance with you. I want to be with you. I want the opportunity to treat you the way you deserve to be treated. You're already the last thought I have before I fall asleep at night and the first one when I wake up. Now I want to have those thoughts in the same room with you. The same bed."

Wolf whistles sound throughout the bar.

"I guess that's all. Thanks for listening." I jump down and the room is still mostly quiet.

Once I'm face-to-face with her I can see unshed tears shining in her pretty eyes. "I'm not fucking ashamed of you. I'm ashamed of me. But you knew all

along, didn't you? Knew that I had a criminal record."

She swallows visibly. "Of course, I knew. I know about all of y'all's secrets. And the special skills. I couldn't do my job effectively if I didn't know."

I take a deep breath and blurt, "I'm a felon." I have to say it out loud, just in case she didn't really know. I need her to really understand.

She gives me a side-eye. "Yeah. You're felon. Because the judge who sentenced you was a total dick and your lawyer was shit. If you ask me, hacking into the phones of rapists and sharing the videos of them raping a girl who was passed out so that she has proof to go to the police ... that makes you a hero. Not a felon."

"Maybe. But I'm still a felon. I won't ever be able to run for office or—"

Samantha busts out laughing. "Why would you want to run for office? You have terrible social skills and a mean death glare. You're not really suitable for political life."

I shrug. "I don't. I just want you to know what you're getting in to."

"Okay, so I'll never be the First Lady. That was never going to happen anyway." She tilts her head to look at the table of our friends and she gives them a little finger wave and a smile. "So you're not embarrassed by me?"

"No, Samantha, there's nothing about you that would embarrass me. You're perfect. I'm the fuck up." I cup her cheeks and kiss her, not bothering to hide any of my emotions in my kiss. I want her to know what I'm feeling. Our co-workers hoot and holler from their table since we're standing in the middle of the bar. But I don't care because she forgave me and she's giving me a second chance and I'm going to make sure she never regrets it.

EPILOGUE

JASON

I'm leaning against the chilled wall of the hotel ballroom. It's a massive space filled with tables and tables of authors signing books and taking pictures with their fans. My wife looks fucking gorgeous sitting at her table. Her smile is wide and so happy that it's like a recharge to my heart every time I look at her. Like she's my battery. Or my charger. Whatever, she's the writer not me.

In any case, she looks so fucking hot and if I thought I could get away with it, I would sneak under her table and eat her while she signs her autograph on all of those books.

"OMG you're him, aren't you?" It's a girl somewhere between teens and early twenties and she's with another girl about that age.

"I'm sorry, what?"

"Hot Nerd, that's you, right?"

I swallow a chuckle and cut my eyes to Sam who's grinning widely at me. Everywhere on social media she refers to me as Hot Nerd AKA her husband. So that's what all her readers call me. It's been a pain in my ass at work, but I'll endure anything for that woman's smile.

"I'm Samantha's husband," I say to the girls.

They titter and wiggle around like I'm some kind of star. Maybe they're pumping some weird endorphine-inducing air into the AC system.

"Can we take a picture with you?" the first girl asks.

“Yeah, I guess.”

They each take a side and grab an arm and then they hold their phones out—simultaneously to take a selfie of the three of us.

“Hot Nerd!” one of them squeaks. “Thanks so much.”

“Sure.”

It’s at this point that Sam walks over to me and I gather her into my arms pulling her tight to my body. “Break time,” she says.

“How long do we have?”

“Not long enough for what you’re thinking. You’ve got your crazy sex eyes going and my break isn’t that long. I just wanted to stretch my legs.” She nods her head to the girls that have walked off. “Fans of yours?”

“Evidently. I’m supposed to be the support behind the star.”

“I’m hardly a star, babe, look at all of the other writers here. I’m one among many.”

“You are a star, Samantha, you’re my star. You shine so bright that you’re a beacon to me. No matter what I can always find you because your love lights the way.”

“Aww, baby,” she coos. “That’s so sweet. I love you so much.”

“I love you more.”

THANK YOU FOR READING!

I hope you loved Jason and Sam's story. Please consider [leaving me a review](#).

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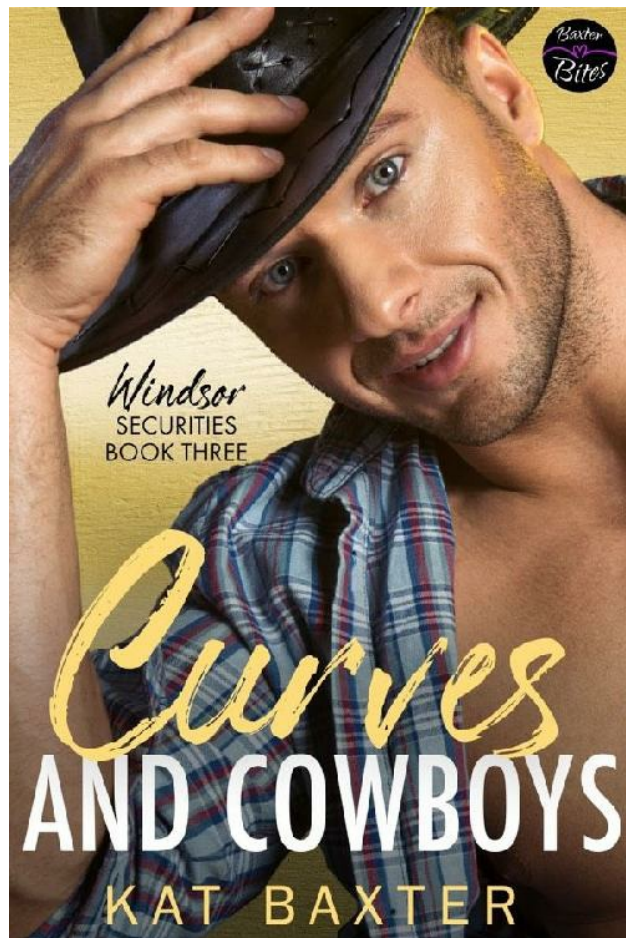
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EXCERPT FROM CURVES AND
COWBOYS



Poppy

I lead a double life. I have a secret identity and everything.

Actually, I have a pen name, which is almost the same thing.

By day, I am Ingrid Chase, author of erotically charged science-fiction romance novels. By night, I am Poppy Thorndyke, British socialite and heiress to the entertainment and transportation empire of Richard Thorndyke.

Wait ... that's not right.

I do most of my writing at night. Which means by day I'm an heiress and by night I'm a writer.

Either way, the point is, it's exhausting being two people.

Especially since I fail so miserably at being Poppy Thorndyke. I am not thin enough or glamorous enough to suit my father. I'm not socially ambitious enough for my mother—who told me that if she'd had to fuck my father for four years and put up with his philandering, the least she should get out of it is a royal son-in-law. Since I have yet procured a title for her future grandchildren, alas I am a huge disappointment to both my parents.

In fact, I am arguably a huge disappointment to everyone (at least everyone I know) with one exception. My best friend, Samantha.

Is it a wee bit humiliating that she is my best friend and I had never met her in person until today?

Why, yes it is.

But we're writers. By nature, we're both solitary and until now, our weekly zoom calls to critique each other's work were enough to sustain us.

"I can't believe you're really here." My American friend smiles at me from across the sticky pub table.

She grabs my hands and together we squeeze.

"It was past time for a visit." I feel a lump of unseemly emotion rising up to clog my throat, but I shove it down. I flew half way around the world for this trip because my friend needed me. She is balanced on the edge of heartbreak and she doesn't need me to get all maudlin about my loneliness.

If she had wanted to spend the evening at my hotel watching period dramas and drowning her grief in ice cream, we would have done that. But instead she wanted to show off her little slice of Texas, so that's what we've been doing. "I can't believe how close you are to the ocean."

"Yeah. Texas isn't really known for our pretty beaches, but I still love it. It's definitely home."

"I've only been here for part of a day and I've had so much sun exposure I feel like a new woman."

This is the first time I've ever been to America. I've traveled all over

Europe, but my father never wanted me to come over here. He'd always wrinkle his nose and tell me I wouldn't like it. That it was too loud and dirty and that Americans didn't appreciate history or heritage. Which is absolutely ridiculous considering my father owns the largest tech company in England and has a forty-thousand square foot state-of-the-art building where he runs his kingdom. Nothing historic about that.

I've always wondered if what he actually meant was that my mother hadn't liked it. Both of my parents have trouble seeing me as my own person and not just an extension of their former spouse, not just as another asset to fight over.

I'm distracted by a group of men coming in the front door. One after another they come in, laughing and cutting up. And each one is hotter than the last. It's ridiculous. I've never seen so many attractive men in one spot.

"Oh my," I say. "It's like a fireman's calendar on parade."

Several of the male models wave at my friend. She chuckles. "Those are my co-workers."

"Bugger me. How do you work with that much hotness on a regular basis." I lean closer and whisper. "Do you keep a vibrator in your desk?"

She laughs heartily, but shakes her head. "I know they're all stupid hot. I recognize that. Several of them are married or have girlfriends."

I scan the group of men who are now sitting at a huge round booth. While they're all handsome, my eyes keep going to the one in the back, cowboy hat riding low on his forehead. Just looking at him gives me the shivers. "Which one is Jason?" I ask her.

She's half in love with one of her co-workers, and I want to make sure the man I'm eyeing isn't her guy.

Not that I'm planning on doing more than admiring from afar, but even that would be a betrayal if the sexy cowboy is hers.

She holds her drink in front of her and rattles off the details. "Tall, unassuming boring clothes, black-rimmed glasses, perfect ass and the most attractive dick I've ever seen."

Whew. Not the cowboy.

Again, I would never expect any of those men to even look at someone like me, not unless they knew my net worth.

But there are advantages to being a slightly dumpy, borderline plain woman. One of them is that most people don't even notice me. Which means I get to do all the people watching I want without worrying about the

awkwardness of having a man look back.

So that is exactly what we do while Sam gives me the highlight reel of her budding relationship with Jason. I flipflop between envy and despair as she describes her past several days.

The emotional gambit she's been through is almost enough to make me thankful I'm not the kind of woman men even notice. At least, that's why I tell myself. Right up until the minute the sexy cowboy saunters up to our table and introduces himself.

Because the moment he winks at me and flashes that slow southern smile, all bets are off.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

KAT BAXTER IS the pen name for a bestselling historical romance author. She lives in Texas with her family and a bunch of furry creatures.

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What readers have said about Kat's books:

“This was a great story!! I’m not usually one for surprise baby stories but this one was different. They didn’t wait long for Kevin to find out. It wasn’t this long drawn out surprise. I liked both characters and the fact that they were both trying to do right by their child but also each other. I loved how amazing Jane was as a single mother with always putting her daughter first but also

yearning to want to be someone's first choice." ~Stacy, Goodreads

"This story was troupe heavy in the best of ways. Steamy and sweet, there might even have been a swoon worthy moment or two. I love me a Navy Seal and this man will be in my dreams. I loved the contrast between the two main characters, they just worked so well together. Lovely story, 4.5 stars. "
~Elysian, Goodreads

"5 Stars! Loved it, the initial meet & chemistry between the main characters and the timeframes throughout throughout the book worked really well. " ~ Paula, Goodreads

"Such a very sweet and spicy story!" ~ Lori, Goodreads

"This anthology is packed full of sexy alphas and the badass ladies that take them on. My favorite stories were Kate Meader's Coming in Hot and Kat Baxter's The Navy Seal's Secret Baby. " ~ Kristina, Goodreads

"The connection between the characters felt real, and I liked the author's writing style." ~ Cara, Goodreads

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