



A Collection of  
Christmas Stories

*his*  
CHRISTMAS  
LIST

INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLING AUTHOR

T L S W A N

# **HIS CHRISTMAS LIST**

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T L SWAN

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# **THE EXPERT**

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## **Monday Morning.**

### **Elizabeth.**

KERRY PUTS her head around the corner of my door. “Can we go through your schedule for the next few weeks?”

I hit send on my email. “Yeah.” I keep typing. “Can we do it a bit later? I’m swamped.”

“Okay, but I need to book your accommodation for Paris today because everything is booking out.”

I glance up from my computer. “I’m not going to Paris, remember?”

“Um...yes you are.”

“Not possible.”

“Too late, I already accepted the invitation.”

I breathe out, exasperated. I love Kerry, she’s the best PA in the world, but damn it she oversteps sometimes.

“Kerry, don’t play with me, I’m way too busy.” I sigh as I keep typing.

“We need the Reynolds account,” she snaps. “We’re not going to make budget without it.”

“I know.”

“And we want our staff bonuses this year. We’re making budget if it kills me.”

“And it might.” I roll my eyes. “I am not going to the conference in Paris and watching my dickhead ex-husband parade around his new wife while competing with him for the Reynolds account. I would rather eat shit.”

Kerry plops into the chair at my desk, “You know...this little poor me act is getting a little tired.”

I roll my eyes. Here we go.

“I’m not giving poor me vibes.”

“Want a bet?”

I keep typing.

“When you and Graham split the company in two after you divorced, our aim was to take him down. You have always been the brains of the operation, show him how hard we can fuck him and his business up.”

“I know.”

“We are the only two forerunners in the Reynolds account, we can win it. But not if you don’t even go to the conference.”

My heart sinks. “I just don’t think I can go and watch him and Melody....” I shrug.

“Melody is a child who is going to realize that her new husband is a dumb sleazebag.”

“She’s thirty, she’s not a child.”

“Oh please.” She rolls her eyes. “Women don’t even grow their second brain until they hit thirty-five. In five years she’s kicking his ass to the curb and leaving him. And you know where we are going to be?”

“Where?” I sigh.

“Without the Reynolds account because our spineless CEO let her ex-husband win at business too.”

I sit back in my chair. “You’re right, I know you’re right. I really just....” I shrug, disappointed in myself. “The thought of going to that conference that close to Christmas and having to mix with him and all our work associates when he’s there with his new wife is just....”

“Embarrassing?”

“Well just five years ago we were at the same conferences as husband and wife and working together on the same business. Now we’re divorced and own two companies who are in direct competition against each other and he’s got a perky young little replacement for me.”

“So, take a date.”

“Ha,” I explode. “And who would that be?” I scoff. “I hate men, I hate dicks and I especially hate egotistical fuckwits, which coincidentally is the entire dating pool for women my age. So, unless you can organize Santa Claus to be my date I’m not going.”

“Ugh.” She rolls her eyes. “You’re impossible.”

## Friday.

*Knock, knock*, sounds at my office door and I glance up to see Kerry.

“What’s up?”

She comes in and closes the door behind her and I frown. “Why are you closing the door?”

“Tell me you love me.”

I raise my eyebrow. “Why do I love you?”

“So...Paris.”

“Ugh, can we not talk about that dumpster fire, please.”

“I have organized a....” Her voice trails off as she searches for the right wording. “*Chaperone* for you.”

“What do you mean?”

“His name is Thomas Stone.”

“Who is that?”

“He’s a doctor.”

“A what, what?” I frown. I’m so confused. “What are you talking about?”

“So, my cousin Marcy is friends with his friend’s wife.”

“Who’s his friend?”

“Cameron Stanton is his friend and his wife, Ashley, is one of Marcy’s best friends.”

I roll my eyes at the million explanations. “Not hard to keep up at all.”

“Anyway...there’s this doctor from LA who....” She wobbles her head around as she tries to word it right. “Helps out professional women like you for weekends just like this.”

“What do you mean?”

“So, apparently he did it once as a favor for someone and he was so good at it and enjoyed it so much that he now does it full-time.”

“Does what?” I stare at her, still confused. “What the fuck are you talking about?”

“He’s an expert in this field.”

“What field?”

“The escort field.”

“The what field?” I gasp, horrified. “Are you on crack?”

“It would work.”

“I’m not taking a sleazebag escort with an STD to a conference as

important as this.” I drag my hand down my face. “Have you lost your fucking mind?”

“You’re not going to go at all?”

“Not going is better than this option.”

“And he’s not an escort that sleeps with women, he’s not that kind of escort.”

“Oh please,” I scoff. “He’d be banging like a barn door.”

“He’s a professional well-educated man who would escort you to all of the social things and pretend to other people that you are together and then at the end of the night, he goes back to his room. No sex involved, it’s a business transaction...and a pricey one at that.”

“How much does he cost?”

“Fifty thousand dollars for a weekend.”

“What?” I explode. “Are you fucking crazy?”

“He keeps his prices high because he only caters for a certain level of professional business women. He doesn’t want to waste his time on lower paying jobs.”

“Well...we are not paying for any kind of....” I widen my eyes. “Expert.”

“So, you have to apply for his company through his manager,” she continues.

I roll my eyes. “Does he think he’s Fabio or something? For fifty thousand dollars he should take what he’s fucking given. No dick is that good.”

“He accepted our job so I paid fifty percent this morning,” she blurts out in a rush.

“What?” I explode.

“You gave me management of the accounts.”

“To spend *wisely*.”

“This is an investment,” she fires back. “It’s tax deductible because he has a legitimate consulting business he works out of.”

“What does he consult on...?” I gasp. “Vagina waxing?”

“Probably...who cares anyway? Listen here, you are going to suck it up and go to this thing with Thomas Stone and play nice and wow the conference with your sparkle and bring home the fucking Reynolds account.”

I stare at her; my mind is officially blown.

She opens a manilla folder and passes me a photo. “This is him.”

I stare at the photo for a beat and frown. The man is wearing a black

dinner suit and smiling. He has dark wavy hair and big dimples on a square jaw, he looks very distinguished and cultured, my eyebrows rise by themselves. “He’s ....”

“Gorgeous.” Kerry smiles. “And if all you achieve by doing this is to make Graham realize that he made the biggest mistake of his life by cheating on you...then I’m happy.”

My eyes linger on the photo.

“Fuck Graham. Don’t let him win,” Kerry whispers. “Nobody will ever know and if this helps us get what we need...then why not? We both know that Graham would do anything in his power to get that account...stop being the nice guy and do the same. Fuck Graham and Melody, wipe their faces in it.”

*She does have a point.*

“Success is the best revenge.”

My eyes rise to meet hers. “No sex?”

“None.”

“Separate rooms?”

“Uh-huh, his only prerequisite is that you privately meet the day before to set out a game plan and strategize. He doesn’t want this to fuck up either, he’s a professional and wants it to stay that way.”

“It’s tax deductible?”

“He’s an expert.” She widens her eyes. “And you could sure use some expertise.”

I smirk. “I’m going to kill you, you know that, right?”

“Absolutely.”

### Three Months Later.

The cab pulls into the hotel in Paris and I want to crawl into the trunk and never come out.

What in god's name was I ever thinking agreeing to this?

I'm here to meet Thomas Stone ahead of the Christmas work conference that starts tomorrow. Who goes to a conference two weeks before Christmas? This is just stupid.

He wants to *strategize*...strategize what?

Help!

I'm shaved, primped and primed and to be honest I think I'm more nervous to meet Thomas than I am to go to this stupid conference alone.

My car door opens and the doorman smiles at me "Bonjour."

"Bonjour," I timidly reply as I climb out of the car.

"Your bags will be taken into reception for you."

"Merci."

Thump.

Thump.

Thump goes my heart.

I take a deep steadying breath. It's fine...this is all going to be fine, I try to tell myself, but I'm quite positive that it won't, someone is going to realize this is all fake and it's going to blow up and come out that I had to hire a date and then I'm going to have to move to Mars to escape the retribution of embarrassment.

I walk into the foyer and without looking around I walk straight to the desk; a man is in front of me checking in so I have to wait.

I know Thomas is here somewhere and I really, really don't want to see him.

Fuck this ridiculous plan, I'm calling it off.

I text Kerry.

Cancel Thomas Stone.

I'm not doing this.

I wait for her reply....

Fuck, where is she? I text again.

Are you there?

Cancel!

This is an emergency.

I begin to sweat.

Oh my god, she's asleep or reading her stupid book or something and isn't going to get the message and then the whole conference is going to find out I had to hire a date and my life will be officially over.

I dial her number. Ring, ring...ring, ring...ring, ring....

*Please pick up.*

"Elizabeth...."

I turn to see a tall man in a suit. He has dark hair, a chiseled jaw and big blue eyes. "Hello, I'm Thomas Stone." He gives me a big breathtaking smile as his aftershave enslaves my senses...good fucking god.

*What is happening right now?*

"Hi," I squeak.

"Nice to meet you," he says as he shakes my hand.

"Hi," I reply.

You already said that, you fool.

He smiles and gives me a playful wink...he knows he just fried my brain.

Help!

"Next," the person at the reception desk calls.

I step forward and Thomas stands behind me.

"Hello, I would like to check in please?" I whisper. "The name is Elizabeth Burchmore."

"Of course." He goes to typing away and Thomas is standing so close behind me that I can feel the heat radiating off his body. Hasn't he ever heard of spatial awareness?

I begin to feel faint.

"We have you in a ...blah blah blah..." the reception man goes on but I can't hear a thing over my hammering heart.

This is bad, *bad, bad*. Nobody on earth is going to believe I pulled this man.

He slides the key over the desk. "You are in room 402 on the fourth floor."

"Thank you."

"We'll take your bags up to your room for you."

“Thanks.”

Thomas grabs my elbow. “Let’s get a coffee.”

I glance over my shoulder at him, why is he acting so familiar? “I don’t have time for coffee.”

“Wrong answer.” He takes my hand in his and begins to pull me toward the hotel restaurant. “We *are* having coffee. We have a lot to discuss.”

Exactly, like why are you holding my hand?

I snatch my hand from his grip. “Fine.” I follow him to the restaurant, the decorations are beautiful and Christmas wreaths that hang from the ceiling light up above, he pulls out my chair and gestures to the waiter. “Bonjour, nous aimerions commander du café, s’il-vous-plait.”

*Oh...he speaks French.*

“Oui, bien sûr,” the waiter replies.

Thomas’s eyes flick to me. “What would you like?”

“A cappuccino.” I shrug. Do they even have that here?

“Un cappuccino et quelques pâtisseries,” Thomas replies to the waiter.

“C’est noté.” The waiter smiles before disappearing.

Thomas’s eyes come back to me and he sits back in his chair. “It’s lovely to meet you, Elizabeth.”

“I wish I could say the same.”

His eyes hold mine.

“I’m sorry that sounded so rude, I just...I think this is a really bad idea and I don’t know why I let Kerry talk me into it.”

He smiles as he leans onto his hand as he listens.

“I...if anyone realizes that this is a business deal I will never live it down.” I continue my babbling. “So, thank you so much for the offer and I know you must be very busy but I don’t think this is actually going to work and I...”

“Elizabeth.” He cuts me off. “Calm down and relax. It’s one weekend and nobody will ever find out.”

“They’re going to know.”

“I’m never going to tell anyone, so the only way they will ever know is if you tell them.”

My eyes search his. “Are you sure?”

“I’m a professional, trust me. We’ve got this, but we have a lot of work to get through today.”

“Work.” I frown. “What kind of work?”

He reaches down into his briefcase and pulls out a leather-bound A4 notepad and opens it up, he clicks his pen. “We’ll get through the paperwork first before we tackle the other things.”

*What other things...?*

“Okay.” He writes at the top of the page.

*Elizabeth Burchmore*

“So...” He looks up at me. “What are our goals for the weekend?”

“Goals?”

“Goals. Like what are we achieving?”

“Oh...um?” I frown. “I hadn’t really thought about goals.”

“Why not?”

“Surviving the weekend would be a bonus.”

“Okay.” He clicks his pen a few times. “Who is going to be here that makes you feel like that?”

“My ex-husband.”

“Now we’re getting somewhere. What is his name?”

“Graham.”

“And how long have you been separated?”

“Divorced four years.”

“I see, and does he have someone new?”

“A wife, her name is Melody.”

He scribbles the notes.

“Do you have children together?” he asks.

“No. Neither of us ever wanted children.”

He smiles as he scribbles down notes. “Agree with you on that one.”

“Here you are.” The waiter arrives with our coffee and a huge plate of pastries.

“Merci.” Thomas smiles, the waiter disappears, and he slides my coffee across to me and serves me out a plateful of pastries.

“Oh no thank you, I don’t eat pastries,” I lie as I try to sound skinny.

“Please,” he scoffs with an eye roll. “Let’s get something completely clear here, Elizabeth. I don’t give a flying fuck if you eat pastries, in fact, if you don’t eat French pastries while you’re in Paris you are officially really fucking boring.”

I give him a lopsided smile.

“You don’t need to impress me...at all. I am on your side already,” he says as he takes a giant bite of a croissant, he closes his eyes in ecstasy. “So good.” He gestures to my plate of baked goods. “Eat.”

“Maybe just a sliver.” I take a knife and cut a tiny corner off the croissant and daintily put it into my mouth.

He smiles into his coffee as his eyes hold mine. “Just a sliver of cake is the same as just the tip of a cock. It never happens. Once you try it you’re getting the whole thing.”

I smirk and sip my coffee.

“Okay, back to business.” He picks up his pen. “Why are we here?”

“Graham and I used to run a human resources company together and when we separated we split the company in two. We are now in direct competition with each other and this weekend is a decider for the biggest account we had.”

He furiously scribbles. “Tell me about this account.”

“It’s for Gaynor Reynolds, she has seven thousand employees that she runs through a company and it’s up for tender. A five-year contract that will be worth an absolute fortune.”

His eyes rise to meet mine, “Female?”

“Yes.”

“French?”

“Yes.”

He smirks, “You’re already a front runner for this account.”

“Why is that?”

“French women are my specialty.”

I giggle at his confidence. “Well if you can schmooze your way into winning this for us please be my guest.”

“Okay.” He keeps scribbling. “Company name?”

“Of what?”

“Gaynor’s company, I need to research her.”

“Reynolds.”

He keeps scribbling. “Okay so.... Why did you and Graham split?”

I stay silent, the words too painful to say out loud.

His eyes rise to meet mine.

“He met someone else,” I force out.

“Well....” He gives me a big, beautiful smile. “More fool him.”

He writes the words.

*Make Him Pay*

He underlines it twice.

I squirm in my chair with embarrassment.

“So, tell me about you.” He sits back in his chair as he holds his pen in his hand.

“Not much to tell.”

“How many boyfriends have you had since the split?”

I exhale, unable to answer.

He frowns. “You haven’t?”

I give a subtle shake of my head.

“How is that possible? A woman as beautiful as you would be fighting them off.”

“With a stick.” I widen my eyes.

He stares at me for a beat as if thinking. “So....”

“So, what?”

“Do you always dress like this?”

I glance down at myself. “Like what?”

“Mumsy.”

My mouth falls open in horror. “This is not mumsy, this is designer.”

“Designer mumsy.” He stands. “Come on.”

“Where are we going?”

“To your room, I need to go through your clothes for the weekend.”

“What?”

“You need to look irresistible and designer mumsy is not fucking cutting it.”

Fifteen minutes later he peruses my outfits that are all laid out on my bed.

“No.” He picks up a dress and throws it on the floor. “No.” Throws another one off. “No, no, no. Absolutely fucking not.”

I put my hands on my hips, indignant. “These are new clothes. I was told by the saleswomen they are the highest of current fashion.”

“Yeah well.... That saleswomen fucked you up the ass. Let’s go.”

“To where?”

“Shopping.”

Half an hour later we arrive at Le Bon Marché and Thomas walks in front of me at speed. “Hurry up, woman.”

“What’s the rush?” I call as I try to keep up.

“We have to buy new clothes and get your hair done; we don’t have much time.”

“What’s wrong with my hair?”

“Sweetheart.” He crumples up his nose. “Don’t talk.”

My mouth falls open in horror. “You’re being obnoxious, Thomas.”

“It’s my specialty.” He keeps walking and goes to the information stall.

“Bonjour, avez-vous un personal shopper disponible ?”

The woman smiles, “Laissez-moi vérifier.” She types into her computer.

“What are you doing?” I whisper.

“She’s checking if there is a personal shopper available.”

“What?” I screw up my face. “I don’t need a personal shopper, I’ll just pick something myself.”

He widens his eyes. “I saw what you picked last time.”

Ugh... this man is pissing me off, I cross my arms in a huff.

“Phillipe va s’occuper de vous.” She smiles.

“Merci.” He smiles.

“What did she say?” I ask.

“Phillipe is coming now.”

“A man?” I whisper, horrified. “I don’t want a man to style me.”

“I told you not to talk, remember?” he whispers.

“Bonjour,” a man says from behind us.

“Hello.” I smile awkwardly, well isn’t this just the most cringey moment of my life.

A man I am paying to spend the weekend with me asking another man to style me because I am mumsy...and I don’t even have fucking kids.

*This is just great.*

“How can I help you both today?” the man says in English, he smiles as he looks between us. Gorgeous and stylish, he’s definitely in the right job.

“Bonjour,” Thomas says. “Elizabeth has a weekend work conference and unfortunately her douche ex-husband will be there and basically...we need to

bring the fucker to his knees.”

Phillipe nods and circles me as he looks me over. “Something.... More....”

“Sexy.” Thomas cuts him off.

“Less baggy...more fitted.”

“Precisely.” Thomas looks around, “Is there a hair salon in here?”

“Oui.”

“Can you try and squeeze her in for an appointment?”

“Of course.”

Thomas smiles. “I’ll leave you two to it.” He glances at his watch. “How long?”

“I’m going to need a few hours,” Phillipe replies.

He kisses me quickly on the cheek. “I’m going to go and get a massage, I’ll be back for you later.”

“Okay.”

“She needs lingerie too,” Thomas adds. “Something pretty and feminine. Super seductive.”

“Of course.”

I feel my face blush with embarrassment, I just want the earth to swallow me whole, two gorgeous men working out what I should wear while I clearly have no idea about anything.

Why the hell would *I* need lingerie?

I don’t think I’ve ever felt so vulnerable and unattractive. I’m going to kill Kerry for making me come here and do this.

## **Four Hours Later.**

The hairdresser spins my chair back toward the mirror and my eyes widen.

My long brown hair is now blond and cut into a sharp bob. A lady from cosmetics came and gave me a makeup lesson and I have twelve bags of new clothes and a major dent in my credit card.

I'm hardly recognizable, even to myself.

The hairdresser smiles. "What do you think?"

"It's...amazing," I reply as I turn my head to look at both sides, not a joke, it really is amazing.

"It really suits you, this color." She takes the cape off and I walk to the reception and see Thomas sitting and waiting with a magazine, he glances up and his eyes light up as he stands. "Wow."

I blush again.... Oh man, this is the chorus of the blushing weirdo.

"That will be four hundred and ninety euros," the hairdresser says.

My mouth falls open. I didn't get a hair transplant, bitch.

*Jeez.*

I pay her and I don't want to think about what I've spent today; I've never spent so much money on myself in my life.

Thomas smiles as he circles me and looks me up and down. "Seriously... fucking hot, Elizabeth." He smiles to the hairdresser. "I'm a lucky man."

The hairdresser giggles on cue as she stares at him dreamily.

Ugh....

We leave and walk back into the shopping center; he takes my shopping bags from me to carry them. "Okay we have to go back to the hotel and practice."

"Practice what?" I reply as I look around.

"Kissing."

My eyes flick to him. "What for?"

"Well if we want to nail this we have to be all over each other."

"Thomas." I stare at him, horrified. "We're not kissing."

He raises his eyebrow. "Want to bet?"



## **Elizabeth.**

“YES,” I whisper angrily down the phone. “He made me go shopping for sexy clothes after he had the audacity to call me mumsy and I had my hair done, which I have to admit does look pretty good. But I draw the line now because he thinks he’s coming to my room to practice kissing.”

“Ha-ha, this is the best day of all time.” Kerry laughs.

“Are you fucking serious?” I whisper. “I do not want to kiss this man.”

“Not even a little?”

*Maybe a little.*

“Absolutely not.”

*Knock, knock,* sounds on my door.

My eyes widen in horror. “Oh my fucking god, he’s here,” I whisper in a panic.

“Just kiss him,” Kerry fires back. “Hell, fuck his brains out the entire weekend.”

“You are a perverted sex maniac, Kerry, and I don’t know how we’re friends. Good. Bye.” I hang up.

*Knock, knock,* sounds again.

I drag my hands through my hair and jump up and down.

This can’t be happening.

“Elizabeth,” Thomas calls through the door. “I know you’re in there.”

I open the door in a rush. “What do you want?” I blurt rudely.

He steps past me into my room. “Close the door.”

“Aren’t you supposed to wait to be invited into a lady’s room?”

He gives me a slow sexy smile. “If I were a gentleman and you were a lady I suppose that would be true.” He takes me roughly into his arms. “But I’m here to serve you and today we are in training.” He looks down at me as his eyes dance with mischief. “Let’s start here.” His lips drop to my neck and he softly kisses me there.

This is an absolute disaster....

He gives me a gentle shake. “Go floppy, relax into my arms. You’re as rigid as a fucking ruler.”

He massages my shoulders in big circles. “Relax into my touch.” He must realize how traumatizing this is for me. He gives me a kind smile. “I’m on your side, Elizabeth, this is only going to work if you trust me,” he says

softly. He puts his finger under my chin and lifts it so that I have to look him in the eye. "Relax into me."

I swallow the lump in my throat and nod, I let my body relax a little.

"That's it." He pulls me closer. "Now, fit your body into mine." His arm around my waist pulls me closer still and my breasts sit up against his chest and he smiles down at me. "See how our bodies fit like this?"

I nod.

"This is Coupling 101. Intimate couples have a way that they touch each other. When they hug they fit, when they hold hands they're in sync. Our bodies have to mirror each other and the only way we get to that point is practice. Yes?"

I give a weak shrug.

"Now kiss me," he says.

My eyes widen. "This is really unnecessary."

"Kiss. Me."

"Thomas."

His lips take mine, softly and barely there.

The scent of his aftershave floats around me, the hardness of his body up against mine begins to steal my brain.

It's been a long time since a man has touched me in any shape or form.

"Good, keep going," he coaches me as his lips take mine again, the kiss lingers this time, a little more tongue. "That's it." He pulls me closer and our kiss deepens, his tongue swipes through my mouth and I feel my feet float off the floor.

"Excellent," he breathes against my lips. "More." My body completely melts against his as he really kisses me.

*Good lord...*

We pull out of the kiss and he steps back from me, his eyes locked on mine. "Very good, Elizabeth." He smiles darkly. "I sense a tiger trapped inside of you."

"You're hilarious." I turn toward the window and widen my eyes to myself in horror.

*Lock it up, bitch.*

"I think that's enough practice for today," I say sternly. "The conference doesn't start until tomorrow."

"Good idea." He adjusts his dick in his suit pants. "Not sure I could handle any more today to be honest."

I feel myself blush.

“Do you want to grab some dinner?” he says casually.

“I....” I hesitate, I do want dinner but not with him.

“Just food.” He smirks as if reading my mind. “I know a great restaurant not far from here.”

“Umm.” I shrug, I guess it couldn’t hurt. I have to see him all weekend anyway. “Sure.”

“Let’s say meet in the foyer in....” He glances at his watch. “In an hour?”

I nod.

He turns to leave and then turns back. “Oh, and Elizabeth.”

“Yes.”

“Wear the black dress and your new heels.”

I go to open my mouth to protest.

“And the black lingerie,” he adds.

“I really don’t think....”

“Stop thinking and do as I say,” he cuts me off.

“It’s just dinner between work colleagues,” I tell him.

“I know, but if you know how good you look in one outfit, why would you wear anything else? Stop hiding yourself, Elizabeth.”

My eyes search his.

“I’ll see you soon, wearing the red lipstick, in the black dress, the black heels and the black lingerie.”

“Nobody is going to see my lingerie, Thomas.” I sigh.

“You will, Elizabeth.” His eyes hold mine. “You will.” He tucks a piece of my newly blond hair behind my ear. “And that’s the only person that matters.” He smiles softly. “Wear it for you.”

Without another word he turns and leaves, the door clicks closed behind him and I stare at it for a beat.

AHHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!!

A million emotions run through me, none of them corporate or innocent.

I rush to the bathroom and strip off my clothes and put a shower cap on over my newly blow-dried hair, I don’t want to mess this up. Lord knows it will never look this good again.

I stand under the hot water of the shower as my mind wanders back to our kiss and the way he pulled me closer.

A slow throb is beginning to build....

Stop. It.

Business transaction...nothing more.

The elevator doors open and I step out into the hotel foyer.

As requested I'm wearing my sexy new clothes. A black wrap dress with a plunging neckline, black strappy stilettos, and if I move the right way my black lace bra peeks out. Oh and who could forget the red lipstick?

*For me....*

Ha, who am I kidding? Me has nothing to do with this but I do like the pretense of it anyway, it won't hurt to humor him a little.

"Wow." Thomas smiles as his eyes drop to my toes and back up to my face. "Eeeeeeeeee," he purrs. "Meeee-owww."

I try to hide my goofy smile. "Stop it, you fool."

He chuckles and kisses my cheek. "You look lovely."

"Thank you."

"Shall we go?"

"Uh-huh," He takes my hand in his and leads the way.

"We don't need to practice holding hands."

"Who's practicing?" He smiles over his shoulder. "I'm showing you off."

"Handsome and full of shit." I roll my eyes. "You are the jack of all trades, Thomas."

He chuckles and kisses my hand as it rests in his. "Master of none."

We walk up the street and I concentrate on not wobbling in my shoes, it's been a long time since I wore heels. "So where is this restaurant?" I ask.

"Just up here." He gestures to the street. "The food is unbelievable."

*Like the night.*

Who would have ever believed I would be in Paris at Christmas dressed like this with a man like him.... I know this is all a sham but damn it's fun pretending.

We arrive at a small quaint restaurant; it has huge windows, and black wrought-iron chandeliers hang low. Thomas pushes through the heavy front doors and we arrive at the reception desk. "Bonjour, j'ai une table réservée au nom de Stone," he says.

The waiter smiles. "Par ici, monsieur." We follow him to a small round table near the window, two tall red candles flicker in crystal holders upon the table and it looks straight out of a movie set. Thomas pulls my chair out. "Thank you." I smile as I take a seat and he does too.

“Souhaitez-vous boire quelque chose ?” the waiter asks.

Thomas’s eyes flick over to meet mine. “What would you like to drink, darling?”

*Darling.*

If only I could think with fried brain cells. “Umm....” I frown as I open the menu.

“Champagne?” he asks. “We are celebrating.”

*We are?*

“Sure, why not.” I close the menu.

The waiter leaves us alone and Thomas smiles over at me.

“What?” I smirk.

“I knew you were hot under all that nerdy shit.”

I laugh out loud. “You did not just say that?”

“Yeah I did.”

“Well I’m still a nerd under these clothes.”

“A hot nerd.” He gives me a slow sexy smile. “What lingerie did you wear?”

I feel my face flush. “Thomas.”

He winks playfully and it’s official, Thomas Stone is the master flirt of all time. He really has found his calling with this job.

The waiter pours out a sample of the champagne and Thomas tastes it. “Lovely, thank you.” He then pours us a glass each and leaves us alone.

Thomas holds his glass up. “A toast.”

I hold my glass to his.

“To a once-in-a-lifetime weekend in Paris.” His eyes hold mine and the air crackles between us as we clink our glasses together.

From the very back darkest and deepest corner of my mind something tells me that Thomas has something in mind...but I’m imagining it, I have to be. What would a man like him possibly see in a woman like me?

“So...” I say to change the subject. “Where do you live?”

“Los Angeles.”

“Are you really a doctor?” I frown.

“I am.” He smiles, he takes a sip of his champagne. “You seem surprised.”

“Well.” I shrug. “This is a weird job for someone who studied for six years to be a doctor.”

He shrugs. “I work in ER two days a week so I don’t lose touch, but I do

admit to loving this job a whole lot more.”

I sip my drink as I listen intently. “You must....” I hesitate.

“What?”

“Go out with a lot of glamorous women.”

“Yes and no,” he replies.

“What does that mean?” I ask.

“Well, there are two types of women that usually hire someone like me.”

“Which are?”

“Glamorous wealthy businesswomen who don’t want the hassle of dating but need someone to take to events with them.”

I listen intently.

“Or women who are trying to regain their confidence and get back into the dating game.”

I nod as I process his words. “Do you sleep with many of them?”

“Hmm.” He twists his lips. “Some.” He shrugs. “But only if I’m genuinely attracted to them. I’m most definitely not a gigolo who is chugging down the Viagra to get through the night.”

I sip my champagne as I listen.

“So....” He smiles over at me. “When was the last time you were railed?”

I snort my drink up my nose and I cough spectacularly. “What?”

“You know what I mean.” He smiles into his drink.

“No actually, I don’t.”

“Like when was the last time your body was used for pleasure? No romance, no lies, or pretenses... just thoroughly well fucked.”

*Used for pleasure.*

Something about that sentence does things to me and I feel a rush of arousal begin to flood me down below.

“I....” My brain is fried and I have no words as I imagine what he’s telling me.

“Well?” He sips his drink as he waits for my reply.

“I can’t remember. My marriage was....” I shrug, feeling bad for even thinking it let alone saying it out loud to a stranger.

“What?”

“Our sex life was very....” I sip my champagne and widen my eyes. “For better words...boring.”

“He was a dud in bed?”

“I think we made each other duds in bed.” I shrug. “It wasn’t just his

fault; it was mine too.”

He listens. “And he was on with this woman behind your back while you were still married?”

“Yeah, I was away in Hawaii and London a lot looking after big accounts. One time I was in Hawaii and I called him late at night his time and he was in the shower and I distinctly heard a woman’s voice, I could tell by the echo that she was in the bathroom with him.”

“Did you say anything?”

“I did but he said it was a crossed line.” I shrug. “You know it’s weird, my gut told me something was going on. But I kind of blocked it out and was completely blindsided when it did all come out.” I shrug, embarrassed. “Stupid fool.”

“Don’t blame yourself for this, there is nothing foolish about being in love.”

“I don’t, I just feel so...pathetic.”

“Why?”

“When he got caught and I kicked him out, he didn’t fight for us. He just moved straight in with her.” I frown as I remember how devastating that time in my life was. “It was like we never happened, out with the old and in with the new within a week. It was the weirdest ...” I shrug. “I mean, usually there’s a transition of mourning for a marriage lost. He never regretted it for a day.”

“I’m sure he would have, even if he never showed it.”

“You haven’t met this man.”

“How long since you’ve had sex?” he asks.

“That’s a very personal question.”

“Answer it.”

I shrug, embarrassed. “A little over six years, the last few years of our marriage were sexless.”

His eyebrows flick up in surprise as he sips his champagne. “Bob must be getting a good work out then.”

I shake my head. “Nope. That part of my life completely shut down when I found out Graham was having an affair.”

“You haven’t orgasmed in six years?” he gasps.

“No.”

He gives me the best come-fuck-me look I’ve ever seen and something tells me Thomas has a new agenda.

Help!

I take a huge gulp of champagne; I feel like I'm in some exotic movie or something.

"This is your seat." The waiter pulls out a chair at the table next to us as he sits a couple who have just walked in.

Thomas's dark eyes hold mine and he licks his lips as if imagining something. "We need to rectify this situation," he mouths.

No shit, Sherlock.

We stare at each other as my heartbeat echoes somewhere in the distance. He takes my hand over the table and lifts it to his mouth and kisses my fingertips, he then cups my hand around his face as his big eyes hold mine. He gives me a slow sexy smile as if to warn me of his intentions.

*Oh...*

"What is the special tonight?" I'm jolted out of my daydream as I hear a familiar voice. I glance up to see that Graham and Melody are sitting at a table just beside us and my eyes widen in horror.

What the actual fuck!

"What?" Thomas mouths.

I take out my phone and text him.

That's my ex-husband and his new wife sitting just there.

He reads my text and looks up at them and frowns, he texts back.

Eww... That is your ex-husband?

Something about this ridiculous situation tickles my fancy and I giggle as I read his text. He types again and I wait.

No wonder you fucking hated sex!

I giggle harder and take a huge gulp of my wine, this night is un-fucking-believable even to me.

Thomas's eyes roam over the two of them and he texts again.

And that is his wife... eww again!

I put my hand over my mouth to hide my smile, I know I'm paying him to be on my side but damn it, it's worth every penny. He types another message.

Pretend not to see them

I frown in question and another text bounces in.

It's game time.

What?

He stands and walks around to my side of the table, "Going to the restroom, darling," he tells me in a loud voice, he then leans down and takes my face in his hands and kisses me. Soft and passionate with tongue and suction and....

*Jeez.*

"Come with me." He smiles against my lips. "I'll make it worth your while."

Stop.

I widen my eyes, talk about making a scene.

"You behave." He says with a chuckle and saunters off to the bathroom.

Graham has seen me; I can see his reflection in the window as he waits for me to look around. Of course I sip my champagne and look the other way in an attempt to ignore him.

Thomas walks back through the restaurant as every woman in the restaurant's eyes follow him back to our table. He's utterly gorgeous, the kind of man that stands out in a crowd. Wearing a linen sports coat and blue jeans, his dark wavy hair sits to just-fucked perfection. But it's the confidence that he oozes, he has this glowing aura around him that says *if I want your girl I'll take her.*

He sits down and takes my hand over the table. "What did I miss?" He smiles sexily.

"Nothing."

He kisses my fingertips as he lovingly looks over at me.

"Elizabeth," Graham says.

We both turn, acting surprised. "Oh, hi." I smile, my eyes flick to Melody. "Hi, Melody."

Melody fakes a smile. "Hello."

Graham's eyes flick between Thomas and me. "Who's your friend?" he asks.

"I'm her boyfriend," Thomas interrupts. "Who are you?"

Graham's eyes hold his. "I'm her ex-husband."

Melody's eyes go to Graham in annoyance at him introducing himself that way. "I'm Melody," she says.

"Hello, Melody." Thomas smiles without hardly glancing her way. "So..." Thomas smiles. "We finally meet."

Graham's eyes hold Thomas's. "I've never heard of you."

Thomas chuckles. "I'm sure you haven't, I met Elizabeth long before you divorced."

Graham's eyes flick to me and then back to him. "What does that mean?"

Thomas smiles and raises his champagne glass toward Graham and then takes a slow sip.

Oh. My. God.

Thomas is full baiting him.

"How long have you two been together?" Graham says; he hates Thomas already.

"Oh, how long is a ball of string..." Thomas smiles over at me. "Our relationship spans over the last fifteen years." He kisses my hand in his. "Doesn't it, darling?"

*What?*

Graham frowns as if putting the puzzle together. "Meaning what?"

Thomas smiles and turns his attention to Melody. "How did you meet Graham, Melissa?"

"Melody," she snaps.

"Right." Thomas smirks sarcastically.

Graham glares at him while Thomas smiles back. "Well Melody, tell us all the details, how did you two meet?"

"None of your business," Graham replies.

"A dating app," Melody says at the same time.

*What?*

They met on a dating app.

He was actively looking for another woman while still married to me.

Oh...this one hurts...and I don't know why, we are already divorced.

An emotion flashes across Thomas's face and I can't tell if it's anger or satisfaction.

"Well, not quite as romantic as our meeting, is it, darling?" He smiles over at me.

I drain my glass and look around for the waiter.

*More alcohol over here!*

“When was that?” Graham asks again.

“Our eyes met across a crowded room.” Thomas smiles dreamily. “We fought the attraction at first but in the end it was too primal to ignore.”

“Where was this?”

“We first fell in love in Hawaii, I was there working and Elizabeth visited often.” Thomas frowns as if thinking and then shrugs. “Well I was in love, Elizabeth was just in lust and using me for sex.” He gives me a playful wink. “I wore her down though.”

“That would have been fourteen or fifteen years ago now,” I chime in.

Ha!

He smiles lovingly over at me. “For years I begged her to move to Hawaii with me. Of course.” He rolls his eyes. “She had this stupid notion of integrity or something equally ridiculous. Thankfully she finally came to her senses. We live between her and my house in LA now.”

Graham glares at Thomas, a red glow is all around him and I want to jump off my chair and punch the air.

This is the best day of my life.

“Actually we’re going back to Hawaii next year to get married. You two should come.” He looks between them. “After all, your sordid affair finally set Elizabeth free to be with her soulmate. I owe you two...big-time.” He raises his champagne glass in a fake toast. “It was the best thing that ever happened to us.”

*Oh...he’s good.*

If I scripted this meeting myself I couldn’t have written it better. I glance over to see Melody looking like she’s about to vomit.

“What do you do?” Graham snaps.

“I’m a doctor,” Thomas replies. “What do you do again?”

“I’m in recruitment,” Graham all but spits.

“Ah, that’s right. Elizabeth’s business.” He sips his champagne. “You must be struggling without the brains of the business.”

Graham is turning red with rage.

“Can I take your order, sir?” the waiter interrupts.

“Nous n’allons pas rester, merci quand même.” Thomas smiles.

“You speak French?” Melody frowns.

“Oui, je parle français.” Thomas smiles over at her.

She smiles goofily. “Oh....”

“Let’s go, darling.” He stands and holds his hand out for me.

He turns to the two of them. “We have another dinner to get to, lovely to meet you both.”

I stand and Graham’s eyes drop down my body and to Thomas. Thomas puts his arm around me and kisses my temple as we walk toward the door.

“Oh my god,” I whisper. “I can’t believe you just did that.”

“What a dick,” he murmurs as he kisses my temple again. “I should have fucked you on his table.”

*That would work.*

“Where are we going?” I ask as we get out onto the street.

“Somewhere better.”

## **Six Hours Later.**

Somewhere better.

True to Thomas's promise, he delivered. I have been wined and dined and laughed around Paris.

Somewhere better was so much better.

We've drunk champagne and eaten beautiful food. We made friends at a bar and laughed until our stomachs ached. Every woman in the world was green with envy as Thomas held me close on the dance floor.

We walk into the hotel reception hand in hand and get into the elevator and we turn toward the doors.

Thomas looks over at me, his eyes drop to my lips as the air between us changes.

Fake.

Date.

Cut it out.

The doors open and he walks me down the corridor. "Where is your room?"

"This way. Where's yours?" I ask.

"Three floors up, I'm being a gentleman and walking you to your door."

"Oh. This is me." I smile as we arrive.

"I had a great time." He smiles.

"Me too."

He takes my face in his hands and kisses me, his lips lingering against mine as arousal swims between us.

My knees nearly buckle from beneath me.

"So...." he breathes against my lips. "Are you going to invite me in?"



## **Elizabeth.**

MY AROUSAL FOG instantly dissipates and I pull out of his kiss. “I....” My chest rises and falls as I grapple for air, a vision of the two of us getting hot and heavy and rolling around in the sheets flashes before me. “I just....”

We stare at each other for an extended beat, and then taking my cue he gives me a soft smile. “Good night, Elizabeth.” He kisses my cheek and then turns and walks up the hall. I stare after him, aroused and confused and damn it...why did I let him leave?

Because he’s an escort...that’s why.

I walk into my room and close the door behind me, my ethics slipping firmly back into place. No matter how low I feel or hard things get, or how absolutely gorgeous and charming Thomas Stone is.

I will never pay for sex.

Breakfast...also known as kill me now in the light of day.

I stand in the elevator as I go over last night in my head. Telling Graham the lie about how long Thomas and I were together was definitely the highlight of my life.

The look on his face when he realized that Thomas and I were a thing long before we broke up.

Not that any of it’s true but damn it was satisfying to see that sleazebag squirm.

For the first time I actually feel sorry for Melody, I can’t imagine being stuck with the loser for life. I smile to myself as I chalk up a small victory, *progress*.

Kerry may have been right, maybe this conference is the way to get the closure I need.

My mind goes to Thomas and the wonderful night we had. Laughing and kissing and dancing around Paris like a couple of lovesick fools.

Drinking...so much drinking.

I’m embarrassed by my prick-teasing behavior; we did not need to practice kissing and yet somehow that’s all we did.

We check into our new hotel at the conference venue today and I’m

wearing a new dress, it's navy blue and fitted with a zipper that runs right down the front of it, and it matches the navy-blue lace underwear I have underneath it...that I'm wearing just for me.

I've got cute little navy flats and my blond hair is done again. I do have to admit, I am really loving myself in this new look.

I feel twenty years younger...or maybe it's just the company that I'm keeping.

I walk into the hotel restaurant and see Thomas sipping coffee by the window, he glances up and sees me and breaks into a breathtaking smile.

My heart skips a beat as I walk over to him. "Hello."

"Good morning." He smiles.

Something about the way he purrs good morning should be illegal...or at least taught to all boys in high school. Either or...it sounds perfect.

I sit down opposite him. "Morning." I force a smile.

Thomas smiles knowingly into his coffee cup. "What is that look?"

"What look?"

"The look you're giving me."

"I don't know what you mean." I look around to change the subject. "We need to check into the new hotel by ten, we should probably get going soon."

"Let's eat breakfast first," he tells me. "Coffee or tea?"

"Coffee."

He gestures to the waitress and she comes over. "May I order a coffee?" He gestures to me.

"Of course." The waitress smiles. "What would you like?"

"Cappuccino please."

She leaves us alone and I glance up to see Thomas staring at me. "What's wrong?" he asks softly.

"Nothing," I answer way too fast.

As if reading my mind: "It's okay, Beth."

*Beth.*

Nobody has ever called me Beth; I've always been a Liz.

"Look, I just...." I drag my hand down my face as I fidget in my chair. "It's just... I'm embarrassed about last night. Forgive me."

"Why would you need forgiving?"

"Because I was kissing and prick teasing and honestly... last night isn't who I am"

"I disagree."

“What?”

“The woman I took out last night was fun and spontaneous and hilarious actually. Not to mention absolutely blazing fucking hot.”

“You really don’t need to lie to me. I’m paying you regardless.”

“You’re paying for me to go to a conference and that’s it. What we do off the clock is personal and free. I know I don’t need to say these things, and trust me I wouldn’t say them if I didn’t mean it.”

“Can we drop it?”

“Give yourself permission to have fun...Beth.” He takes my hand over the table. “What are you punishing yourself for?”

“What?” I frown.

“Why do you think you can’t be wild and free?”

“I don’t think that at all.”

“Can we agree that whatever has been programmed into your head up until this point is no longer serving you?”

“Your coffee.” The waitress puts my coffee down.

“Merci.” I smile.

“Beth,” he says. “Look at me.”

I drag my eyes to meet his.

“Just let go of control and this good girl persona that you think you have to hold...and let me lead us through this weekend.”

I sip my coffee as I listen.

“Stop thinking about what is right and wrong and just let life happen.” He gives me a slow sexy smile. “You might just be surprised how much fun it is.”

My shoulders slump in disappointment. “Do you think I’m an uptight frigid mole?”

“What?” He bursts out laughing and it’s deep and rumbly. “Uptight and frigid most definitely. The mole part I’m not so sure.” He laughs again and it’s a wonderful sound.

That statement sounded ridiculous, even to my ears, and I giggle too.

“Now...let’s go get the Reynold’s account.”

The car pulls into the conference hotel and Thomas and I climb out of the cab, the trunk pops and the doorman grabs our bags. “Bonjour.” He smiles. “You may go straight through to reception.”

“Merci.” Thomas smiles as he takes my hand in his, he leads me through to reception and up to the check-in counter. There are a few couples in front of us and Thomas slings his arm around my shoulder as we wait.

I catch sight of us in a full-length mirror and I bite my bottom lip to hide my satisfied smile.

Me in my cute navy dress and Thomas being all...well, Thomasish.

We look *good*.

The man up the front finishes up and we step forward, there’s one couple in front of us now. “So, what’s on today?” Thomas whispers as I scroll on my phone.

“We have the welcome lunch and then I have a thing on this afternoon that you don’t have to come to and then we have a cocktail party tonight,” I reply, distracted.

“Okay.” He puts his lips on my temple as he looks over my shoulder at Instagram on my phone. He puts his lips to my ear. “What underwear are you wearing?”

I feel my face flush. “Will you behave for just one minute?”

“No.” He nips my ear, goose bumps scatter up my arms and he smiles as he feels them.

“Next,” the woman on the check-in desk calls.

We step forward. “We would like to check in, please.” I slide my passport over to her and she types into her computer.

“Ah yes. We have you in two rooms.”

“No,” Thomas interrupts. “We only booked one room.”

I glance over my shoulder to him and see that Graham and Melody are in the line behind us, Thomas subtly widens his eyes at me.

Oh crap....

“One king room,” Thomas asserts.

“My apologies, sir, I’m not sure what happened. That’s an error.” She types again and prints up the keys and slides them across the counter. “One king room. Breakfast is included and located in the garden terrace out the doors and to the right every morning from six.”

“Thank you.” Thomas still has his arm firmly around my shoulders, then turns and pretends to see Graham and Melody for the first time. “Oh, hello.”

“Hello.” Melody smiles.

“Hi,” Graham grunts.

“Lovely day.” Thomas smiles as he takes my hand in his. “I guess we’ll

see you guys later.” He leads me into the elevator and we turn to face the doors and I drop his hand like a hot potato.

*One room.*

Oh my god, what a fucking nightmare, I haven’t shared a room with anyone in years. What happens if I want to burp or crap or eat cake at midnight?

I feel myself begin to sweat; this is a disaster.

The doors open onto our floor and I walk up the corridor. “I’m going to get my own room, don’t worry.”

“I’m happy to share a room.” He raises his eyebrow playfully.

“Will you cut it out,” I whisper as we get to our door.

He holds up his two hands in surrender.

Damn it, I make a mental note that I need to kill Kerry as soon as I get home.

*This is all her fault.*

I open the door and am pleasantly surprised, the room is huge with a giant size king bed. It has a couch at the end of the bed and an armchair with an ottoman in the corner. There is a window seat in a bay window overlooking the Eiffel Tower.

“Wow.” I smile as I look around.

The bathroom is beautiful apricot marble and has a big circular bath in the center.

“Gorgeous,” Thomas says. “This will do us nicely.”

“Oh....” I shrug. “You can have this room, I’ll get another.”

Thomas’s eyes hold mine, “What is it?”

“What’s what?” I cross my arms.

“Last night....” Thomas takes me into his arms as he looks down at me. “You were....”

“Flirty.” I cut him off. “And...I apologize for giving you the wrong idea.”

His eyes hold mine. “It’s okay to enjoy yourself, you know?”

“I know.”

“Do you?” He tucks a piece of hair behind my ear. “So why do I get the feeling that you want to keep punishing yourself.”

“Why would I want to punish myself?” I whisper.

“Because your marriage didn’t work out, because on some level you blame yourself for its demise.”

“Don’t....”

“I think you’ve forgotten how to be happy, Beth.”

*I know I have.*

Hearing the truth is overwhelming and my eyes fill with tears.

“Hey,” he whispers softly, he puts his finger under my chin and brings my face up to his. “I’m not trying to upset you.”

I nod, unable to push a word past the lump in my throat.

“You know what I see when I look at you?” he whispers. “I see this beautiful woman who has so much happiness waiting for her...but she needs to be brave enough to try it.”

“How do I try it?” I whisper shamefully. “I don’t even know where to start.”

“You live life like it’s your last day on earth.”

I frown.

“No yesterdays, no tomorrows.” He kisses me softly, like a magician his words cast a spell over me. I feel myself begin to float away on a sea of dreams. “Today is all that matters. If you live in the today you will always be happy.”

“Is that what you do?”

“Yes.” His hand cups my face, “If you knew today was your last day on earth, would you stay in this room with me tonight?”

“Maybe....” I whisper.

“Would you let me kiss you?” He takes my face in his hands and tenderly kisses me, his lips lingering over mine. “Would you let me please you?”

*Yes....*

He slowly slides down the front zipper of my dress as my heart hammers in my chest. He kisses me again and my eyes close as he slides it all the way down, my dress falls completely open.

With his eyes locked on mine he trails his hand down my jaw and then slowly across my décolletage, over my breasts and dusts the backs of it over my stomach. “Would you let me touch you here?” His four fingertips slide over my sex through my panties. He puts his mouth to my ear. “Deep inside.” He bites my earlobe and goose bumps scatter up my arms. “I can make you feel so good.... Beautiful Beth.”

*Beautiful Beth.*

My breath quivers as I try to control myself, every cell in my body aches to feel his touch.

I get a vision of his thick body over mine, my legs up around his waist as

he rides me hard.

Oh....

From the darkest depraved part of my psyche a little voice whispers, *You're paying him to act like he wants you.*

No.

“We have to get going.” I step back from him.

His eyes hold mine. “Why are you fighting this attraction?”

“This wasn't in our arrangement.” I turn my back to him and with shaky hands I do my dress up. “You have your fifty thousand dollars, leave me be.”

“This has nothing to do with the fucking money and you know it.”

“I hired you for a conference not a fuckfest...and—” I throw my hands up, “—and I'm sure all of your clients fall into your welcoming arms but I can assure you that won't be me. So get it out of your head. Right. Now.” I walk into the bathroom and close the door and I lean up against the back of it as my body screams for me to go back in and face my demons.

To beg him for more.

## **Twenty Minutes Later.**

“You ready to go down?” I ask as I walk out of the bathroom.

“Yep.” He stands, he’s changed his suit. He’s in a navy one now with a crisp white shirt...how does he know that navy suits are my kryptonite? His dark hair is just messed to perfection and damn it...I hate that he’s this good looking. It’s really complicating what should be a simple situation.

He holds the door open and I walk past him and into the corridor, we walk in silence to the elevator and I get the feeling that he’s pissed with me.

Well good...because I’m pissed at him.

He pushes the button and we wait for the elevator in silence, it dings as it arrives and we walk in and face the front. I glance over at him. “Are you angry at me?”

“Nope.” He straightens his tie as he looks straight ahead.

“Well...you’re acting angry.”

“Just doing my job.” His jaw clenches as he stares at the back of the doors.

I inwardly roll my eyes; this day could be a legitimate fucking disaster.

What was I thinking?

I take out my phone and text Kerry.

I’m going to kill you with my bare hands.

I get a text back of two smiley faces...she thinks this is funny.

*Bitch.*

The elevator dings as we arrive to the conference floor and he takes my hand and smiles sweetly. “Let’s go, my *beloved.*” He sneers.

“What are you doing?” I whisper angrily.

“You want a puppet.... So I’m being a fucking puppet.” He steps out of the elevator dragging me with him, and smiles broadly at everyone in the room like the performer he is. “It’s show time.”



## Elizabeth.

THE FUNCTION ROOM is crammed and busy, people are standing around as they chat, circular tables are set with the finest silverware and flowers sit proudly in the centers. Thomas smiles as he looks around. "This way." He pulls me by the hand to the bar. "What would you like to drink?" he asks.

"Do you think it's a good idea if you drink?" I ask.

"Yes."

"I'm not sure...."

"What are you afraid of...that I'll fuck you on Graham's table?"

A stupid grin covers my face at the thought.

"Oh...it's only okay if we're making dickhead jealous, I'll note that down." He fakes a smile and goes to the bar.

I roll my lips to hide my smile, he's kind of cute when he's grumpy like this.

He returns momentarily with two glasses of wine and passes me mine; I take a sip and wince.

"No good?" He frowns.

I subtly shake my head.

"I'm almost scared to try it." He takes a tentative sip and crosses his eyes. "Good god." He licks his lips as he tries to deal with the flavor. "We're in Paris for fuck's sake, isn't the champagne supposed to be good here?"

"Not all things are good in Paris."

"So it seems." He fakes a shiver and I giggle.

"We should mingle." I look around.

He exhales heavily. "Fine."

"You know, you were a lot cuter when you did what you were told," I murmur under my breath.

"Ha." He rolls his eyes and takes another sip as he winces.

"What does *ha* mean?"

"It means you're one to talk."

"Meaning what?"

"You were a lot cuter when you were all kissy and cuddly last night but do you see me complaining?"

"You're sulking, that's the same thing."

He pretends to laugh and then drops his face deadpan. "You can stop

talking now, Elizabeth...you're grating on my nerves."

"Ha. *You're* grating on my nerves." I take a sip and wince. "This is so fucking bad."

"Atrocious," he mutters as he takes another sip.

"If you hate it so much why are you still drinking it?" I whisper.

"Because there's nothing else to do here...nothing that I want to do anyway."

"What does that mean, what do you want to do?"

"We could go upstairs and take a bath or something," he says casually. "Wash your mind a little."

"My mind is not dirty." I look around the room, "Unlike yours."

"My mind is focused on good clean fun and dirty has nothing to do with it." He holds his glass up to a silent toast, "So...let's read the room," he says.

"Okay," I whisper. "The man and woman in the yellow dress in the corner are the Baxter's. Brilliant at their job but mad swingers and at last year's conference got rolling drunk and invited everyone back to their room for an orgy."

"Nice." He nods as his eyes linger on them, "Did anyone go?"

"Just me," I lie.

He smirks and taps his glass on mine. "That's our backup plan sorted for the night then."

"There is the Vesper team, they bring like ten staff with them every year." I point in their direction. "Weird nerdy men who do absolutely no work while here but all volunteer to come because they want a trip away."

"Smart."

"We have the iMac girls." I gesture to the group of girls in the center. Every one of them is young and gorgeous. "They are the kind of girls I imagine you like on the outside."

He looks them up and down. "Bit young aren't they?"

"Oh please," I scoff.

"I don't want to sleep with a little girl. I like women over thirty. Actually, thirty-five is my sweet spot."

"How old are you?" I frown.

"Thirty-six. How old are you?"

"Older than that."

"Cougar hey?" He raises a suggestive eyebrow.

"Not in the least." I spot the target. "That's Mrs. Reynolds, she's the one

who holds this conference and the one we need to win the account from.”

“Tell me more about her?”

“Widow, French. Billionaire.”

His eyes linger on our subject. “Billionaire hey?”

“Yes.” I sip my drink. “She’s the kind of woman you should go for.”

“Eww.” He screws up his face. “My dick would not be in agreement with that plan.”

I giggle, glad that our easy banter has returned. “Anyway, good thing because you are supposed to be my boyfriend, anyway.”

“Fiancé,” he mouths. “Get it right.”

“Right.”

“Where are we getting married again?” he asks.

“Hawaii.” I sip my wine. “Apparently.”

“Are you wearing a white dress?” He looks around the room as he talks. “Because I think you should seeing you’re a born-again virgin.”

“Of course, because I didn’t have sex with you obviously means I’m a born-again virgin?” I mutter as I drain my glass. “I’m not sure if you know this...but you aren’t irresistible.”

“Ha,” he scoffs. “I don’t know if you know this...but you aren’t fooling me.”

“What does that mean?” I whisper.

“I know.”

“Know what?”

“Hello,” Graham’s voice says from behind, we both turn to see him standing with Melody.

“Hello.” Thomas smiles. “How was your morning?”

“Good thanks.” Melody smiles. “I’m literally like starving.”

“Oh my god, like me too.” Thomas widens his eyes all excited-like and I have to bite my lip to hide my smile, he’s such a smart-ass.

“Stop,” I mouth discreetly, he smiles into his glass as he takes a sip of the poison.

“Graham,” he says. “You must really work out, man, you’re in great shape.”

Graham smiles proudly as he looks down at himself. “I do my share.”

I snort my wine up my nose, Graham does not do his share...he has no share in the shape department.

“Looks like you do a lot of people’s share.” Thomas squeezes his bicep.

“Impressive.”

Graham chuckles, oh hell...he can charm men too.

Now I've officially seen it all.

“When you two have finished feeling each other up we need to take a seat,” I mutter dryly.

“This way.” Thomas leads me by the hand and we sit down, unfortunately Graham and Melody sit at our table. Thomas grabs my hand in his and puts it onto his lap over his crotch and I feel his hard erection as he flexes under my fingers.

*What?*

I discreetly widen my eyes at him and he gives me a playful wink.

This man is a fucking sex maniac.

The table breaks into chatter but all I can focus on is the heat coming from the hard cock under my hand.

Thomas casually twists the ring on my finger as he talks and I have an out-of-body experience.

It's nice having him here with me. Well, not necessarily Thomas, it's nice having someone here with me. I've been on my own for so long, I think I was alone even when I was married. It's ironic that I feel that I can trust a man who I've hired to be my date more than I could ever trust my husband.

I watch Graham and Melody and the way he speaks to her and I see a former version of myself. The weaker version.

Maybe my marriage didn't fall apart, maybe I was never meant to marry him in the first place. Maybe the universe was just rectifying my mistake.

That's it...isn't it?

The epiphanies keep coming, blow after blow.

Thomas laughs and chats with everyone at our table, he's so charismatic and endearing while I sit and eat and think in silence.

I wonder what his personal life must be like, he could have any woman he wants.

Does he date like a regular guy or...is he in love with someone...what's it like to live in his shoes?

I've never met anyone like him.

His fingers circle on the back of my shoulder. “You okay?” he asks softly.

“Yeah, why?”

“You're very quiet. You've hardly said anything the entire two hours.”

“Not much to say.” I force a smile.

I glance at my watch, what.... We’ve been here for two hours?

“That brings a conclusion to our luncheon. The first seminar will be in the Starling Room in five minutes.”

Thomas looks around the table. “See you all tonight, everyone.” We stand and walk a little to the side and he leans in and kisses me, his lips linger over mine. “Tonight.” He smiles against my lips. “I can’t wait.”

My heart skips a beat at his close proximity as he kisses me some more and I giggle and pull out of his grip. “Go.”

I turn around to see an older woman watching us. “Oh to be so in love.” She smiles. “You two are adorable.”

“Thank you.” I cringe, if only she knew. Adorable business associates.

That’s it!

**Thomas.**

**I sit at the hotel bar and sip my scotch.**

**Elizabeth is upstairs getting ready for the cocktail party and I'm waiting down here for her.**

**I'm a professional, I pride myself on my work ethic and my ability to separate my personal and work life.**

**In the last six hours since I've seen Elizabeth, I've been hard for five and a half of them.**

**My only half-hour reprieve was when I had a wank imagining it was her lips around my cock.**

**There's something about this woman, she's different to my other clients.**

**I can't keep my hands off her.**

**When she kisses me...all bets are off. The thought of her not orgasming for six years has me hardly able to see straight.**

***I want her.***

**I want her beneath me, I want her on me, and more than anything I want to hear her moan my name as she comes.**

**It's all I can fucking think about.**

**I sip my scotch, disgusted with myself. This is not in the playbook; I don't lust over my clients. I never cross that line.**

**Sure I sleep with a few of them, not many if I'm honest, but I never want any of them like this.**

**I sip my scotch and look up to the door to see her walking in through it. She's wearing a gray fitted strapless dress, her blond hair is up. She gives me a beautiful broad smile and every one of my cells stands to attention.**

**She's here.**

**I stand and kiss her cheek. "You look gorgeous."**

**Her perfume wafts around me and I feel my cock twinge in appreciation.**

**She sits down on the stool beside me. "What have you been doing all day?" She smiles as she sips the cocktail I had waiting for her.**

**"Wanking."**

**She gives me a slow sexy smile. "How was I?"**

**“Sensational.” I sip my scotch as my eyes hold hers. “Although... would prefer something more...” I widen my eyes, “...3D.” I slide my hand up her thigh. “Let’s skip the cocktail party and get straight to the good part.”**

**“The good part?”**

**“The me railing you into next week part.”**

**“You’re such a romantic.” She smiles.**

**“I try my best.”**

**“For the record, Thomas, nothing is happening between us.”**

**“Why not?”**

**“Because....” She shrugs. “I’m not into you.”**

**“Liar.”**

**Her eyes hold mine for a moment. “Okay, you want the truth?”**

**“Yes.”**

**“As much as I enjoy your company, deep down I know that you are being paid to please me. I just wouldn’t enjoy myself knowing that you are probably hating every minute of it.”**

**“Trust me, I’d enjoy it, and besides, me and you are off the clock.”**

**“We’re not though.” She rolls her eyes as she sips her drink. “Forget it, it’s not happening.”**

**“But...”**

**“Save your moves for your next client, they’re wasted on me.” She leans over and kisses my cheek; her lips linger on my skin and she puts her mouth to my ear. “Pity though, the railing sounded pretty fucking good.”**

**Thump, thump, thump goes my cock.**

**I grab her hand and put it over my crotch. “Does this feel like a man who doesn’t want you?”**

**Her eyes hold mine as the air swirls between us, I don’t care what she says, there’s a serious attraction going on here.**

**I take her face in my hands and kiss her. My tongue slides through her open lips and my cock really begins to throb.**

***She’d be wet and tight and...I bet she’d taste so fucking good.***

**“Thomas.” She pulls out of my grip. “Let’s get going.”**

## **Elizabeth.**

You know those days that you have in your life that just seem.... Monumental?

I'm having one.

Something is changing deep in my DNA.

Epiphanies about my sham of a marriage, aroused by playful Thomas, my new look has me feeling more like myself than I have in years, and this afternoon I had the perfect pitch presentation for the Reynolds account.

I walk into the ballroom feeling like a rock star, a shadow of my timid self from years gone by. My newly gained confidence is somehow tangible, a force that I can feel.

My glow-up is in motion.

Thomas leads me through the ballroom by the hand and pulls my chair out for me. "Would you like a drink, sweetheart?" he asks.

"Yes please." I smile up at him, our gaze lingers on each other for a little longer than it should and I feel my stomach flutter.

*How is he so beautiful?*

"Back in a moment." He takes off to the bar and I look around the ballroom. Huge chandeliers hang overhead and there's a jazz band up the front playing.

"Wow." I smile, I feel my phone buzz with a text and I dig it out of my bag to see a notification from my bank.

Transfer complete: \$50,000 from Thomas Stone.

"What?" I glance over to Thomas to see him watching me with his phone in his hand.

I begin to hear my heartbeat in my ears.

He paid me the money back.

I sit stunned, *what?*.... I can't believe this.

Eventually he ambles back to the table with our two drinks and takes a seat beside me.

"What are you doing?" I frown.

He sips his drink. "Whatever I like."

"That was the stupidest thing you've ever done." I smirk as my

excitement begins to build.

“Probably.” He smiles.

I roll my lips to hide my goofy smile, “So.... Are you paying me for sex now?”

He gives me the best come-fuck-me look of all time. “That pussy better be worth it.”

I feel my face flush. “It will be.”

“Would you like to dance?” He holds out his hand.

“Maybe.”

He chuckles darkly and leads me to the dance floor and takes me into his arms, we sway to the music for a beat. “You know, I’ve never paid for sex before.” He kisses me softly, his lips lingering over mine. “What do I get for my money?”

“Whatever you want,” I whisper up at him.

Arousal swims between us as we stare at each other.

“Can we leave?” I ask.

“What?” He chuckles. “Now?”

“Right now.”

We bust through the door, kissing out of control, and he slams it behind us.

Suddenly we’re alone and his eyes drop down my body as he circles me, I feel like I can hardly breathe.

“Let’s get you naked, shall we?” he murmurs, he slides down the zipper of my dress and holds my hand to help me step out of it. I stand before him in my lacy white underwear, I’m even wearing suspenders.

Don’t tell anyone but I was planning on having sex with Thomas tonight anyway.

I mean.... How could I not?

This has just made it all the more perfect between us.

He undoes my bra and my breasts fall free, he smiles darkly as he bends and takes my nipple into his mouth, he sucks on me and I feel it all the way to my sex.

He pushes me back onto the bed and lies on his side beside me. His hand slides down the front of my panties and my breath quivers as he runs his fingertips through the lips of my sex.

My nerves are pumping.

“Oh...yes,” he breathes. “You’re so wet for me.” He slowly slides one finger into my body. “Open your legs for me.” He pumps his finger. “Just like that.”

My eyes flutter closed as we kiss, unsure if this is real life because it feels too good to be true.

His tongue in my mouth mirrors his finger, slow and steady...strong. He adds another one and then another as he slowly pumps me, my sex is so creamy and wet that the sound of my body sucking him echoes through the room.

My legs are back to the mattress now, I’m wide open for him. His fingers really begin to work me and I see stars.

“That’s it, baby.” He smiles down at me. “Let it go, sweetheart.” He pumps me with his thick fingers. “Clench around me, take what you need.” He bites my bottom lip and the sting makes me shudder hard. He smiles against my lips. “Fuck yeah...I like that.” He pumps me harder. “It’s been too long, hasn’t it, baby?”

His fingers get stronger and stronger and the bed begins to hit the wall.

My body slurps him in and dear god, how am I so wet?

My life flashes before me and my heart is thumping so hard that I can hear it in my ears. Every one of my senses is heightened. More intense.

Better.... So much better.

My back arches off the bed and I moan as a freight train of an orgasm hits me hard.

I shudder and shudder and shudder. My body is completely overcome with pleasure.

“Elizabethttttthhhhhh,” he whispers into my mouth. “So fucking hot when you come.” His fingers keep slowly sliding through my dripping-wet sex as he stares down at me.

My arousal fog lifts and I look up into his eyes and he smiles down at me.

“If today was our last day, it’s pretty fucking perfect,” he whispers.

Embarrassment fills me, what must I look like moaning and writhing on the bed in literally two minutes flat? Nobody comes this quick.

He kisses me softly, his lips lingering over mine. “Take your clothes off,” I whisper as my hand moves lower. I feel his erection through his pants and I clench to deal with the rush of excitement.

“I ...” I whisper.

“You what?”

“I needed that.”

He chuckles. “No shit.” He puts his fingers in his mouth and sucks them. “Hmm,” he hums before putting them in my mouth. I stare at him, shocked, and the arousal down below begins to throb again, the taste of me on his fingers in my mouth.

*He’s so naughty.*

“My first orgasm in eight years,” I whisper up at him.

Fire blazes in his eyes. “The first of many this weekend.” He slowly unbuttons his shirt. “I need to get my money’s worth.”

I lie on my back holding my breath, is this a dream having him undress for me like this? His body is tanned and rippled and he has that V of muscles that disappear into his suit pants.

How the hell is this man so gorgeous?

In slow motion he slides his pants down and his huge dick springs free. Dark well-kept pubic hair and thick veins course down the length of his engorged angry cock.

*Oh...dear god.*

The air leaves my lungs, that was a little more package than I was expecting.

Fear flashes through me.

“You’ll be fine.” He smirks, reading my mind. “And if I was a better man I would warm you up more.” He lifts my leg and puts it over one of his shoulders as he lies over me, he licks up my leg as his dark eyes hold mine, “But I want to feel you struggle to take every fucking inch.”

I swallow the lump of fear in my throat as he nudges the tip through the lips of my swollen sex. He slides it through me a few times as I hold my breath.

“Relax,” he whispers.

“I haven’t done this in a long time,” I breathe.

“Then we have a lot of making up to do.” He surges forward and I feel the sting of his possession.

*Oh fuck...*

“Hmmm,” he breathes with a quiver, his hands on the back of my thighs as he holds my legs back. “Fucking hell.... So good.” He pushes forward again and slides right in as he nails me to the mattress.

We stare at each other as alarm bells scream all around me.

Run.

Run.

*Run.*

This is what it's supposed to feel like to have someone inside of you.

Overwhelming, terrifying.

So good that you can't even breathe.

He circles his hips one way and then the other to loosen me up. "Now."  
He smiles darkly down at me. "Time to earn your money." He slams in deep  
and knocks the air out of my lungs.

Ahhhhhh!

What the hell kind of sex is this?

We fall into a rhythm and he rides me hard, the bed slamming against the  
wall as my body takes every inch. Deep punishing hits and I cling to him as I  
feel myself building again.

In this position I'm nearly scared to come. He's completely in control of  
me as he holds my legs back. A sheen of perspiration dusts his skin as he  
pumps me and I smile up at him in awe.

Lost.... Or maybe I'm found.

Either way...this is the best night of my life.



## **Elizabeth.**

I SIP my coffee as the man sitting opposite me smirks into his.

Thomas the devil Stone.

“Yes?” I ask as I act casual. “Got something to say?”

“I’ve got a lot to say.” He rubs his foot up my shin.

“Such as?” I smile as I sit my coffee down.

His mischievous eyes hold mine. “You were worth every penny.”

I chuckle. “You’re a fool.”

“A satisfied fool.” He runs his fingers through his dark messed-up curls and I get a peek of his large bicep under his T-shirt.

“Why *did* you do that?” I ask.

“I always get what I want.” His eyes hold mine and it’s there again, this energy that zaps through the air, a tangible force.

It’s not love or emotion or anything deep that I can specifically put my finger on.

It’s like there’s this sexy playfulness that bounces between us and damn it...I might be addicted.

Thomas Stone is one hell of a lover.

His reputation preceded him, I mean, he comes with some serious credentials. Fifty thousand dollars for just his company and he refunded it all to have sex with me.

The best sex of my life if I’m keeping score...which I secretly am now.

Today...I feel different. My blinkers have been removed and for the first time in my adult life I can see clearly.

Alive like never before.

Last night we fucked and laughed and fucked some more, Thomas is intelligent and witty and the funniest person I’ve ever met. We had greasy hamburgers in bed from room service and took a two-hour-long bath. There were no false pretenses, fake promises or awkwardness.

Just fun, so much fun. It was the perfect night.

Thomas Stone isn’t an escort.... He’s an expert life coach.

A medic who has brought me back from a very long period of darkness.

He doesn’t know it yet but last night after he fell asleep I transferred the money back into his account.

A deal is a deal.

He earned every fucking penny of that fifty grand; I'd pay it again tomorrow.

All the years of expensive counselling and psychologist visits trying to heal myself when all I really needed was to be railed by a well-hung god.

"What's on today, boss?" He smiles.

"Well." I act serious. "This morning I have meetings."

"Right." He steeple his finger up the side of his temple as he listens.

"Then at one you have an oral appointment between my legs."

He gives me a slow sexy smile as his eyes hold mine. "Excellent."

"Then you can rest a little this afternoon before tonight when I completely use every inch of your body for my pleasure."

He reaches under the table and slides his hand up my calf muscle. "Ever been fucked in a restaurant bathroom before?"

I giggle in surprise. "No."

He stands and takes my hand. "You're about to be."

I stand at the bar as I wait my turn. The afternoon session has just finished and we are having a drink before we retire to get ready for dinner.

Today has been a game changer, I secretly think I've won the Remington account.

She asked me to send the contracts, so fingers crossed and here's hoping.

"Elizabeth," a man's voice says from behind me, I turn to see a familiar face.

"Mathew." I smile. "How are you?"

"Great. And you?" His eyes hold mine and my stomach flips. "You look...incredible." He smiles as he looks me up and down. "You're just glowing."

Well-fucked will do that to a girl.

Mathew and I have always had chemistry, at every conference on every year I would stare at him for hours and wonder what it would be like to be with a man like him.

He's older than me, very successful and well respected in the industry.

He's a kind gentleman.

I look around. "Where's Annaliese?"

"We split."

What?

“Oh.” My face falls as I act sad about it.

“Just on two years.”

“I didn’t know, I’m sorry.”

He shrugs. “And you and Graham never got back together?” he asks as he looks around guiltily.

“No way.” I laugh. “My god, don’t wish that on me.”

He chuckles and an awkward silence falls between us. “So...” He leans his weight up onto his toes. “I was wondering if...you would like to go out some time?” he says. “The truth is, I’ve been wanting to ask you out for years.”

“Oh.” I smile, I try to hide my utter delight and then I remember my goodtime god upstairs.

*Shit...*

“I’m...” I search for the right wording, “I’m kind of seeing someone.”

“Oh.” His face falls.

“It’s very new.”

He nods. “Apologies if I overstepped.”

“Not at all.” I stare at him for a beat.

Fuck it.

“Perhaps you could email me one day.... In case things don’t work out?”

He breaks into a beautiful broad smile. “I could do that.”

We stare at each other for a beat and I feel my face flush and smile goofily as I snap my gaze away.

“He’s upstairs waiting so...I should get going,” I say in a fluster.

“He’s a lucky man.”

I’m the lucky one who gets to spend the weekend with him, suddenly I’m desperate to get up to my Thomas the devil Stone.

“Goodbye, Mathew.”

“For now.” He smiles, he raises his glass of red wine to me and I bite my lip to hide my smile.

I walk casually out of the conference room and once out of sight nearly run to the elevator; I push the button with haste. “Hurry up.”

Once on our floor I stomp up the corridor and bust open the door.

Thomas is lying on the bed in navy silk boxer shorts.... “What a sight to behold.” I smile.

He puts his hands behind his head and shows off his biceps and abs. “Just waiting for my lady.” He winks, he holds his arms out for me and I drop

beside him and hug him. "How did you go?" he asks.

"I think I got the account, she said she was going to email me the contracts."

"I knew you'd get it." He kisses my forehead.

"And the guy I told you about last night."

"Mathew?" He frowns.

"He just asked me out."

He chuckles and kisses my forehead. "Look at you go." He hugs me tighter, "I can't believe you're breaking my heart like this, Beth," he teases. "You wound me, woman, can you not at least act sad that you have to let me go?"

"You mean go to your next job that starts on Tuesday?"

He chuckles. "Yeah, that one."

I kiss his bare chest and snuggle into him for a while. "What are you going to do?"

"Who, me?"

"Yeah." I think for a moment. "What does Thomas Stone's future look like, do you think you'll ever settle down?"

"I'd like to think so." He shrugs. "I may have written myself into a corner with this line of work though." He twists his lips as he falls into deep thought.

"One day you're going to fall madly in love." I smile up at him.

"Hmm." He curls his lip. "I don't know, maybe I already have and I don't even know it."

"You'll know it. When she comes you will move heaven and earth to keep her."

He smiles and hugs me tighter.

"Where are you for Christmas?" I ask.

"Going to Hawaii with my family." He kisses my forehead, "I'll plan our wedding while I'm there."

"Thanks," I giggle and snuggle in closer.

*This man.*

"Did you tell Mathew that you're mine this weekend and that he needs to fuck right off?"

"Yes." I kiss his chest again. "And I told him that you have the most beautiful dick in the world."

He flips me over onto my back and holds my hands over my head as he smiles down at me. "In the world?" He smirks.

“Universe.” I widen my eyes.

“That’s a big call....” He kisses me, his tongue swiping through my open lips, he nudges my thighs apart with his knee and comes to rest between my legs.

We stare at each other as our most intimate parts touch. His hardness to my softness, the perfect yin to yang.

“You know I’ve been a very bad girl today, Sir Thomas,” I whisper.

“Have you?” He flips me again and suddenly I’m kneeling at the edge of the bed, then standing behind me he pulls my dress up and palms my behind through my panties. He grabs a handful of my hair and drags my head back and kisses me backward.

“How much you paying for this one?” I tease.

“Four thousand.”

“I’m worth ten.”

He kisses me aggressively, “Baby, I’d pay anything.”

He can flirt, he can joke, he can fuck, and boy...can he dance.

I laugh out loud as Thomas spins me around the dance floor. I’m having the time of my life.

Laughing and loving my way through what was supposed to be a hellish experience.

“Do you know how beautiful you are when you laugh?” Thomas smiles down at me.

“How have you single-handedly made this weekend so wonderful?” We sway to the music.

“I hate that you’ve been sad for so long,” he says softly.

“Me too.”

“Sometimes the darkest skies bring out the brightest stars.” He kisses me tenderly.

“And what a beautiful star you are, Thomas Stone.” I smile up at him. “You never know, one day you might get a whole book written about you.”

He laughs out loud and spins me around. “No dodgy author is going to massacre my life with a third act breakup.”

I laugh out loud and then we fall serious again. “I don’t think it’s going to be a massacre at all.”

He kisses me softly and then looks over my shoulder. “For the record, if

Mathew keeps looking at you, I'm knocking him out."  
I giggle as he spins me. "I dare you to."

We wheel our suitcases into the airport and our check-in desks are at different ends.

My eyes search his. "I guess this is goodbye."

He takes me into his arms and hugs me tight.

"Thank you." I hold him close. "Thank you for everything. You've changed my world in one weekend."

He puts his head into the crook of my neck.

I feel like I can't let him go. "Look after yourself...okay?" I hold him.

"You too." We hug each other as if we will never see each other again because the reality is we probably won't.

He's changed my entire world in one weekend.

I get a lump in my throat and step back with tears in my eyes.

"Don't cry, for one hundred thousand you can have me for a week."

I laugh out loud and he does too.

He kisses me softly. "Goodbye, Elizabeth." He holds my face in his hands. "It was wonderful to meet you."

"You too."

He picks up his suitcase and turns and walks away.

He doesn't look back but I watch him until I can't see him anymore.

"Goodbye, Sir Thomas." I smile softly.

What a beautiful, beautiful man....

I check my bags and go into the terminal and take a seat at the bar.

"I'll have a margarita please," I ask the waiter.

"Of course."

"Is this seat taken?" a familiar voice asks.

I glance up to see Mathew. "No."

"Mind if I sit down?"

And this is it, the moment my new life begins.

I'm finally free.

Merry Christmas Elizabeth.

I smile broadly. "Not at all."

THE END.

**MR PRESCOTT**

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**Alora.**

I CAREFULLY SET the letter to the side and open my computer.

I cannot believe that I'm even searching for this shit.

I promised that I would do every single last thing on this bucket list and I want to...but honestly?

This?

Nerves dance in my stomach.

I tip my head back to the ceiling. "Are you laughing up there, bitch?"

I type into Google.

*Anonymous sex club for kinks*

I read through the results.

First one.... No. Again...no...no.

I read on to the next page.

## **THE ESTABLISHMENT**

*The Establishment is a private facility five-star resort in Switzerland.  
Explore your needs, wants, and kinks in a safe and anonymous environment.*

### **How does it work?**

*We at the Establishment believe that everyone should live their life to its full  
potential and leave no stone unturned.*

*Many people have sexual desires or interests that are not cohesive with their  
lifestyle, current relationships, or religious beliefs.*

*We help you move past this without barriers in a clinical and safe  
environment.*

***One weekend.  
Total confidentiality.***

***Names and personal information are never shared between clients.***

### **How do I apply?**

*Submit your application and what experience you would like to explore.  
If successful, we match you with a person or people of your desired sex with  
the same needs and wants as yours.*

### **What can I expect?**

**Day One** -*You will arrive at the resort and have one night in your private  
room alone.*

*You will have access to a sexual psychologist if you would like a consult.*

**Day Two** - *You will be introduced to your partner or partners as Jane or Jon  
Doe, under no circumstances are names ever exchanged.*

*There are no names or data kept on the in-house database. A security breach  
or cyber attack is impossible.*

*You will then spend the next twenty-four hours in a private suite with them  
living out and enjoying your every fantasy.*

*All suites are equipped with a private swimming pool, jacuzzi, steam room,  
gymnasium, bondage and playroom, swings and the appropriate benches. All  
equipment such as toys and lubricant are supplied.*

**Day Three** - *You part ways with your partner/partners and spend a night in  
your own private suite to recover.*

**Day Four** - *Satisfied...you return home to your life without the risk of anyone  
ever finding out.*

*Your secret and health are 100% safe.*

**CONFIDENTIALITY IS WHAT SETS US APART.**

*The cost to visit **THE ESTABLISHMENT** is \$70,000 Euros.*

*Don't live life wondering what if.  
Apply for your dreams to come true today.*

### **APPLY NOW.**

“Seventy thousand euros...what the fuck?” I click out of it in disgust, that was sounding so perfect too.

Ughh...I knew it was too good to be true.

I flop back onto my couch, I guess at least at that price you know people are definitely going to be discreet.

I mean...I do have my house deposit money.

No.

My mind goes back to the hospital that day, it's so clear in my mind that it's like it was yesterday and I pick the letter back up and read Misty's bucket list for the ten thousandth time.

I promised I would do it for her, every last thing.

And I'm determined.

I'm living my life for the two of us now.

My eyes skim the letter, I have one thing left to do.

*#9..... Peg a guy.*

I smirk, Misty was a such a dirty bird. How the hell was an eighteen-year-old girl so deviant?

I don't want to do this one, *how can I do this one?*

It's so far from anything I have ever ventured into.

I click into Pornhub and type into the search bar.

### *Pegging*

I peruse through the options and finally find one that I like.

I hit play and watch....

I begin to perspire.

It's weird and wrong and...*hot*.

Fuck.

What the hell am I getting myself into?

Edward.

Paul looks over the top of his glasses across his desk at me. "Hello, Edward." He smiles.

I run my tongue over my teeth, this guy fucking pisses me off. "Hello."

"How are you today?"

I flick my hands up. "I'm here."

"And have you had a chance for any reflection on our last visit?"

"Yes." I glance at my watch. "I don't have long today."

He smiles calmly as he folds his hands on his lap. "Let's recap, shall we?"

I exhale heavily. "Do you have to say the same thing every visit? Don't you get fucking bored?"

Paul smiles and I imagine myself punching him out of his chair.

He reads his notes. "You are here because you have control issues."

"No."

Paul looks up at me, "Why are you here, Edward?"

"Because I promised my sister, Charlotte, that I would see a psychologist."

He runs his finger up his temple as he watches me. "Charlotte is important to you?"

I pinch the bridge of my nose. "This is a waste of time, this is my sixth visit and I'm not getting anywhere with you. Of course she's fucking important to me, why else would I be here?"

"You can't fix a problem until you admit it, Edward."

I sit forward in my chair. "I don't have a problem. I like control, I like to take it from people...I like to assert mine. That's not a problem... it's an asset."

His eyes hold mine. "How is that working out for you relationship wise?"

I run my hand through my hair.

He keeps reading my notes. "Take your time."

*Fuck off.*

I glance at my watch.

"On our second visit you told me that you have had a string of

broken relationships. That you like strong women but they can only take your need to control for so long before they leave.”

“I leave them,” I reply, angered.

“Do you leave them because you want to, or do you leave them because you begin to feel out of control yourself?”

I roll my lips.

“You see, I think that you know that you have an issue, and that you hide behind Charlotte making you come here. That deep down you want to see me and you want to correct this.”

I stay silent.

“Am I right?”

I feel adrenaline scream through my body. “Maybe.”

“Tell me this, Edward, have you ever thought of tackling control head-on?”

“Isn’t that what we’re doing?” I roll my eyes, “Can you hear the things you say sometimes? How am I paying for this bullshit?”

“You are here because I’m left field and I get success. Regardless of how unorthodox my suggestions, there’s no denying I do.”

I exhale, it’s true, he is supposed to be the best.

“You’ve told me that you’re a highly sexed individual,” he says.

“Yes.”

“How often do you like to have sex?”

“Daily.”

“And if you don’t have sex?”

“I fuck my hand,” I reply coldly. “Get to the point.”

“What would you consider the ultimate handover of power to a sexual partner?”

“A woman?” I ask.

“Is that your sexual preference?”

“That’s my only preference.”

“Okay...let’s run with that. How far would you let a woman dominate you in the bedroom?”

“I wouldn’t.”

He sits back in his chair and smiles. “Not at all? Not even in the moment?”

“Where are you going with this?”

“You came to me because I get results and we are getting nowhere in

this office. Let's explore other possibilities."

He digs through his drawer and slides a card over the desk to me.

## THE ESTABLISHMENT

"What's this?" I ask.

"It's a private facility in Switzerland, I think it would be very beneficial for you to visit."

"Why?"

He folds his hands in front of him. "I would like you to explore the possibility of handing your power over to a woman. Give yourself completely over to the experiment."

I frown as his words roll around in my head. "Meaning what?"

"Have you ever thought of visiting a Dominatrix?"

"Nobody is fucking me with a strap-on cock," I spit.

He smiles, clearly amused by my horror. "It doesn't have to come to that but I think it would be good for you to explore other ways to hand over your sexuality and vulnerability and to learn trust."

"No." I shake my head. "No fucking way in hell."

"You might like it." He smirks.

"Absolutely know I won't."

"It's one weekend. Confidentiality is assured and you will be anonymously matched with a woman who has the same needs as you."

"What woman would need this?"

He smiles. "I'd like you to find out."

"No."

"If you go and you can't go through with it...at least you'll know."

"Know what?"

"That there is a control issue and that way we have a good place to start moving forward."

"What in the hell is letting a woman dominate me in bed going to do?"

"It's going to free you from fear."

"I'm not scared."

"Prove it."

**Six months later.**

**Alora.**

“Is there anything else I can help you with, Miss Doe?” the bellboy asks.

Like what...?

Wait...do the bellboys give out sexual favors here too?

Oh dear god, I want to run far, far away.

What the hell am I doing here?

“No.” I force a smile. “I’m good.” I close the door of my suite and sit on the bed and look around. I’m at the Establishment, the kink hotel in Switzerland.

I flop back onto the bed and look up at the ceiling as I search for divine guidance. After going round and round for months I knew if I didn’t do this now...that the wish list wouldn’t be completed. I have no idea if my future boyfriend or husband is going to be into it and if he’s isn’t I can’t do it with someone else.

It will be too late.

I’m using all my savings to do this, and I’m terrified and creeped out and I hate to admit it...a little excited.

I get up and turn on the taps as I run myself a big deep bath, I sit on the edge as I wait for it to fill.

Tomorrow I meet him, Misty’s stranger.

I smile as I think how proud she would be of me.

I’m a little proud of me too.

I pace back and forth in my room.

This can’t be happening. I can’t go through with it.

I want to leave; I want to leave now.

He’s due any minute and I don’t think I can go through with this.

I’m wearing a black sexy date dress and heels; my dark hair and makeup is done.

I’m even wearing lingerie and suspenders.

All I know about my date for the weekend is that he's between twenty-five and thirty-seven, he's heterosexual and that he wants to be pegged by a heterosexual woman.

That's me....

No names or personal information are going to be exchanged and this is the only time we will ever see each other.

I swallow the nervous lump in my throat.

I glance over to the black box that was delivered an hour ago. The equipment we need for the assignment.

Fuck.... I can't even bring myself to open the box and look at it.

Bang, bang, bang...goes my heart.

"Shit, shit, shit." I hold my temples as I imagine how horrifically bad this could be.

*Knock, knock.*

*He's here.*

I glance to the window, wondering if I can jump out of it and escape.

Oh no, it's too late to leave. I've wasted all my money on paying for something that I'm unsure if I'll be able to go through with.

I open the door and am greeted by another bellboy wearing a white uniform.

"Good evening, Miss Doe."

"Hello."

He steps to the side to reveal the man standing behind him and the air leaves my lungs.

Tall, dark hair, and handsome with the biggest blue eyes I've ever seen.

Utterly gorgeous.

We stare at each other as electricity crackles in the air between us.

"May I present Mr Doe."



## **Alora.**

“HELLO.” He holds out his hand to shake mine.

*Oh, he’s English.*

“Hello.”

A weird sense of déjà vu falls over me.

Wait...have we met before?

Mr Doe’s eyes hold mine. “Leave us.”

I glance around as I suddenly realize the bellboy is still here, I totally forgot.

“Yes, sir.” The bellboy turns to me and nods “Dial nine if you need anything, Miss Doe.”

“Thank you.” I can’t even look the poor bellboy in the eye. Does he know the perverted shit we’re here to do?

Of course he does.

I just want the earth to swallow me whole, I’m very vanilla usually...I promise. What must he see working in a place like this?

The door closes as he leaves and we are left alone, I’m so nervous that I can hardly breathe.

Mr Doe has a dominant power about him, why the hell would he be paying for sex?

He walks to the bar. “Would you like a drink?”

“Yes please?” I say timidly.

“What would you like?”

*Cyanide sounds good.*

“Umm...” I can’t even think, let alone string two words together. “Whatever will be fine.”

He stands with his back to me and as he pours our drinks my eyes roam over him. He’s tall, standing over six foot three with dark hair and well built. His suit is perfectly fitted and something about his aura and the way he holds himself tells me he’s wealthy.

He turns and walks toward me with a glass of amber fluid and ice in a crystal tumbler. My heart somersaults in my chest as I take it from him.

He gestures to the table and chairs and we sit down opposite each other.

Just being close to this specimen of a man is unnerving.

“Thanks.” I take a sip and wince.

*Fuck.*

Tastes like gasoline only stronger.

He sits back in his chair all powerful like and sips his drink as his eyes hold mine.

Thump.

Thump.

Thump goes my poor panicked heart.

*What's he thinking?*

An awkward silence hangs in the air between us and I just need to break the ice.

“You’re not what I expected,” I say softly.

“What did you expect?”

His piercing gaze has some sort of intimidation superpower, I want to crawl under the table and hide.

“I’m not sure.”

His eyebrow flicks up as if unimpressed with my answer.

Fuck...why did I say that?

“Am I what you expected?” I try to sound confident but my question comes out as barely a whisper.

“No.”

“Why not?”

“Because you’re submissive.”

*No I'm not...am I?*

“You don’t like submissive?” I frown.

“I love submissive.” His dark eyes hold mine and he lifts the drink to his lips and takes a slow sip. “Very much.”

His approval excites me and I feel my face flush.

I nervously sip my drink. *What will I say next?*

Okay...what the fuck is going on here?

I’m supposed to be hating every moment of this and getting something ticked off my to-do list. Having a visceral physical reaction to this man was not in my plan.

“Do you always fidget when you’re nervous?” he asks.

“What?”

“Your leg.”

I glance down to see my leg bouncing and I put my hand on my thigh to stop it.

*What the hell is wrong with me?*

“Oh...sorry, I didn’t realize.” I look around for an excuse for my kindergarten behavior. “You’re....” I shrug as I search for the right wording. “Intimidating.”

A trace of a smile flashes across his face and he takes a slow sip again. “What are you doing here?”

“I....” I swallow the lump in my throat. “I....”

He raises an impatient eyebrow.

Fuck it. Just tell him the truth.

“I’m living out a bucket list for my best friend.”

“A what?”

“My best friend wrote me a list before she passed of the ten things that she wanted to do in her life.” I take a sip of my drink, feeling braver. “This is me fulfilling wish number nine. I promised her I would do each and every last one.”

“This isn’t even something that you want to do?”

“It wasn’t...but, now that...you’re....” My mouth is so dry I can’t even talk.

*The truth is you’re gorgeous and the thought of fucking you in any shape or form excites me.*

He frowns as he thinks for a moment. “What else was on the list?”

“Lots of things.” I shrug. “Travel. A sex show in Amsterdam.” My brain has gone completely blank under his scrutiny. “Umm.... A tattoo. And ballooning in Cappadocia.”

“Anything else sexual?”

“Umm....” Oh god, why did I openly admit this? “A threesome.”

His fascinated eyes hold mine and he sips his drink.

“And I did that.... A few years ago now, actually.”

“And?”

“I....” I shrug, embarrassed. “I couldn’t bring myself to do two men so I thought I would add another woman and....” My voice trails off.

“And what?”

“I learned that I don’t like to share,” I blurt out in a rush.

A trace of a smile crosses his face. “I don’t share either.”

“Right? I think it’s weird that people do.” I smirk, feeling a little more of my equilibrium return.

We fall silent and he sips his drink as if in deep in thought. “I’ll have your

money refunded. I apologize for wasting your time.”

Disappointment runs through me.

“What?” I frown. “Why?”

“I’m...” He gives a subtle shrug as he tries to articulate himself. “This will not be advancing to the next stage.”

“Why not?”

He gestures to the air that is crackling between us.

“What does that mean?”

“The physical attraction between us is too strong.”

*He feels it too.*

I fight the goofy smile that is threatening to cover my face. “Isn’t that the point?”

“From your perspective perhaps, from mine most definitely not.”

What’s he doing here?

“Do you think you’re gay?” I ask.

“Absolutely not.”

“It’s okay if you are.”

He stands as if outraged and walks toward the door.

*He’s leaving.*

“What are you doing?” I splutter in a panic.

“This is not working.”

“Stop.” I stand too. “We’ve gone to all this trouble to get here and we are obviously attracted to each other so what’s the point of not seeing where it goes?”

“I know where it goes and it doesn’t go there,” he spits angrily.

It suddenly dawns on me, he’s nervous. This is out of the normal for him too.

“So show me where it does go.” I gesture to the couch. “Sit down and... try and relax.” I take the glass out of his hand and go to the bar; I refill it and hand it back over. “Drink this one hundred percent alcohol,” I instruct him. “Although I think it’s illegal to drink this in most countries.” I take a shaky sip and I feel it burn all the way down. “But in a Switzerland sex kink club I guess anything goes.”

His eyes hold mine and I know he’s only seconds from leaving.

“Sit down please, Mr Doe,” I whisper. “Don’t go.”

He hesitates before finally taking a seat on the couch and we fall silent again.

I have no idea what's going through his head.

"I don't like that you're doing this only because you are being forced," he says.

"I'm not being forced. I wanted to fulfill my friend's wishes and to be honest now that I've met you—" I sip my drink as I try to muster up my courage, "—I think it will be very enjoyable to spend some time naked with you."

He gives me a slow sexy smile and sits back in his chair. "I'm a lot to take on."

There is no air in my lungs.

None.

I shrug, feeling like he's warning me.

"You said you were attracted to me?" I whisper.

"Don't act like you can't feel it."

We stare at each other, the magnetic pull toward him is so strong that I can hardly fight it.

Suddenly I just want the awkward fear gone. I want to get this over with.

Whatever *this* is.

"What happens now in a place like this?" I ask nervously.

His eyes hold mine.

"I've never been in a situation like this." I begin to babble on. "Do we date? Do we small talk? Do we eat dinner?" My eyes search his as I beg him to take control. "What do I do?"

"You take your clothes off," he says.

"What?"

"You said you want me to show you where it does go?"

"I did."

"Then do as I say. Take. Your. Clothes. Off."

My eyes widen.

"Now."

What the hell?

We didn't even kiss and he expects me to undress in front of him?

Wait...do we kiss?

I tip my head back and drain my glass, I cough as the poison burns my throat and steals my breath.

I go to walk into the bathroom.

"There," he demands.

“What?”

“You undress right there.”

My heart is hammering so hard in my chest and I glance toward the door and imagine running out of it.

Fuck this, I’m out of here.

“Look me in the eye and take your fucking clothes off,” he growls.

Gulp.... I swallow the lump in my throat.

Oh hell...what the fuck am I doing?

I take one stiletto off and throw it to the side.

Satisfaction flashes across his face and he sits back.

I take the other stiletto off with a shaky hand.

*I’m literally about to have a heart attack.*

I go to the bar and pour myself another glass of Dutch courage and take a huge gulp.

I predict copious amounts of therapy coming in my near future.

Am I actually going to do this?

Fuck it, what have I got to lose. I’m here now.

I slowly undo the zipper at the side of my dress.

“Eyes on me,” he demands.

I glance up and see him sitting there with his hand on his cock.

Gulp....

Fuck.

Me.

Dead.

Is this really happening?

No wonder I was nervous, I had a very good reason to be.

With his dark eyes locked on mine I take my dress down over one shoulder and then the other.

“Take it off,” he mouths.

Oh hell on a cracker, once he sees my body he really will run for the hills.

Can we at least fucking dim the lights or something?

With my heart in my throat I slowly slide the dress down and step out of it.

I stand before him in a black lace bra and G-string with a black ribbon suspender belt.

Satisfaction crosses his face as his eyes hungrily roam down over my body.

“Turn around.”

“What?” I frown.

“Turn. Around.”

*He wants to look at my ass.*

I nervously turn around.

“Touch your toes.”

“What?” I squeak.

“Touch. Your. Toes.”

I didn’t drink enough alcohol for this.

Oh...this is mortifying...and somewhat hot.

I bend and touch my toes and he inhales sharply. I close my eyes as I hear my heartbeat in my ears.

Help!

I hear the couch creak as if he’s stood up, what is it about this man that has me in a puddle?

I see his feet as he comes to stand behind me and I hold my breath as I wait for his next instruction.

His hand runs over my behind and then down to my sex, he pulls my G-string to the side and slides his fingers through my dripping-wet sex.

“Very nice,” he hums in a deep throaty voice, his finger circles through my sex and I see stars. “Very nice indeed.”

Hanging upside down with all the blood rushing to my head with his fingers doing that while one hundred percent alcohol is rushing through my bloodstream is a heady combination.

I could pass out any second...wouldn’t be surprised actually.

I hope he knows mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.

He slowly slides my panties down over my hips and drops them to the ground and he pulls my cheeks apart.

Thump.

Thump.

Thump.

I feel his tongue on my back entrance and my legs nearly buckle out from beneath me.

*What the fuck?*

He licks me deep; I feel his stubble burn my skin and I see the huge bulge in his suit pants through my legs.

Every cell in my body gets a goose bump as electricity from his touch

sends me into overdrive. I don't know what alternate universe this is in...but I do know it's fucking perverted.

He slides two thick fingers deep into my sex and my knee collapses.

*Slap.*

Owww....

His slap sends a sharp sting through my skin.

“Stand up,” he growls.



## **Alora.**

I STAND UP, not because he told me to but because I'm infuriated. I turn toward him like the devil. "That's the first and last time you ever hit me."

Confusion crosses his face as my words roll around in his head. "It wasn't a hit, it was a sexual slap."

"It was out of fucking line." I don't know what to say next without being a drama queen so I storm from the room, I find myself marching up the hallway to the bedroom. My blood is pumping hard through my body, is it arousal, is it rage, or is it sheer petrification...who knows?

I'm totally out of my depth here and I am freaking the fuck out.

I bust through the bedroom door, throw the robe on and begin to pace.

What am I doing here?

What the actual fuck am I doing here?

Getting my ass eaten by a god who wants to discipline me...that's what?

*I didn't sign up for ass eating.*

That's...too in my regions...especially on a first date.

Only this isn't a first date, it's a kink club where anything goes and somewhere I paid a shit ton of money to be.

Ugh...what was I thinking?

I hear the front door click closed....

Wait.

Did he just leave?

I put my head into my hands, fuck it.

What are you doing you idiot?

I can't even be adventurous for one weekend.

I drop my robe and walk to the mirror and turn to look at my behind. A large red handprint marks my skin.

*How fucking dare he?*

I drag my robe back on and I hit the button to open the heavy drapes.

It's blatantly obvious that I'm not cut out for this type of thing. No wonder he left.

Damn it, I'm so disappointed. Especially now I know how fucking gorgeous he is.

As the drapes slowly open they reveal a large sunken spa in the balcony overlooking the beautiful valley down below. It's hot and bubbling, steam is

rising into the air and I give a weak smile. May as well take a hot spa bath in the freezing cold in Switzerland...why the hell not.

I get a vision of him on his knees behind me...and his tongue.... I feel a throb deep in my sex.

*It was so hot.*

What made me blow up like that?

Maybe I overreacted?

To be fair, I don't think I would have survived having sex with that god anyway.

Probably a good thing he's gone.

I walk out onto the balcony and put my hand into the water of the spa bath, it's hot and inviting.

I look left and I look right, screw it, nobody's here. I drop my robe and get in. I sink back into the water and rest my head on the side.

"Wow." The hot water tickles my senses and I smile.

For a long time I soak but the more relaxed I get, the more I see him.

*"Look me in the eye and take your fucking clothes off."*

Arousal beats through my bloodstream at the way he was looking at me while I was undressing.

*"Eyes on me."*

I get a vision of him sitting there with his hand on his cock.

What I wouldn't have given to have just one night with a man like him.

Not in the way he wanted me though.... Just in the way that I wanted him.

Although something tells me that Mr Doe's version of vanilla wouldn't be anywhere close to mine.

Deflated, I drop my head back against the side of the tub and close my eyes.

Oh well, it is what it is. Sorry Misty, I tried.

All waxed up and nowhere to go.

"Room for one more?"

The voice startles me and I jump, Mr Doe is standing beside the spa.

"I thought you left?"

"I did."

I raise an eyebrow in question.

"I came back."

"Why?"

“We have unfinished business.”

I stare at him.

“Can I get in or not?” he says impatiently.

“I have a giant handprint on my ass, I want to hear an apology.”

He looks at me deadpan.

I raise an eyebrow.

“Miss Doe, I apologize for getting aroused and slapping you in what I believed was a playful sexual act. I forget that not everyone is playful.”

Hmm, that’s a passive-aggressive apology if ever I heard one.

“Okay,” I say.

“Okay what?”

“Okay you can get in.”

“The question is.” He glares at me. “Do I want to now?”

“Not sure.” I shrug. “But please know I’m naked in here.”

“Although annoyed, that’s an excellent incentive.” He takes his suit jacket off and puts it onto the chair as he kicks his shoes off.

*Is he going to undress in front of me?*

He undoes his shirt buttons and he tears his shirt off over his shoulders. His broad muscular chest comes into view, it has a scattering of dark hair and his shoulders are ripped and buff. I feel my face flush as I sit in the front row to watch the strip show.

Yes...yes he is undressing.

Hallelujah the world is saved.

I look around as I try to pretend not to ogle, but once he slides his pants down and his large cock springs free...all bets are off and I can’t help but look.

Oh my....

Thick quad muscles, well-kept pubic hair, and the biggest dick I ever saw.

The man is a god...or a porn star, but honestly who cares, either works for me.

He sinks into the water beside me and his close proximity steals my breath. There’s no denying it, there is some serious sexual chemistry here.

We stare at each other as the air crackles between us.

“You said we have unfinished business. You mean sex?” I ask.

“Isn’t that what you’re here for?” he replies.

I swipe my hand through the water and it causes a ripple as I try to articulate my thoughts.

“Are you here just for sex?” I ask.

“I’m not here for a romantic date if that’s what you’re asking.” He slides his hand up my thigh underneath the water. “Although I must admit I wasn’t expecting to find someone as beautiful as you here.”

My heart swells.

What is it about this guy, even a hint of a compliment sends me weak at the knees.

“Me either.”

He pulls me over his lap to straddle him. “You think I’m beautiful?”

Every cell in my body ignites into a blazing inferno as we stare at each other through the steam.

“Breathtakingly so.”

His hand comes up to cup my breast and he dusts his thumb back and forth over my erect nipple. I feel like I can’t breathe, his touch is magical, almost otherworldly.

Dominance, reverence, and fire all rolled into one.

He leans up and kisses me, his big lips take mine with a hunger behind them.

*Oh...*

He pulls me closer onto his body and I feel his erection press up against my sex.

Naked and in the water like this there is nothing between us.

He kisses me again and his eyes flutter closed, it’s at this moment I realize he’s as into this as I am. His tongue swipes through my lips as his hands slide up my back.

*Fuck.*

The way he kisses....

My legs open wider as my body craves a deeper connection.

He adjusts his dick between us and then sits me down to rest on him.

I can feel every hard vein in his engorged cock.

Oh god....

With his hands on my hips and his tongue deep in my mouth he begins to slowly drag me over him. The feeling of his cock rubbing through my lips and over my clitoris sends waves of pure pleasure through me. So close and yet so far.

*Fuck...*

The water sloshes around and I moan into his mouth as he kisses me.

His hard body is against mine and my legs are now open wide, my toes begin to curl.

Back...and forth...back...forth.

Harder.

This is too much...too good.

Faster.

Deeper.

Until my entire body is quivering with want.

"I...I need," I whimper.

"You need what?" he whispers into my mouth.

"I need to..." My head throws back in pleasure. "...come."

He smiles against my lips and drags me harder across him and I shudder as an orgasm is ripped right out of my soul.

"Ahhhhhh," I cry out as I cling to him.

I see stars.

Before I can even finish I feel my body being lifted out of the spa bath and he lays me down onto the deck and opens my legs.

I need this.

But instead of climbing over me like I want him to, he drops his head to between my legs. His fingers spread me open and he licks me deeply, his eyes flutter closed in ecstasy.... Oh

I grip his hair as his strong hands hold my legs back, he licks me deep and finishes with a flick of his tongue.

He repeats the process, a deep hard lick followed by a flutter.

*Oh...*

Fuck.

That is soooo fucking good.

Oh god.... How does he know how to do that so well?

I nearly jump out of my skin and my legs close around his head. "Ahh," I cry out as I writhe around. He holds me down as he licks me deep. I thrash beneath him, his strong tongue taking no prisoners as he sucks every last bit of my orgasm from me.

An exorcism of life as I know it.

Because fuck, where does a girl go after this?

This man is a god.

I gasp for air as he finishes me off and then he slides up over my body and smiles down at me. "Hi."

“Hi,” I pant, struggling for air.

He lies beside me and leans up onto his elbow as he watches me.

“What are you doing?” I frown.

“Watching you.” He runs his fingertips over my lips and then as if unable to help it puts four fingers into my mouth then down my throat until I gag, his eyes darken as he watches me struggle to take them.

I don’t understand. *Doesn’t he want to have sex?*

“Are we?”

“No.” He stands and pulls me up by the hand and wraps my robe around me. “Let’s get you in out of the cold.” He leads me inside and then through to the bathroom where he turns the shower on, he holds his hand under the water as he adjusts the temperature.

I stand waiting in the oversized robe but I’m so confused.

He’s physically aroused, his hard cock hangs heavily between his legs, but he’s acting completely in control. Only there’s no acting.

He *is* in control.

He turns to me and smiles softly; his big blue eyes have a tender glow. “Let’s get you warm, baby.”

I nod and step under the hot water and close my eyes as I let the heat sink in. “Are you getting in?”

“I am.” He steps in under the water and turns me away from him and soaps up his hands and begins to wash my back. Up over my shoulders and then down lower and lower. Down to between my cheeks, and I hold my breath as I go up onto my toes.

His touch is electric and once again as his fingers nearly penetrate me there the goose bumps start.

*Oh...*

I’m a weeping hot mess.

“You like me touching you here...don’t you?” he murmurs as his finger rims my ass.

Good lord....

I nod, unable to form a single word.

“Is this your favorite place to come, angel?”

I shrug. “I....”

“Answer my question,” he says, sterner.

“I’ve never....”

He turns me back toward him as his eyes flicker with arousal. “You’ve

never taken someone here before?”

My eyes search his.

“Doe?”

“No,” I whisper, ashamed. “I’m sorry I’m not more experienced for you.”

Unexpectedly, he breaks into a beautiful smile and it makes my heart skip a beat.

Pleasing this man is my new favorite thing.

He puts his finger under my chin and brings my face up to his. “Don’t ever apologize for making me happy.”

“That makes you happy?”

“Very.” He dips his head and kisses me, his lips lingering over mine before turning me away from him to face the wall. He rearranges my hands up on the tiles above my head before pulling my hips back toward him and spreading my legs wider.

I’m completely at his mercy as he moves me into the position he wants.

I can feel my excited pulse all over.

The chemistry between us is like nothing I’ve ever felt before.

*Does he feel it too?*

“Why would that make you happy?” I ask as I act dumb.

“Because I want you here.” He slides his finger in my ass to the knuckle and I whimper as my eyes roll back in my head.

He kisses my neck from behind, his teeth grazing my skin as he slowly pumps me with it, and just when my body begins to relax against him he removes it.

*Don’t stop.*

He goes back to washing my back, his soapy hands roam all over me and I reach for his cock and he steps back.

“No.”

“No?” I frown.

“No.”

“I can’t touch you?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

He takes my face into his hands as he stares down at me. “I’m waiting.”

“For what?”

A sudden disappointing thought flashes through my brain.... Oh.

He doesn’t want me like this.

“That’s why you’re here, isn’t it?” I ask. “You want to come with me fucking *you*?”

“No.”

“How do you want to come?”

“Patience, my love.” His teeth drag my bottom lip out and I whimper as I hang somewhere between pleasure and pain.

“Good things come to those who wait.”



## **Alora.**

WAIT...WHAT? I stare up at him as I try to work out what's going on here.

This man is so confusing.

He's hard and ready, obviously aroused, but then doesn't want sex. He's only interested in my orgasms.

I have no idea what's going on. I can't read him at all.

He stands behind me, his teeth grazing up and down my neck as his fingers slide through the wet flesh between my legs. He finds the spot that makes me shudder and I feel him smile up against my skin. "You like that?" he murmurs darkly.

I nod, unable to form a coherent word.

"Just like that, baby." His fingertips flick fast and furiously over my clitoris and I nearly pass out from the pleasure.

"Oh...fuck." My legs go weak beneath me.

He chuckles. "Hold it."

How the hell am I supposed to hold it? He's getting off on making me come.

Don't come, whatever you do don't come.

He grabs my clitoris and pulls it aggressively and I nearly convulse as an orgasm explodes through me.

He pulls and pumps me through it, never have I come by having my clitoris aggressively tugged.

What the actual fuck?

Who does that....

Who knew that that would feel good? I sure as hell didn't and I own a clitoris.

He turns me back toward him, his hand still wedged tightly between my legs.

"You're beautiful when you come, Miss Doe." He smiles as he kisses me, his fingers start again and I step back from him.

"No more."

His face falls.

"I need a break. I can't keep coming again and again."

He chuckles. "I beg to differ." He takes his hand away and wraps me in his arms.

I'm sated and sleepy and I lean up against his broad chest as the hot water runs over us.

There's an elephant in the room, one that I'm not allowed to touch. His huge erection pressing against my stomach.

"Let's go and have some dinner," he murmurs.

Huh?

*What about your dick?*

I don't like this; it feels like there is an uneven power exchange. He needs to come too.

I slide my hand down through his pubic hair and he steps back. "I said not yet," he says sternly, as if annoyed he turns and gets out of the shower.

I stay under the water and let it run over me. My body is throbbing, swollen and wet from his strong fingers and yet I'm not even allowed to touch him.

Huh?

He dries himself and wraps a towel around his waist and then holds a towel out for me. I turn the taps off and step into his arms, he carefully dries me and then wraps the robe around my shoulders. "You need to eat," he says from behind me into my hair.

I'm really not sure what's going on here but fuck, the anticipation is killing me.

Dressed in our robes we go out to the dining room to see the table laden with silver trays with lids.

"I wasn't sure what you wanted so I ordered an assortment of dishes for you to choose from." He begins to lift the silver lids to reveal delicious restaurant meals. There's ravioli pasta and fillet of steak. Sashimi and seafood and then some kind of chicken dish. There's vegetables in some kind of cream sauce and salads.

"Wow," I whisper as I look around. "When did you order this?"

"Before I got into the spa."

I stare at him as my brain misfires; he knew that what just happened was going to happen exactly as it did. In that order and in that timeframe.

"Sit." He gestures to my chair.

"You're very bossy."

"Miss Doe." He smirks. "Now that's a revelation." His eyes have a mischievous glow to them. "Where on earth did you get that idea?"

It's not a revelation, I'm pretty sure it's going to be on his tombstone. I

bet he's a real bossy bastard on the outside.

I sit down and look around the choices. "Do you want the pasta?" I ask.

"No." His elbow is leaning on the table and his pointer finger is steepled up over his temple as he watches me. "It's all yours." He passes it over to me.

"Thanks." I pick up my fork and glance up to him, he's still sitting back watching me. "Are you eating?" I ask.

"I'm hungry...but not for food." The air crackles between us as we stare at each other. His tongue slides over his bottom lip and I feel it between my legs.

He's so intense...jeez.

"I'm not eating alone so either you come over here and eat me or you eat dinner alongside of me."

Amusement flashes across his face and he picks up the fillet steak and puts it in front of him. I watch on as he dishes out some vegetables and then he gets up and fills two glasses of iced water. He puts lemon wedges into both and then sits one down in front of me.

He's very strategic in everything he does, I get the feeling nothing is left to chance with this man.

He picks up his knife and fork.

"Do you like control, Mr Doe?" I ask.

"Yes," he replies without hesitation, he bites the steak from his fork.

"In everything?"

"Yes." He chews his steak; his eyes dare me to ask more.

"Not having sex.... Is that a control thing?" I ask.

"It's a pleasure thing."

I frown. "I don't understand, how is not having sex pleasurable?"

"Abstinence is my drug of choice." His dark eyes hold mine.

Huh?

Either this guy is supersmart or I'm super just super dumb.

"What does that mean?"

He cuts his steak as if he has this type of conversation every day. "You sit there opposite me satisfied and sleepy."

I frown, more confused than ever. "And?"

He chews his steak in slow motion as he watches me.

"If I'm sitting here satisfied and sleepy...what are you doing?" I ask.

"When I spread you wide and tasted you by the spa...you thought it was for you."

Huh?

“If it wasn’t for me, who was it for?”

“I was tasting your body to give mine the information it wanted.”

“Why would you want information?”

“To calibrate my senses.”

I stare at him confused.

“You see, Miss Doe, when I give my body a taste of the DNA it could possibly have...it performs at a much higher level.”

I feel a throb between my legs. *This man is fucking hot.*

“My senses are at an all-time high, working like never before.” He continues, “As you sleepily sit there.... The predator in me can smell you.” He whispers darkly, “I can feel your pulse as it runs through your body.” His tongue swipes over his lips as if tasting something. “I can still taste the beautiful creamy come that came out of your tight little cunt.”

*Dear god.*

“Every single cell in my body is screaming to claim yours.”

I feel all of the blood drain out of my body.

“Eat your dinner now because you’re going to need energy later.” Our eyes are locked. “My primal instincts are going to use your body well tonight. When I claim you as mine.”

I swallow the nervous lump in my throat.

“I’m already sold,” I whisper.

He breaks into a breathtaking smile and butterflies dance in my stomach.

Suddenly I desperately want to please him, I want to blow his mind as much as he’s blowing mine. It’s only fair.

I stand. “You eat your dinner. I’m sucking your cock.” I crawl underneath the table and pull his shorts down; his thick length is already hard and weeping with pre-come.

I take him into my mouth and he lets out a deep husky moan.

*Fuck.*

This is already the best sex of my life and we didn’t even do it yet.

I take him deep as I stroke him and he inhales sharply as he leans back in his chair. His hand goes to the back of my head. We get into a rhythm and he begins to fuck my mouth. His behind lifting off the chair as he begins to lose control.

The moans and noises his body is making are turning me inside out. I say his body because I honestly believe I’m sucking off his base needs now.

Mr Doe isn't here anymore; I'm feeding the animal inside of him.

He drags me up from the floor by the arm and bends me over the couch and pushes my head down into the cushions.

I hear a rip of a condom, then he slams into me and holds himself deep and we both cry out in ecstasy.

Oh.

My.

God.

*This is too good.*

He's huge, stretching me to the hilt, but it's the way my body is rippling around him that's sending us both over the edge.

He's right, this isn't sex between two people.

This is two bodies feeding their most human base needs in the most primal of ways.

He lifts his foot to put it on the couch beside me and pulls out and slams back in.

I cry out, the pressure of his grip almost breaking my spine.

Fuck.

Then he's pumping me at piston pace, our skin slapping together as he takes what he needs.

Oww....

I can't think, I can't breathe, and the position he has me in I can't even move. I'm bent over the couch, my feet not touching the ground.

His hands are spreading me wide and I'm taking his pumps blow by blow.

He's moaning, deep and throaty. The most orgasmic sound I've ever heard in my life.

He's like an animal.

I've never ever been fucked like this before.

"Fuck." He moans. "So...."

*Pump.*

"Fucking."

*Pump.*

"Good."

*Pump.*

Oh....

He holds himself deep and grips me hard.

The sound of his excitement sends me over the edge and I cry out as I come hard.

My vision blacks out and I swear I have an out-of-body experience.

Skin slapping around me, his deep moans and...damn it, I may not survive this kind of sex.

He holds himself deep and I feel his cock jerk violently as he comes deep inside my body.

“Fuck...” he moans. “Oh yeah, fuck yeah.” He slowly keeps pumping me to completely empty out his body.

I pant as I desperately try to catch my breath. I stare into space as I try to regain my physical consciousness.

*What the hell was that?*

I wake as my back arches off the bed.

The bedroom is shrouded in darkness and I feel teeth graze my clitoris.

I look down to see Mr Doe is going down on me underneath the blankets.

Fuck.

This man is an animal, I’ve lost count of how many times I’ve come.

He’s been fucking me for hours, every which way, and after the last time I drifted off into an exhausted sleep...only to wake to this.

I actually don’t know if I am going to make it through until morning.

His four fingers slowly fuck me as his tongue flicks over my clitoris and I moan.

I can’t even act cool anymore, he’s ripped any sense of self-awareness right out of my soul.

“Please,” I whimper, scared to come again. “I can’t ....”

“Sshh,” he whispers. “One more time, baby, and I’ll let you sleep.” I screw up my hands in his hair as my eyes roll back in my head. “I only have you for one night, Doe.” He sucks on me. “I can’t get enough.”

*Don’t say that.*

With this physical connection how could we only have one night?

No world is that cruel.

My body begins to convulse and I moan as I come hard on his fingers, he kneels up over me and slides his cock down my throat and comes into my mouth.

I gag and choke as I try to deal with him.

He smiles down at me in the darkness as he tenderly brushes the hair back from my perspiration-clad forehead. “So fucking beautiful, Doe,” he whispers, he keeps stroking himself into my mouth.

We stare at each other and something shifts between us.

Whatever his body was searching for, it just got. With his satiety, I can feel the tectonic plates move into place.

But where they’re moving to...I have no clue.

Only that I want more.



## **Alora.**

THE HEAVENLY SCENT of freshly percolated coffee wakes me from my slumber and I stretch as I try to focus my eyes.

*Where am I?*

My body feels heavy, achy, and instantly I'm reminded of last night and the god I went to bed with.

I look over to his empty side of the bed, where is he?

I slowly get out of bed and wince, I'm sore from last night. Every one of my muscles feel stretched and used. I throw my robe on and make my way out in search of my Mr Doe.

I make my way into the living area and look around; everything from dinner last night has been cleaned up and packed away.

"Miss Doe." He calls from the balcony. "I'm out here."

I walk over to the door and find him sitting at the table, breakfast is laid out and the morning sun is beaming. He smiles broadly and taps his lap.

My heart swells and I float over to him and sit down on his knee.

He kisses me tenderly. "Good morning."

"Hi." I smile shyly, suddenly embarrassed about my whorish behavior last night.

As if he can read my mind he smiles down at me and combs his fingers through my hair. "Your beauty takes my breath away."

*I probably look like a racoon.*

We kiss, slowly at first and then deeper and our eyes close as we get lost in each other, I wasn't imagining it or lost in the moment last night.

In the light of day it's still here between us.

A blindingly beautiful chemistry, so bright that I can hardly see straight.

"We part today," I say sadly.

"Hmm." He kisses me again. "About that."

"Yes," I say hopefully, please tell me that you want to run away together or something equally as crazy.

"Spend another night with me." He readjusts my robe to protect me from the cold.

This is my chance; I want to know more about him.

Hell, I want to know everything there is to know.

"On one condition," I tell him.

“What’s that?”

“I want to leave this place.”

“What?” He frowns.

“Not *leave*, leave. I want to....” I shrug. “Explore the village, go for a walk in the sunshine.” I smile softly. “Maybe go on a date to a restaurant tonight?”

“Doe....” He sighs, unimpressed that I want to break the rules of the hotel.

“It’s just one day.” I kiss his big lips as I try to talk him around. “And then we get another night here.”

His eyes hold mine.

“We’re never going to see each other again,” I whisper. “I hate the thought. Give me my one day.”

“This was not our arrangement and I really don’t....”

“You asked for another night too.” I cut him off.

He looks out over the valley below as he thinks this over.

“Or we can just say goodbye now.” I stand, annoyed that he even has to think about it.

“No, no.” He pulls me back down onto his lap. “One more night.”

“And one day.”

“Yes.” He holds my face in his hands and kisses me, our lips linger over each other’s and a warm fuzzy feeling passes between us.

More than just lust, less familiar than love. A whole new ballgame to the one we signed up for.

This goodbye is going to suck.

“Are you ready?” Mr Doe calls from the living area.

“Uh-huh” I grab my purse and walk out and he frowns as he looks me up and down.

“Where is your coat and hat?”

I glance down at myself. “I don’t need one, do I?”

“It’s cold outside, you’ll freeze half to death.”

“Oh.” I shrug. “When I was packing I didn’t think it would be this cold. I’ll be fine, we’ll be walking anyway so I’ll be able to keep warm.”

He rolls his eyes. “Hang on, you can wear something of mine.” He walks into the spare room and I follow him. His suitcase is on the luggage rack and

he opens it up.

Everything is folded and organized to precision and I frown as I stare into it. “Who packed your bag, a drill sergeant?”

He glances back at me. “What does that mean?”

“Why is it so neat?”

“I like things to be organized like a normal adult.”

“Me too.” So not me too, I’m a hot mess and can never find shit in my suitcase or when I’m packing, I roll up onto my toes feeling like a petulant child.

He pulls out a grey beanie and puts it on my head and kisses me quickly before turning back to his suitcase to dig for more.

*He’s very kissy.*

I smile goofily as I wait, doing domestic everyday things with him is my new favorite thing. He holds out a big coat. “Put this on.”

“It’s huge.”

“It’s about to snow.” He widens his eyes. “And you want to walk around the countryside in a thin cardigan? I don’t think so.”

“Fine.” I sigh as I put my arms into the sleeves, he does up the zipper and pulls the waist cord to tighten it snug. He reaches down and grabs a handful of my sex and gives me a squeeze before turning back to his suitcase. “Now....” He passes me a pair of leather gloves. “These will keep those pretty little hands warm.”

I hold out my hands and he puts them on for me. “Can we go now, boss?” I ask.

“We can go now, Doe.”

We’ve somehow arrived at nicknames for each other, he’s Boss and I’m Doe.

In my oversized beanie, huge jacket and gloves the size of flippers. “I feel ridiculous.” I smile up at him.

“That’s because you look ridiculous.” He dots the tip of my nose. “Now...where are you taking me on our date?” He breaks into a slow sexy smile and my heart skips a beat; he has the most beautiful face I’ve ever seen. Big blue eyes and pouty kissable lips. His hair is dark and has a curl to it and his stubble creates a shadow over his square jaw.

Probably the most gorgeous man I have ever seen, but maybe that’s just because he’s a sex god and I’m still drunk on his pheromones. He’s released so much oxytocin into my bloodstream that it’s a wonder I’ve survived the

overdose.

We walk to the door and out into the corridor, “At least nobody will be able to recognize me in this abominable snowman outfit,” I say as we arrive at the elevator and push the button.

“Lucky you.” He twists his lips as if unimpressed.

Oh...shit. I didn’t even think when I asked him to leave the resort. If he’s seen here will it have implications for him on the outside? “It is okay if we leave, isn’t it?” I ask him.

“Well too late now, isn’t it?” he mutters as we get into the elevator and turn toward the doors.

*Does he have someone on the outside?*

Shit....

The reason he came here flashes through my mind, we have to do that for him when we get back. I don’t want him to go home with regrets.

He came here with a goal and I need to make sure we get it done.

The elevator doors open and we step out into the foyer, he walks slightly in front of me out through the front doors of the resort and down the driveway.

I scamper to keep up, and once at the end of the driveway and out onto the country road he turns to wait for me.

“What’s the rush?” I ask.

“We’re in a fucking kink club, Doe. Not something I want as common knowledge. What if I know someone in there?”

“Oh....” I hadn’t thought of that. “Well if they’re also here, they have a hidden kink too.”

He chuckles and I link my arm through his as we walk. When I breathe out fog comes out of my mouth. “It *is* cold.”

“Like I told you.”

“Does it snow where you live?” I ask.

“Yes.” He glances down at me. “Not from where you’re from?”

“No.” I think for a moment. “I’ve only seen snow once before.”

“What?” He seems surprised.

“Yeah, it was on a school camp. We went to the Rockies. It was a ski trip although I didn’t ski.”

“Why didn’t you ski?”

“We couldn’t afford the ski hire costs so I just watched my friends.”

“How much was the ski hire?”

I shrug as we walk. “I don’t know, I think it was like sixty-five dollars. My dad already took a second job...third job, actually, so that I could go on the trip at all.”

He listens as we walk.

“My mom died when I was young and....” My voice trails off.

He stays quiet as he waits for me to finish.

“My dad had to give up his full-time day job to look after us, he worked night shifts so that we could stay overnight at Grandma’s. We just scraped by so any extra activities were a treat.”

He nods once as if acknowledging my story and we walk in silence for a while.

“How many siblings do you have?” he eventually asks.

“I have a sister and a brother.” I kiss his shoulder. “Do you have any siblings?”

“I have a sister and a brother too.” He smiles as if thinking of them fondly. “They’re the light of my life.”

“That’s nice.” I smile. “And your parents?”

“I lost my mother too.”

My face falls. “Oh no. How?”

“Car accident.”

“Did your family struggle?” I ask as I look up at him.

“Very much so, we still do.”

My heart aches for him, what are the chances we share that same grief?

“What do you do for work.” He asks to change the subject.

“I’m a math teacher.”

He frowns as if surprised, “Would never have picked that.”

“Well.” I shrug, “Numbers are my thing, what can I say.”

I walk along and I have a question on the tip of my tongue that I’ve been dying to ask. “Are you wealthy?”

“In some things.” He stares out over the rolling green hills as we walk. “What makes you ask that?”

“Your accent. The way you sound.”

“My accent?” He smiles as if fascinated. “How do I sound?”

“Like an English nobleman or something.”

He chuckles. “How many English nobleman do you know?”

“Well, none.” I giggle. “I was confused because I’m pretty sure that English nobleman don’t know how to fuck like that.”

He throws his head back and laughs out loud.

“I’m being serious.” I smile up at him. “I think maybe you’re a porn star or something. I’ve never met anyone before who has sex like you.”

“Sex like me, what is sex like me?” He smiles.

“So...” I widen my eyes. “Great.”

“Great.” He repeats the word. “I don’t like the word *great*.” He scrunches up his nose. “*Great* sounds very average to me.”

“You are anything but average.” I laugh. “Believe me.”

“Yeah, yeah, keep digging.” He smiles as he walk. “This hole is deep, Doe.”

I laugh and think for a moment. “Okay *great* isn’t the best word. I would describe our sex last night as...” I narrow my eyes as I try to articulate myself, “...life changing.”

“Life changing?” He stops and my arm nearly rips out the socket. “How was it life changing?”

“Well...” I think for a moment. “I’m pretty vanilla on the outside.”

“You are *not* vanilla.” He cuts me off.

“No, I am.” I smile as I pull him to walk once more. “I’ve only ever had two boyfriends and...I’ve never had a one-night stand.”

He stares down at me. “How many people have you slept with?”

“Four.” I shrug. “Well five now.” I continue to babble on, “Well six if you count that one time I had a threesome.”

He chuckles. “The one you didn’t like to share the dick in?”

“Yes.” I smile goofily. “That one.” I glance back and see two men walking in the distance behind us. “Who are those men?” I ask. “Are they following us?”

He glances back. “Oh.... They’re from the resort. It’s standard for them to send someone with a client if they leave the hotel.” He nudges me with his shoulder. “In case I’m a serial killer or something.”

My arm is linked through his and I can feel his hard forearm under my hand. “How many people have you slept with?” I ask him.

“A lot,” he replies without hesitation.

“Oh.” I nod, I hate that answer, he’s probably slept with the most beautiful of people.

Insecurity rears her ugly head, what would he ever see in someone like me?

Then I remember the cold hard facts.

He didn't choose me; he was matched with me. I was just the lucky number that got pulled out of a hat.

We walk for a while as my brain goes into a silent confidence crisis.

"So I have to ask...." He breaks the silence. "For someone as inexperienced as you.... Why would you pay to come to a place like this? I'm sure there's a million men who would give anything to have you to peg them."

"I don't know." I think for a moment. "I guess I was searching for something more."

He nods as if processing my words.

"What about you, I'm wondering the same, why did you come here?"

"I honestly don't know." He hesitates. "Maybe I was searching for something more too."

"What a pair of misfits we are." I smile sadly. "I'm vanilla shortbread, you're a chocolate fudge whorebag. You want to be pegged but you don't want to be pegged. I need to do Misty's list but when push comes to shove I'm not sure I'll actually be able to do it because I don't know how to work a prosthetic dick without disemboweling someone. We can't know anything about each other and yet I feel like I already know *everything* about you. And I'm quite sure that long after spending this weekend with you I will mourn your loss while you will probably never think of me again because you are just the most amazing lover of all time and well...I'm just me," I blurt out in a rush.

He stops us and turns me to face him and smiles softly down at me. "You have it mistaken, it is you who is the most amazing lover, why do you think I couldn't stop last night?" He takes my face in his hands and kisses me softly. "Why do you think I need an extra night?"

My eyes search his. "I wish we didn't meet here."

"Doe...." He sighs. "Don't." He pulls me into a hug and holds me tight in his arms.

My heart constricts because I know that's his way of dismissing any chance of a meeting on the outside for us.

*He already has someone.*

As he holds me a lump in my throat forms, we're so close but so far.

We don't know each other at all.

"Let's just enjoy every minute of our night together, okay?" he whispers into my hair."

“Okay.” I smile, feeling stupid.

I knew what I signed up for...*keep it together, fool.*

I pull out of his arms determined to do better. He did not come here to put up with my whiny and needy behavior. I’m not his girlfriend, hell...we don’t even know each other.

It is what it is.

I came here to finish Misty’s list and that’s exactly what I’m going to do.

It’s time to put my heart in a box and sharpen my sword to prepare for battle.

Tonight...I’m going fulfill his deepest and darkest fantasy.

Who knows, it might turn out to be mine too.

If déjà vu had an official day, today would be it.

Mr Doe and I are on the love boat, we went for a walk around the village this morning, had a late lunch and an afternoon nap.

We’ve talked and laughed and taken a big hot deep bath and then this afternoon we had a nap, well I slept while he lay on his side and watched me.

We’re acting like an old couple in love and haven’t had sex once.

Or maybe it’s just that he had enough of my body last night.

I crave his touch and yet at the same time I want to prove to myself that we are more than what we came here for.

*Does he feel it too?*

I stare at my face in the dimly lit bathroom mirror, my dark hair is out and I’m wearing my tight red dress and strappy stilettos.

Tonight was our date.

We’ve had dinner and danced; Mr Doe has wined me and dined me and I can’t imagine a more perfect night. We’re still at the restaurant and it’s 10 p.m. but I don’t want to go back to the hotel because then it will be our last night and when I wake up he will be leaving.

And I know it’s coming...and I know I can’t stop it.

But god, how I want to.

I stare at my reflection. *Go out there and do what you came here to do.*

“You can do this,” I whisper as I give myself a pep talk.

The door opens as someone walks in and I force a smile and walk back out into the restaurant.

Mr Doe’s eyes hold mine as I walk toward him, he gives me a slow sexy

smile as his eyes drop down to my toes and back up to my face.

“Miss me?” I smile as I take a seat opposite him.

He sips his drink and gives me the look.

“You know....” I smirk. “You shouldn’t look at people like that.”

“Like what...?” He swirls his red wine around in his glass as his eyes hold mine.

“Like you want to do unspeakable things to them.”

Electricity sparks through the air.

“There are no people here.” In slow motion he lifts his glass to his lips and takes a sip. “Only you.”

And I feel it, like an undercurrent, the pull toward him is so strong.

“Then you should take only me home and do all the unspeakable things.”

“I intend to.” He raises his eyebrow; our eyes are locked and damn...how is he so freaking hot?

He stands and takes my hand and leads me out of the restaurant, my mouth falls open in wonder as I look up into the sky. “Look, it’s snowing.”

“I ordered it just for you.” Mr Doe smiles down at me.

“Thank you.” I giggle.

Wouldn’t surprise me at all if he had that power.

I slide my arm under his overcoat and he puts his arm around me as we walk down the sidewalk toward the car. The hotel security guards are with us again and were loitering around out the front of the hotel while we had dinner.

The Establishment sure does offer great security, no wonder it’s so expensive.

One of the security men opens the back door of the black SUV and we climb into the car. Mr Doe holds my hand in his lap and turns his attention to out the window.

He seems lost in his own thoughts and I wonder if he is dreading saying goodbye tomorrow half as much as I am.

As we drive into the snowy night I know I have to count my blessings, no matter what happens in the future, I’m grateful for the time that we have had together...even if it is limited.

It’s been a beautiful day and that was a wonderful dinner date. Probably the best I’ve ever been on.

My mind wanders to the night we are about to have, I have no idea what is about to unfold and I’m nervous and excited, perhaps even a little terrified.

Let's do this.



## **Alora.**

WE WALK into the suite and Mr Doe takes off his jacket and hangs it up and I walk to the bar. “Nightcap?” I ask.

“Yeah.”

I begin to pour our two drinks and he comes and stands behind me, his lips drop to my neck as his arms wrap around me from behind.

I can feel his body harden against mine. “There it is.” I smile. “I wondered where he’d been.”

He chuckles and pumps me with his hips. “Waiting.” He pumps me again. “To strike.”

I turn toward him and pass his drink over; my eyes hold his as I take a long sip. “So?” I smile.

“So....”

There are a million words hanging in the air between us, sexy, dirty and forbidden words.

I set my drink down and go to the black box. “I think it’s time we open this.”

His eyes hold mine as he sips his drink, the look he gives me could start a fire.

I pull the lid off and peer in, I pull out the first thing I see. “We have massage oil.”

He smirks.

“A very large bottle of lubricant.” I hold it up and then place it on the counter beside the box. “A blindfold.” I pull out a black blindfold, I frown as I see the next item. “Handcuffs.”

He breaks into a sexy smile and raises his glass toward me.

“You like handcuffs?” I frown.

“Very much.”

“Oh....” Of course he likes handcuffs, he’s a fucking deviant. I keep digging through the box. “A butt plug.” I pull out a black butt plug and hold it up.

He rolls his lips seemingly unimpressed with this one.

“Oh look, there are different sizes.” I pull out four more butt plugs and set them down on the counter. I frown as I spy something else. “What in the world...?” I pull out a butt plug with a horse tail attached to it and I hold it

up.

Mr Doe breaks into a playful smile. “Giddy up.”

I giggle in surprise. “I mean...really?” I keep digging and see a snakelike thing rolled up. “What is....” My mouth falls open as I pull it out. “A whip.”

His eyes blaze with fire as they hold mine.

“You like this?” I whisper, slightly horrified.

“We already know this about me,” he replies.

“We do?” I frown. “A smack on the behind is not a whole-ass fucking whip.”

“And you couldn’t even take that.” His eyes hold mine as if daring me to say something.

My heart sinks, I hate that I unknowingly failed that test.

“Yeah well.” I set the whip down onto the counter. “Nobody gets to hit me.”

“It’s not about the hit, it’s about control.”

*He’s beginning to piss me off now.*

“Nobody gets to control me either,” I fire back.

Amused, he smirks and sips his drink as if knowing something that I don’t know.

There’s no doubt about it, Mr Doe and I would clash in the real world.

He’s controlling, I’m controlling.... Not ideal circumstances for a warm-your-heart love match.

I see three strap-on dildos in the bottom of the box and I purposely get out the largest one. “Here we are.” I hold it up. “It’s going to feel great fucking you with this.” With my eyes locked on his I put it into my mouth and suck it. I hold it out to him. “Your turn, Mr Doe.”

“I don’t suck cock.”

“You might surprise yourself.” I smirk. “Let me put it on and hold you by the hair and fuck your throat until you gag.”

Sound familiar, fucker?

He glares at me as a sudden surge of animosity runs between us.

I put it back in my mouth and close my eyes and moan for added effect.

*Screw you and your control bullshit.*

I’m wearing the pants tonight...literally.

If he’s leaving me tomorrow...and he will...he’s going to fucking remember me if it’s the last thing I do.

“Get on your knees,” I tell him.

“You trying to top from the bottom, angel?” he whispers darkly.

Nerves simmer in my stomach.

“You know what I do to naughty girls who try to pull that shit?”

His dark eyes hold mine and he walks toward me, he pulls the strap-on cock out of my mouth and throws it to the side. He unzips his pants and pulls his hard dick out and slides it down my throat.

With both hands in my hair holding me just how he wants me, he lets me have it.

I struggle to take him and good god, I’ve woken the beast.

Like a carbon copy of what I’ve just threatened to do to him, he does to me, and I gag around him.

He pulls himself out of my mouth and suction releases with a pop, he leans down so that we are face-to-face. “Here’s how tonight’s going to go,” he whispers. “I’m going to oil you up and I’m going to make you see stars through that pretty little ass of yours.”

“I’m fucking you tonight,” I announce.

He breaks into a sarcastic smile. “We both know that’s not happening. Not even close.”

“But you wanted....”

“My therapist wanted.” He cuts me off. “I want no such thing. The only fantasy I have is to fuck *your* ass and that’s exactly what we’re going to do.” He pulls me to my feet and in one fell swoop takes my dress off over my head.

“But Misty’s list,” I stammer.

“I’m not here with Misty. I’m here with you.” He grabs my head and kisses me aggressively. “We’re doing *our* lists, not the ones others have set for us.” His teeth stretch out my bottom lip and I feel a sting of pain.

Yesssss.

Adrenaline screams through my veins as we stare at each other.

He takes off my bra and his teeth drop to my nipple and he bites me there. Hard enough for pain, soft enough for pleasure.

The perfect combination.

Goose bumps scatter up my arms at the dominance of the act.

He slides my panties down my legs and his fingers move to my sex.

“Dripping.” He smiles darkly as he slides his fingers deep into my body. “Just like I knew you would be.” He pumps me with his fingers. “Admit it, Doe, you like me in charge.” He pumps me hard again and I whimper and

throw my head back. “Don’t you, baby?” His teeth graze my jaw as he brings me undone.

His hand is nearly violent as he fucks me with it.

Fast and hard...deep.

The sound of my arousal sucking him in echoes throughout the room and I begin to lose all coherent thought.

I shudder and he takes his hand away. “Please...” I whimper, every one of my senses on fire. “I need...”

“I know what you need, angel.” He picks up the bottle of massage oil and kisses me, then taking me by the hand he leads me into the bedroom and lays me down onto the bed.

He props pillows behind me and half sits me up and then spreads my legs wide open.

I watch him rearrange my body in awe.

Never have I been with someone who knows exactly what he wants, and exactly how he wants me. Nothing is left to chance, the master of control.

It melts my brain to be here with a man like this.

With his eyes on me he takes his shirt off over his head, I’m blessed with the view of his broad muscular chest. He slides his jeans down and reveals the V of muscles that leads to his large manhood.

His pubic hair is short and well kept, and every muscle on this god’s body is in peak condition.

From the very back of my depraved mind I get a fleeting thought....

*He is my bucket list.*

He kneels onto the bed and then drops his mouth to my sex; he licks me there and his eyes close in pleasure.

His fingers spread me wide as he sucks me deep.

Oh... *fuck.*

The way he has me sat up so that I can watch him do this is too much.

My eyes roll back in my head.

I begin to quiver, the need to come so strong.

“Sshh.” He stills. “Hold it....”

“I....” I pant. “I....”

“Sshh, angel.” He smiles into me. “You need to learn to control this.”

There’s a plan.

You probably need to teach me...in a three-month full-time training camp in the Swiss Alps.

He licks me again and I nearly bounce off the bed.

“Ahh.... So eager to come.” He smiles darkly, he flips me over onto my stomach and pushes the pillow away. I feel the hot oil pour onto my back and over my behind.

He spreads my legs wide and pours oil all over my sex.

Oh....

Good lord.

I may not survive the night.

He straddles my body and begins at my shoulders, his magical hands rubbing and massaging me into the mattress. He rocks forward and I can feel his hard cock up against my back.

I clench to try and get some kind of traction between my legs.

His hands massage down my body while I hang in ecstasy and every now and then as he rocks forward I can feel every vein on his hard weeping cock.

His fingers move lower and he slides off me and sits to the side, he pulls me up onto my knees and begins to massage the oil through my lips and over my ass.

His two fingers slide into my sex and he pushes his thumb deep into my other opening.

My head dips as I try to deal with his onslaught.

“Relax,” he breathes, he pumps his thumb deeper until my eyes begin to roll back. “That’s it, angel...relax.”

For a long time he massages me just like this, oil all over, fingers in my pussy, thumb in my ass.

All the stars in my eyes.

“You want me here.” His thumb gets rougher. “You want me in this tight little ass, angel?”

I nod, unable to speak.

He shuffles around to behind me and with one hand occupied on my sex he puts his other hand on my shoulder and begins to bring my body back onto his with force.

Oh....

His thumb gets almost violent. “You want more?”

“Yes,” I whimper. “Give it to me.”

He keeps going and I begin to grab the sheets between my fingers.

*I need more.*

I feel oil being poured over my sex and he bends and kisses my ass cheek

tenderly, “Just a sting,” he whispers. “Once I start we don’t stop.” He kisses me again. “Okay?”

I nod and close my eyes.

I feel the tip of his cock at my entrance and then I feel more oil being poured over us.

He runs his tip through my lips of my sex and I hear him inhale sharply. “Fuck,” he whispers.

I smile, he’s as lost to this as I am.

He pushes forward and I feel more than a sting. “Ahhh.”

“Sshh,” he whispers. “Relax, baby, let me in.”

He moves with force and it burns...and it hurts.

“Ahhh,” I whimper. “Oww.”

More oil gets poured over us. “You’ve got this,” he breathes, his hand tenderly runs up my back to calm me.

*I’m not sure I have got this.*

He surges forward again and I’m filled with pain.

I wince and screw up my face.

After what feels like eternity my body finally releases and he slides in to the hilt.

An overwhelming sense of dominance fills me.

“Oh my god.” I pant at the new sensation.

“Fuck....” He moans. “So good.” His fingertips come around to my clitoris and he circles them as he stays deep inside me. His lips are at my ear as he curls over me, his thick quads are either side of mine and cocooning me in.

But it’s the possession of his cock as it sits deep inside my body.

Owning me like never before.

This is an out-of-body experience, raw and intimate.

Like nothing I’ve ever felt.

“Kiss me,” he breathes.

I turn my head and we kiss over my shoulder. Deep and different and so fucking perfect.

For a long time we kiss and I know what he’s doing. He’s letting my body adjust to his size.

But what about my heart, how does she recover from this?

Pleasure starts to build and I move a little, wanting some friction.

“That’s it.” He smiles into my mouth. “Just like that.”

He slowly pulls out and slides back in, once more. Slowly pulls out and then slides back in.

This is actually...enjoyable.

He gets rougher, deeper, and I begin to push back on him as I chase the closer connection.

Then we are hard at it, our skin slapping together. The bed is hitting the wall.

His deep moans are all around me as he completely loses control and fuck, this is too good.

He pumps me hard and I scream out as I come hard.

He holds himself deep and I feel the telling jerk of his cock as he orgasms strongly inside of me.

His deep moan echoes through the apartment and I smile into the mattress, now there's a hot sound.

He turns my head and kisses me as he holds my face in his hands.

It's tender and loving.

Intimate, everything I ever dreamed of.

I'm totally and irrevocably, forever ruined.



**Edward.**

**DOE WALKS** out with her bag and puts it by the door and she gives me a sad smile.

**“Time to say goodbye?”** I ask.

**“Yep.”**

Her eyes search mine and if I were a better person I would say something meaningful and significant. But as I stare at her beautiful face...words fail me, so instead I take her into my arms and kiss her.

Last night was more.

Way more than I had bargained for, much more than I deserved.

My lips tenderly take hers as a million questions I'm unable to ask linger on them. She's perfect, absolutely fucking perfect, and I'm unable to offer her a goddamn thing.

She puts her head onto my chest and I stroke her hair as I hold her in my arms.

We both stay silent, lost in our own thoughts.

**“It was nice meeting you,”** she whispers.

**“Believe me—”** I smile into her hair, **“—the pleasure was all mine.”**

She giggles and it drops my stomach.

**“What time does your plane leave?”** she asks.

I glance at my watch. **“In a few hours.”**

**“Mine too.”**

She stares up at me and I know she wants me to ask to see her on the outside.

If I could...I would.

**“You should get going,”** I say softly.

She nods and pulls out of my grip and instantly the absence of her warm touch is felt.

She walks around the suite and collects her things and puts them into her carry-on luggage while I stand still on the spot, willing myself to let her leave.

I discreetly take my phone out of my suit pocket and turn my data off. I hit search for wi-fi.

*Alora's Phone*

**Alora.**

*Her name is Alora.*

She walks back into the room and I quickly stuff my phone into my pocket before she sees.

She comes back to stand in front of me. "Are you sure we can't do what we came here to do?"

"My apologies...I just..." I exhale heavily, disappointed that I can't do this for her.

*Why aren't I better with words?*

"I'll make sure you receive a credit," I tell her.

"I don't want to do that with anyone else," she whispers.

I stare at her as her words hang between us.

If I were a better person I would tell her to come here again with a new partner, fulfill the list and make her friend proud.

But I can't.

The thought of her touching someone else is not something I can bear to think about.

"Will you remember me?" she asks.

"Yes. Will you remember me?"

"Probably not."

I smile down at her and I press my lips to her forehead as I hold her close. She closes her eyes to my touch. "I love it when you kiss my forehead." She smiles against me.

*Enough.*

This is getting fucking morbid; I need to cut it short.

"You should get going." I step back from her.

"Okay," she whispers, her nostrils flare as she holds in her tears.

Don't....

Before she can say another word: "Goodbye, Miss Doe." I nod, then I turn and walk out of the suite. The door clicks closed behind me and I hesitate for a moment as I hold the door handle in my hand. I imagine her on the other side of the door.

I can *feel* her on the other side of the door...waiting for me to come back through it.

I close my eyes in regret.

**Leaving her was harder than it should have been.  
I straighten my tie and calmly walk back to my room.  
It's time to go home.**

## **Alora.**

The cab ride to the airport is long, it's snowing now.

And unlike the magical snow of last night in his arms, today it's cold and depressing.

What are the chances that I meet my dream man in a place like this?

I've cried for over an hour.

I know that there's no future for us...hell, he's probably married or something.

Men like him are never single.

With a connection like we had I get the feeling he would have asked to see me on the outside if he didn't already have his life set out in front of him.

He's with someone for sure.

The scenery flies by and I remember the sex and the wild lovemaking, the tender showers and the way he looked after me, and my eyes well with tears anew.

*The way he made me feel.*

What the fuck is wrong with me?

I drag my hand down my face in disgust, only I could catch feelings in an anonymous kink club?

Two hours later I sit at the airport bar by the window.

I'm on my second glass of wine, because as the saying goes, if you can't be happy be drunk.

I'm on the very last terminal and I watch a big plane pull out to take off and a sleek black private jet parked on the tarmac comes into view.

Wow.

There must be someone famous in town.

There are people refueling it and a truck is delivering produce. Imagine being that rich that you had your own private jet. I see the captain and the three stewardesses board; it must be leaving soon.

It's the weirdest day, I keep flicking between present time and memories of the weekend. I feel like I'm between worlds, I want to stay back there with him but I'm being forced and dragged to be in the present.

It doesn't seem fathomable that I will never see him again.

My heart aches at the depressing thought.

I sip my wine and look down at my phone and scroll through for a moment, I glance back up to see two black SUVs pull up beside the black jet. I wonder is it a sportsperson's jet or maybe a pop star or something?

I watch as a bodyguard gets out and opens the back door of the second car.

I knew it was someone famous.

I grab my phone and flick open the camera; nobody is going to believe me when I tell them I saw Taylor Swift if I don't have a photo.

I smile as I wait for the person to get out, and then when they do my face drops.

Dark suit, sunglasses, and perfect posture. His dark just-fucked hair and I would know that physique anywhere.

My Mr Doe.

He walks up the stairs of the plane, the pilot is waiting at the top, he shakes his hand as he walks past him. With my heart in my throat I watch on as he disappears inside. The men in suits who I'm assuming are the bodyguards carry the suitcases onto the jet and eventually the door is shut.

My mouth falls open and I glance down at my phone, damn it. I was so gobsmacked that I forgot to take a photo.

The bodyguards from yesterday...they weren't from the resort at all.

They were with him.

I stare at the jet as it slowly pulls out and drives away into the afternoon sunset.

What the fuck....

I sit back shocked to my core.

I think I just had a dirty weekend with someone rich or famous.

*Who are you?*

The waitress walks past my table and puts a fortune cookie down as she hands them out to everyone. "Merry Christmas." She smiles.

"Thanks." She moves on to the next table and with a heavy heart I crack mine open.

### ***Make a wish***

I hold the fortune cookie in my hand as I go over the weekend and all I

can feel is the deepest sense of gratitude.

I know that I didn't tick off Misty's wish list.

But I sure as hell ticked off mine.

"Mr Doe. I don't know how, I don't when...." I smile fondly and close my eyes as I make my Christmas wish. "May we meet again."

**THE END.**

Full book coming in 2024.

# **ALASKAN JACK**

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## Holly

THE BUZZING of my phone wakes me and I glance at the clock, it's 5 am.

I pick it up, the name *Clancy* lights up the screen. "Hi."

"Oh my God," she splutters.

I frown at the sound of her voice. "What's wrong?"

"I've been up vomiting all night."

"Oh no, you poor thing. Are you okay?" I wince.

"No, I'm literally on my deathbed."

"You should probably go to the hospital then, less messy to clean up your dead body." I smile, relieved that it's only that.

"This isn't funny."

I rub my eyes. "Sorry. So, I take it you're not coming in today?" Clancy is my PA, the best damn one I ever had.

"I can't, I'm so sorry."

"That's okay," I sigh.

"It's not. You'll have to cancel Alaska."

I screw up my face in horror as I remember today's itinerary. "Shit, I can't."

"Well, you can't go alone."

I close my eyes. "I'll get Joel to come."

"Joel starts his time off today, remember?"

"Fuck."

"What about Melissa?" she asks.

"Are you kidding me?" I sigh. Melissa is Clancy's assistant, and she drives me crazy. She flirts with every man she comes into contact with, to the point that it's embarrassing.

"It's three nights, surely you can handle her for three nights?"

"No, actually. I can't."

"I'll tell her to behave."

"I'll just go alone."

"This is a major meeting, Holly. You can't."

"Clancy, I love you, but you are aware that I can do my job without you, right?"

"I know that," she scoffs.

"Stop underestimating me and go back to bed," I smirk. I've worked my

ass off to get where I am. Years and years of blood sweat and tears has led me to be the head of acquisitions for Ferrara Media, New York. I'm Gabriel Ferrara's right-hand woman. I know my job and I do it well, and tomorrow, I have a meeting in Anchorage, Alaska, to close a multi-million dollar deal on the sale of the local television station. "Can you email me the flight details, please," I ask.

"Okay so, you're flying commercial because Gabriel leaves in the company plane for Italy today to visit his family."

I roll my eyes; this is just getting better by the second. "Yes, I remember," I reply. "Email me the details of hotels, etc."

"Are you sure you can go alone?"

"I'm not a baby," I snap, exasperated. Clancy has become a tad overprotective.

"I'm pretty sure after the last eighteen months I can handle two days in Alaska on my own."

"No doubt," she says. "The car will meet you at the other end and I'll detail everything in the email. Call me whenever you need me."

"Okay." Clancy's been my rock and has become one of my closest friends. Eighteen months ago, my husband of ten years was imprisoned for insider trading, and if that wasn't devastating enough, having his private life dragged through the courts was the ultimate betrayal. He played me like a fiddle, the real Wolf of Wall Street. He was *the* rock star stockbroker, the Harvard lawyer who came from one of the most respected families in New York. Handsome, wealthy and powerful.

And I was the fool, so blinded by love that I had absolutely no idea of who I was really married to. The press covered the stories of his embezzlements, blackmail, cocaine, high-end prostitutes and oh, there's the small matter of a love child he had with another woman two years ago, that he wanted to know nothing about. It was revealed in the courts that he paid the mother out to never reveal his identity to the boy. What kind of man deserts his own child?

While I was working my ass off to get us ahead, he was ripping people off and fucking around.

*Asshole.*

"I'm sorry, that flight is closed."

"What?" I frown as I glance at my watch. "What do you mean? I still have plenty of time."

"It's out of my hands." The airport attendant shrugs. "It closed ten minutes ago."

I close my eyes in horror. *Fuck*. "I have to be in Anchorage tomorrow," I say.

"Nothing I can do," she says casually.

I run my hands through my hair as I begin to feel my temperature rise. "Okay, can I get onto another flight please?"

The attendant types into the computer and reads the screen. "Unfortunately, there isn't another vacant seat until Friday."

"How is that possible?" My eyes widen in horror. "What do you mean? That's three days away."

"You're flying to Anchorage in Alaska."

"And?"

"And a limited amount of flights go there."

I pinch the bridge of my nose. "Oh... this is just great." On my way to the airport this morning I found out that there has been a counter offer by Miles Media and I need to get there urgently to close the deal before Tristan Miles swoops in and steals it from under me.

"Sorry."

*Fuck's sake*. "Umm, okay." I try to think of a solution. "What other airlines fly to Anchorage?"

"Only two others, American and United. And they have both tried to get seats on our flight on Friday as they oversold their seats."

"So, they're full, too?"

"I'm afraid so."

I stare at her flatly. "Out of JFK in New York.... the biggest airport in America, only three airlines go there?" I scoff.

"Anchorage seems like a very popular destination."

"Apparently so."

I pinch the bridge of my nose. "This is a disaster."

I text Clancy.

Can you get me a charter, please?

I missed the flight.

No flights are available until Friday.

She types into her computer and reads the screen. "I could get you onto a flight to Fairbanks, Alaska, in an hour. But there is only one seat left and if you don't get it now, it may sell out, too."

I glance at my phone waiting for Clancy's reply. She hasn't read my message, which means she isn't on her phone, which means she's probably throwing up right now.

Shit, the poor girl is probably throwing up right now. She can't organize a fucking emergency charter plane, she's too unwell.

The woman on the desk continues to type while reading out the information. "From there you could hire a car and drive the rest of the way. I mean it's not ideal, but it would get you there for tomorrow."

"How long is the drive from Fairbanks to Anchorage?" I ask.

She googles it. "It says here seven hours."

"What time does the flight get into Fairbanks?"

"Six o'clock this evening. You could rent a car and use Google maps and still make it by near midnight."

I stare at her as I go over my options.

"You could call ahead and rent yourself a car," she says to try and be helpful. "It might actually be fun?"

"I guess." I force a smile. Or I can just arrange for a car to pick me up. "Okay, I'll take that flight. Thank you." It will be easy from there, a lot easier than it is from here. At least I'll be in the right state.

She types into her computer and then hands me the ticket. "You need to hurry; the flight is just about to board."

I read the bold writing.

### ***JFK – Fairbanks, Alaska***

"Good luck." She smiles.

"Thanks." I give her a weak wave and make my way through security as I email Melissa. I'll leave Clancy alone to be sick in peace.

*I need a transfer from Fairbanks Airport, Alaska.*

*Arrival 6 pm local time.*

*To be driven to Anchorage, Alaska.*

*I missed my flight.*

*Boarding now, will check in on arrival.*

Ten long hours later, I stand at Fairbanks Airport and look around. Everyone is just wandering around as if on vacation, nobody seems in a rush and to top it all off, the transfer isn't here. "I hate incompetence," I whisper under my breath. "This is the worst fucking day of all time." I take my phone out and call Melissa. It rings out.

My blood boils and I call her again, it rings out again and I leave a message on her voicemail. "Hello Melissa, this is Holly McMillan, my transfer isn't at the airport. Where did you ask them to pick me up from? Am I supposed to be waiting in the arrival lounge or out front?" I look around in hope of seeing someone with a small sign. "Call me back immediately," I say sharply. "I'm in the middle of nowhere here." I hang up in disgust and dial Clancy's number. She answers on the first ring.

"Hi, Hol."

"Hey, sorry to bother you."

"That's okay."

"Are you feeling any better?"

"Yes, a little. Where are you?"

"In the middle of Bumfuck nowhere, do you know who Melissa booked my transfer through? They haven't turned up."

"What do you mean Melissa?"

"I missed my flight and had to fly into Fairbanks, I emailed and asked her to book a transfer from here to Anchorage tonight."

"Oh fuck," she mutters. "You should have called me."

"Why?"

"Melissa didn't go into work today, she called in sick, too. She wouldn't have seen your email yet."

My eyes widen in horror as I look around at my surroundings. People are taking a second look as they walk past me, as if I stand out to be different. I suddenly become aware of people staring at me and I glance down at myself. I'm in a black tight pencil skirt and matching suit jacket, a silk blouse, sheer stockings and high heels. My long-length dark hair is twisted into a bun. I have a small overnight black Louis Vuitton suitcase and my matching Louis Vuitton laptop bag.

Shit, a tad overdressed. I feel like I come from another planet, looking around at my surroundings...maybe I do.

"I'll find you one now," she says in a panic. "Grab a drink at the bar and I'll call you right back."

I pinch the bridge of my nose. I don't need this shit tonight. After the ten-hour flight, I'm beat. "Okay." I reply as I try to stay calm. "Speak soon." I hang up.

*Oh... my fuck.*

I wheel my suitcase through the airport and over to the bar and take a seat, the waiter smiles as he wipes down the bar. "Hello."

"Hi."

"What can I get you?"

"A Manhattan, please." I smile.

"A what?"

I frown at his reply. "Um... a Manhattan?"

"Nope, don't know what that is."

"Oh." I pause as I think of another drink. "A cosmopolitan, please."

He screws up his face.

"As in cocktail?" I wince. "Maybe a Classic Old Fashioned?"

"Nope."

Oh hell, where the fuck am I?

He scratches his whiskers as if thinking. "I can do a fancy Margarita."

"Yes, that," I snap way too fast. "Fancy Margarita would be great."

He gets to making my drink and I take my phone out and text Clancy.

What's happening?

No answer.

Great, I put my phone down on the bar and stare at the back of the bartender.

I can't wait for this fucking drink. My phone vibrates on the bar and I pick it up, it's Clancy. "Hi."

"Don't freak out."

I frown, that doesn't sound good.

"So apparently there isn't a transfer company open, the one company there who does transfers for that distance is closed for refurbishment for a month."

"What?" I pinch the bridge of my nose.

"Don't worry, I'm just looking for a charter flight now. I'll find someone to fly you straight to Anchorage"

"Okay, good idea."

"What are you doing?"

"I'm at the bar."

"Well, don't drink too much until I find you a flight."

I roll my eyes.

"I'll be back soon."

"Speak then." I hang up just as the bartender puts the drink in front of me, only it's not a drink, it's a concoction. And when I say concoction, I mean, what the actual hell is this crap? The only thing that resembles a Margarita, is the glass.

"What is this?" I frown.

"A fancy Margarita."

"It's red."

He smiles broadly. "That's the fancy bit."

I narrow my eyes as I study the drink and point to the balls floating at the top. "Are these grapes?"

"Aha," he smiles proudly. "Super fancy, just for you."

"Ha-ha, great." I lie.

*Kill me now.*

I tentatively pick it up and take a sip. I try hard not to screw up my face in disgust. Oh hell, I think he used a cleaning product instead of Tequila.

"Well?" he smiles hopefully, as he waits for my verdict.

"Oh...", I fake a smile. "It's...", I pause as I try to find an alternative word to fucking poison. "Wonderful."

He gives me a cheesy wink. "Don't you worry about us in Fairbanks, we know our shit."

I stare at him as I realize that a truer statement has never been made, this drink is literal shit in a cup. "Yes...yes, you do." I smile.

He turns his back to me and gets back to work and I wince as I take another sip.

Oh hell...this is fucking bad. I look around for somewhere to empty it so that he won't see. At least he tried.

My phone rings again, it's Clancy. "Hi."

"I can't find anywhere."

"What?"

"Nobody can do a charter until Friday."

"What do you mean?" I whisper angrily. "This is getting fucking

ridiculous."

"There are no charter flights until Friday."

I roll my eyes in disgust.

"I'm renting you a car."

"For what?"

"You're going to have to drive."

"What, now?" My forehead creases in horror. "Are you serious?"

"I don't know how to get you there if you don't drive yourself. I told you we should have postponed."

My blood begins to boil.

"I'm going to call around and try and find you accommodation halfway on the trip. I googled it, and it seems like just one highway. That should be easy," she says, but I can hear the panic in her voice.

"Where is my original hotel?"

"The Four Seasons in Anchorage."

"Okay." I'll make that tonight, I'm not completely useless. I glance around to see the car rental counter over at the other side of the airport. "I'll get a car, don't you worry. Go back to bed."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, I'm fine." I stare at the drink in front of me. If I can drink that, I can do anything. "Okay, speak later."

"Are you alright?" she asks.

"Of course, I am, how hard can it be to drive seven hours?" I pick up my drink and take another sip. This shit is actually getting a little better.... or maybe I'm just drunk on cleaning fluid now?

"You're in Alaska."

I wince as I swallow. "Well aware, I'll keep in touch. Get better." I hang up and drain my drink.

Okay, let's do this.

I march up to the car rental counter. "Hello." I smile. "I need to rent a car, please."

"Yes, sure." The woman smiles. "How long will you need it for?"

"Well," I shrug. "I missed my flight to Anchorage so now I have to drive there."

"Okay." She types into her computer. "Drop off at Anchorage airport..."

on, when is your returning flight?"

"Yes, Friday."

"Do you want the car until then?"

"Yes, please." I slide my credit card across the desk to her.

She continues to type into her computer. "Now...have you driven here before?"

"No."

"Okay, well, there is a weather system warning for tonight."

"What does that mean?"

"We are expecting rain."

"Oh." I smile in relief, "I can handle a little rain."

"Yes, it's not showing too much on the radar. If you come across any ice on the road, I would suggest you pull over if you aren't accustomed to driving through it."

I frown. "Ice on the road?"

"There won't be any at this time of year, but I have to warn you just in case. It's in the terms and policies."

"Oh good." I smile, relieved. "If I get tired, I am just going to pull into a hotel anyway."

"Okay, sounds like a plan." She keeps typing into her computer. "What kind of car did you want?"

"What drives the best?"

"I'd probably go with a SUV?"

"Are they hard to drive?"

"No, easier on our roads. Can handle all weather with a heavier tire."

"Sounds good."

She shuffles through her keys and hands me a set.

"If you go out these doors and over to our parking lot, you will see a black SUV; that's your ride."

I take the keys from her. "Perfect." I grab my suitcase and laptop bag and make my way out to the parking lot to see the black SUV parked.

I feel myself wither a little. "Jeez, that's a big beast." I click the keys and it lights up as it unlocks. I peer in and am pleasantly surprised. Black leather interior, with all the modern upgrades. Quite luxurious really. I throw my things in the back and climb in and get behind the wheel. I type 'Anchorage, Four Seasons' into the navigation system and start the car.

I smile broadly, as I look around. This car is actually pretty cool.

Four hours later, I sit forward in my seat and grip the steering wheel with white-knuckle force.

"This is a fucking nightmare," I mutter. The wipers are going as fast as they can. Loud and fast, and still, I can't see through the windshield. It's pouring rain, torrential actually. And to top it off, I've lost internet connection, so my maps have stopped working. I glanced over the map route before I started driving and I'm pretty sure I just have to stay on this road. But at this point, who knows where the hell I am?

It's dark and wet and I'm in the middle of a forest, huge trees line the sides of the winding road. There isn't anywhere safe that I can pull over and stop. I just need to keep going until I find a gas station or get to a town so I can get service again.

I glance at the bars on my phone.... still nothing.

*Fuck.*

I come around a winding bend and a huge branch lays across the road and I swerve to miss it. The car hits a puddle and spins into a 360. "Ahhh," I cry as I lose control.

I go through the barrier at the side of the road and over the embankment and down a sloping hill. I'm bouncing all over the place as I try to regain control of the car. The wheels completely lose traction and the brakes aren't working. I run straight into a tree trunk.

The car comes to a dead halt and I close my eyes in relief and put my head into my hands. I pant as adrenaline rushes through my system and my heart is beating fast.

I look up at my surroundings; huge trees surround my car. It's pitch black and pouring rain. I pick up my phone, still no service.

"Holy fuck, what do I do now?"

I sit for a moment in the darkness as I try to calm myself down. I peer through the back window as I try to work out how far I travelled from the main road. Can't be too far. I need to get out of here.

The sound of the rain is deafening on the roof of the car and the windshield wipers are going at full speed still.

I straighten the wheel and put the car into reverse as I peer through the back window. I can't see for shit. I put my foot down on the accelerator and the wheels spin. I do it again and I can hear them spinning hard over the

engine in the mud but there is no traction.

I'm trapped.

Shit, this is the monumental fuck up of all fuck ups.

*Think.*

What would be the logical thing to do?

I could try and dig the car out of the mud, but with the rain coming down like it is, there is next to zero chance of that; everything is mud.

I could walk up to the highway and try and flag down a passing car.

What cars, there are no fucking cars. Maybe I should just stay in the car until morning?

I look around at my surroundings. It's dark and creepy and pouring down rain and the windshield is fogging up on the inside. Spending the night here is my worst nightmare.

I try to think outside the box, what would you do if a car was trapped in mud? I try to think back to those reality in the wild television programs and what they would do in this circumstance. Put sticks under the wheels to try and drive over for traction.

Yes, that's it.

I open the door and the rain is really coming down hard. I slam the door shut again.

Oh crap.

For ten minutes, I sit in the darkness weighing my options.

Okay, get out of the car, find some sticks and put them under the wheels. How hard can that be?

I glance down at what I'm wearing, a tight skirt with high heel shoes. "You idiot," I mutter as I peer out onto the ground, maybe I should take my shoes off. No, I need them, who knows what's on the ground out there. "These are fucking expensive shoes, too."

"Okay, let's do this." I give myself a pep talk. I take a deep breath and open the door in a rush. I climb out and look around at my surroundings. The car is on a gentle slope. It's not as bad as I first thought. I walk around the car, inspecting the damage; only one back tire is buried in mud.

Yes, maybe I could get out of here.

Sticks, I need all the sticks. I begin to scrounge around on the ground, feeling around with my feet. The rain is hammering down, and I look up at the sky. "Are you kidding me?" I cry to the heavens. I find a branch and I drag it around and put it behind the back wheel. I find another and another.

I'm saturated.

I put them down as I scrounge around on the ground. And as I stand and step back, I roll my ankle, fall and slide down the hill and end up on my back in the mud.

"Oww."

"Easy, Miss," I hear a deep voice.

Huh?

I look up through the rain to see a man in a raincoat with a flashlight. "Are you hurt?" he calls.

I shake my head. "No, but I crashed my car."

"I saw you go off the road from my place, so I came looking for you," he calls.

"Oh," I pant in relief. "Thank God."

He walks over and holds his hand out to help me up. I take it and he pulls me to my feet. I put pressure down on my foot and wince.

"You are hurt."

"It's just my ankle." I try to put it down again and pain shoots through my foot. He picks me up and opens the car door and places me on the seat. "Stay in here while I check on your car." He slams the door shut and he walks around and looks over the car with the flashlight. He gets down on his knees and looks underneath the car and then comes back and opens the door. "You aren't going anywhere; the axle is broken."

"Oh." My face falls.

"I can take you into town if you want?" he asks. His voice is deep and I can hardly see his face. His huge raincoat with his hood is hard to see through the rain.

"Thank you. That would be..." I shrug as I try to search for the right word. "Great."

I grab my handbag and he holds out his hand and I take it and step out of the car. I wince again when I put pressure on my foot and without warning, he bends and picks me up like a bride.

He begins to march up the hill toward the road as if I'm light as a feather.

The rain is really coming down and his step doesn't falter as he navigates where to walk. I cling to him, my two arms around his neck.

This is hellish.

We get to the road and I see a large SUV parked at the side of the road. Jeez, his car is nearly a truck it's so big.

He opens the passenger side door and places me on the seat. "You okay?" he asks as he does the seatbelt up around me as if I'm a child.

"Yes." I give him a lopsided smile. "Thank you."

I watch him walk around to his side of the car and get behind the wheel. He starts the car and pulls out onto the road.

"Thank you so much."

He nods and keeps his eyes on the road. I don't think he's made eye contact with me at all.

"I missed my flight and I had to drive to Anchorage and then my navigation system wouldn't work and, oh my God, it's raining so hard," I stammer.

He nods but stays silent. His focus remains on the task of driving. I look between him and the road. He's not very friendly...is he? Why would he be? God, poor bastard, I bet this is the very last thing he wants to be doing on a night like this.

"You saw my car crash?" I ask.

"I saw your headlights veer off the road."

"Oh." I watch him. "It was really scary, could have been a lot worse though."

He nods once.

I twist my hands in my lap as I think of the right thing to say. "How far away is town?"

"About twenty miles."

I nod as I listen. "And you live out here?"

"Yep." His eyes stay on the road.

Okay, it's quite clear he doesn't want to talk, but for some reason I feel like I need to. "Thank you again, I don't know what I would have done if you hadn't come."

His eyes flick over to me. "That was a good plan."

I frown, not understanding.

"The sticks under the wheels, that was a good plan."

I smile, feeling proud of myself. "Thanks."

"It wouldn't have worked in these conditions," he continues. "But a good plan, just the same."

"Oh." I shrug. "I had to try something at least."

He remains silent.

"I'm Holly, by the way."

His eyes flick over to me. "Hi, Holly."

"Do you have a name?"

"Jack."

"Hi, Jack." I twist my fingers some more, his lack of polite conversation is unsettling. The rain is still coming down hard and I think about what could have happened if he hadn't come along. "This weather is horrendous," I say.

He keeps driving.

"If you hadn't come along..."

"I did though." He cuts me off.

Okay, shut up. Shut up now. We drive in silence until we get to a sign that says:

### *Welcome To Cantwell*

Thank God, civilization.

"If you could just drop me at a hotel, that would be great."

He drives without saying a word. Unbelievable, he borders on rude. It's just awkward.

We turn a corner and then he pulls into a parking lot and I see the hotel sign. Relief fills me and we both peer through the windshield at the deserted-looking hotel. No lights are on and nobody seems to be around.

"Is it open?" I frown.

He shrugs and gets out of the car. The rain is blowing sideways from the wind and I stay put as I watch him approach the front doors. He reads a sign and turns back and gets in and starts the car. "What are you doing?" I ask.

"It's closed."

"What?"

He pulls out onto the road.

"Okay, just take me to another hotel."

"That's it."

I frown. "What do you mean, that's it?"

"There's only one hotel here and they're closed for the Christmas period. I remember now that they went interstate."

"Well... what will I do?"

"You'll stay with me."

"What?"

"You'll stay in my cabin."

"No." I shake my head. "That's not a good idea, no offense, but I don't know you and I don't feel comfortable doing that."

"Okay." He turns the corner.

My eyes flick between him and the road. "What do you mean .... okay?"

"Okay, I'll just drop you back off at your car."

"You want me to stay in my car in the forest?" I gasp.

"No. You want to stay in your car."

"I didn't say that," I snap.

He turns his attention to me. His eyes are hard and cold. "I'm not in the mood for this shit. You stay at my cabin or you go back to your car. Make your decision because I'm going home."

"Well.... where will I stay at your house?" I stammer.

"In my bed."

My horrified eyes hold his.

He rolls his eyes. "I'll be on the couch, don't flatter yourself."



## Holly

"OH," my eyebrows rise in surprise. *Don't flatter yourself.* What the hell?

"I wouldn't," I snap. "I simply didn't want to be an imposition." I cross my arms angrily. This guy is an asshole. A bona fide asshole. And he's full of himself, too.

"I'll take the couch," I spit.

"You are an imposition, so that suits me fine," he mutters.

"You're a real knight in shining armor, you know that?"

His face crinkles into a smirk and then a broad smile.

"You find this amusing?" I squeak.

He smiles as he watches the road.

"For your information... Jack," I snap. "I'll have you know that I would not flatter myself by thinking you wanted to sleep with me. I would be flattering you."

He raises an eyebrow as if surprised. "Is that why you're wearing stripper clothes?" He pauses as if searching for the right words. "To... flatter me?"

"What?" I gasp. "Stripper clothes...you must be joking?"

He glances down at my tight skirt, stockings and high heels all covered in mud, and raises his eyebrow once more.

I inwardly cringe. Oh Hell, what must I look like? "I don't know what strippers wear in Alaska, but I can tell you that they must be very different from the strippers in New York. And actually...this work suit is Armani," I announce.

"Are-who-ee?"

I roll my eyes and fold my arms in a huff. Please shut up, you caveman.

"There is no way in hell that you would wear that to work," he replies casually as he drives. His voice is deep and husky.

"And why not?"

"How would you get any work done?"

"Huh?"

"I imagine men would try and have their way with you on your desk, all day long." He turns into a driveway.

*What the hell?*

I open my mouth to say something snarky and slam it shut. That sounded decidedly sexual. Suddenly uncomfortable, I wiggle up and pull my skirt

down.

That's a weird thing to say, sort of passive aggressive sexiness.

I stare out the window at the rain as it pours down hard. Maybe sleeping in my car was the safer option after all?

I stay silent and his eyes flick over to me. "What?" he asks.

"Nothing," I shrug, my lips pressed so tight together that they are beginning to hurt.

"Well?" he prompts me again.

*Oh my God, stop talking, you idiot.*

"Jack."

His eyes glance over to me. "Yes, Haley."

"First of all, it's Holly. Get it right."

A trace of a smile crosses his face as if amused.

"I've had a really, really, *really* bad day that started at 4 am this morning when I missed my flight. Now, if you don't mind, I would like to use your couch for the night... to sleep. If that's not okay, or if something else is rattling around in that head of yours, please drive me back to my car, because I'm not in the mood to have to justify my wardrobe choices to anyone, least of all you." I cross my arms in front of me. "And for the record... I am a professional and would never even contemplate having sex on my desk." I tilt my chin to the sky in defiance. "I don't know what happens here in Alaska, but that is not how corporate New York operates."

He rolls his lips as if trying to hide a smile. "Got it."

We arrive at the top of the hill and a log cabin comes into view through the pouring rain. It's lit up from the headlights. The house is made completely of timber. It's small, with a veranda wrapping around the entire outside. I can see smoke coming out of a double chimney on the roof.

"This is it," he says as he climbs out of the truck and slams the door shut behind him.

He comes around to my side and opens the door. Without asking for permission, he lifts me out of the car like a bride. The rain begins to hit my face hard once more. "I can walk, I'm fine."

"Be quiet, Haley."

"Holly," I snap.

He breaks into a broad smile. "Whatever the fuck your name is, shut up woman."

My mouth falls open in horror and he carries me to the front stairs and

under the cover of the front roof. He puts me down and I step back from him, surprised that anyone is that strong. He opens the front door. "It's a bit of a mess, I wasn't expecting company," he says.

I peer in, it's all timber and what looks like to be one big room. I can see a small kitchen and living room with two couches. A dog lies sprawled out asleep on a rug in front of an open fire. I glance back to him just to see him take his raincoat off and hang it on a hook next to the door. He's tall, huge actually. He must be 6 ft 4, and for the first time, I see his face. Dark brown hair that has a bit of a curl to it, a chiseled jaw, with big brown eyes. He's handsome, in a caveman kind of way. Ha, who knew?

"You just going to stand there dripping wet?" he asks as he begins to undo his flannel shirt.

Damn it, in all the commotion, I didn't grab my suitcase. Now what am I supposed to change into? My face falls in horror as I remember more of my misdemeanors. Oh shit, my laptop is still in the car. Ugh, this is the day from hell.

"You're dripping everywhere," he says as he peels his shirt off over his shoulders and hangs it on the hook.

"Well," I go to answer him as my eyes drop down to his large broad chest and his muscular physique. Looks like something you would see at a strip show.

*Well, fuck.*

He kicks his boots off and undoes the button on his jeans. He raises his eyebrow as if waiting for an intelligent reply.

*Um... I got nothing.*

He slides the zipper down on his jeans. "Don't just take your clothes off in front of me," I scoff.

He rolls his eyes and slides his wet jeans down his legs. He's wearing blue boxer shorts underneath and I snap my gaze away immediately. Okay, this is getting into weird territory. Hot Alaskan mountain man territory.

"In all the commotion, I left my suitcase in the car," I say.

"Oh," he frowns and looks out into the rain as if contemplating going back and getting it.

"It's too wet and dangerous out there." I say. "Would you..."

He nods, and the wet dark brown curls in his hair bounce from side to side.

He really is quite...

"Would I what?" he asks.

Oh...that's right, I was talking, *focus*. "Would it be possible to borrow something to wear?" I ask timidly. "I'll pay for laundry or replace it with something new," I shrug. Poor bastard, I ask him to rescue me, give me a bed for the night and now supply me with clothing and food.

"Sure." Without hesitation, he marches into the house and I stand at the door and peer in after him. He goes into the bedroom and closes the door. What's he doing? I frown... do I follow him, or is he coming back?

I look back out into the rain as it comes pouring down. It's like a mini cyclone or something.

I see something in the darkness coming up toward the front steps and I squint my eyes to try and see what it is. It's black and mangy and it begins to come up the front steps toward me.

A wolf.

A wolf.

*A fucking wolf.*

"Ahhh," I scream as I hobble into the house. Oww, my ankle hurts.

How did I forget?

Before I can close the door, the wolf runs in behind me and jumps up and grabs me with his front legs. "Ahhh," I cry as it corners me in the kitchen. "Help!"

The wolf jumps up and goes up onto its back legs and I cover my face with my hands. "No," I scream. "Oh my God, there's a wolf in the house. We're all going to die."

"Rex," I hear Jack's deep voice bark out.

I look up. "Huh?"

The dog begins to hump my leg with vigor and my mouth falls open in horror.

*What the hell?*

"Why you... get out of here," Jack snaps as he shoos him away. The dog runs toward the door but not before shaking himself off, with mud and water spraying everywhere.

"Out," Jack bellows with a loud clap.

The dog runs out and Jack slams the door behind him, his eyes come to me and then he shrugs. "He's a bit wild, that one. Goes crazy when it rains."

"You own that dog?" I gasp.

"Yep, that's Rex." He puts his hands on his hips as he assesses the

damage. There is mud everywhere. "Never seen him hump anyone before, though.... I guess he doesn't get to see pretty girls too often."

I roll my lips to hide my smile. "Well, I never got humped by a dog before either, so it was a first for both of us."

He smirks, amused by my answer. He pauses as if lost as to what to say next. "You can take a shower if you want. I have some clothes for you to put on."

"Thank you." I shrug. "Much appreciated, that'd be great."

He holds his hand out to guide me. "It's this way." He walks through the house and out the back door and I frown as I hobble along behind him.

He turns and looks down at my foot. "Is your ankle okay?"

I hobble along. "Yeah, I'm fine," I reply as I follow him. Oh dear God, it's an outside bathroom. Please, no more semi-wild animals that want to have carnal relations. There's an awning that joins the house and the bathroom. It's covered but rain is still blowing in a little.

"This isn't fancy like New York," he says. He opens the bathroom door, turns the light on and I look around. A large metal bath sits in the middle and a shower hangs overhead. The tiles are white, it's clean and well kept. Not at all what I expected, and I smile. "It's perfect."

His eyes hold mine and for the first time I get a feeling that Jack isn't as tough as he makes out to be. "I can't thank you enough for helping me tonight," I say.

He nods once, his lips pressed tightly together.

"Is there a towel?" I ask.

"Yeah." He opens a cabinet to reveal a stack of clean towels. They're all different and don't match, but clean, nonetheless. "Just in here."

"Thanks."

He hesitates.

I glance toward the door. "Is the sex maniac dog going to come barging in here?"

"Possibly." He points to the lock. "Use this." He walks out and closes the door behind him, and I hear him walk away.

I look around at my surroundings and turn the hot water on. It comes out fast and hot and I breathe out a sigh of relief. I peel my wet clothes off and quickly wash the mud out of everything and squeeze them out. I put them in the sink to try and let them drain, before I climb under the hot water and let it stream down over my hair.

"Feels good." I feel myself begin to relax for the first time in hours.  
"What a nightmare of a day."

**Jack**

I hear the shower turn on and I march into the kitchen. "This place is a fucking mess." I quickly clear the dishes out of the sink and straighten up the living room. I throw the cushions into place and snatch up a few shirts that are lying over the back of a chair. I hear a scratching at the door, and I storm over and open it to see Rex, sopping wet and wanting to be let in.

"What do you want?" I snap. He looks up at me. "No," I whisper angrily. "You're not coming in, you're covered in mud." He goes back on his hind legs and lets out a playful bark. "I can't fucking believe you humped her leg."

He woofs again and runs back out into the pouring rain thinking this is the best game of all time.

I slam the door shut. "Damn dog is fucking insane" I walk into the bedroom and snatch up the clothes that hang over the back of a chair in here, too. I turn the lamp on and straighten up the bed linen.

I hear the shower turn off and I hurriedly continue to clean like a maniac. I pick up my shoes from the floor and throw them in the closet. I straighten the top of the dresser and throw the cushions onto the bed.

I hear the bathroom door open. "Umm.... Jack." She calls.

I smirk, I like the sound of her saying my name.

"Yeah," I call as I head back down the hall.

I find Holly peeking through a crack in the slightly opened bathroom door.

"What's wrong?" I ask.

"I um," she hesitates as if embarrassed. "You said you had something I could borrow to wear?"

I stare at her, wrapped in a towel, big brown eyes, perfect white teeth and olive skin, water beading on her bare shoulders. Her long dark hair is wet, and damn, she looks good enough to eat.

*No clothes.... I like you naked.*

"Sure." I glance back down the hall toward my bedroom. "Just a moment."

I march back into my bedroom and begin to rat through my drawer at double speed as I look for something suitable.

Damn it, why don't I have any spare lingerie laying around? I smile as I imagine passing that through the crack in the door and the horrified face she would pull.

I grab a pair of boxer shorts and a white T-shirt. I go to the wardrobe and find a black bathrobe. Finally, I have a good use for this damn thing. I walk back down to find that the bathroom door is now closed, and I knock.

"Holly."

She opens the door slightly and peers through it as if I'm a wild animal.

"Here you are." I pass the clothes through the crack. She smells clean and like soap... *my soap*. Hmm... I get a visual of what she might look like under that towel and I feel my cock twitch in appreciation.

*Stop it.*

"Thank you," she says as she takes them from me and stands on her foot and then grimaces in pain once again.

"Are you okay?" I frown.

She hops as she keeps the weight from her foot. "Yes, I'm fine."

She closes the door in my face and my cock pitches a tent in my boxer shorts. *Just fucking cut it out already.* I walk into my bedroom and over to the wardrobe and I look for a pair of pants that will hide this thing. Quick, I need to hurry.

*Fuck.*

I find a black pair of jeans, throw them on and tuck my dick strategically in the waistband and look for the biggest t-shirt I can find. I pull a grey one over my shoulders. I look at my crotch in the mirror. All clear.

"This'll do."

## Holly

I quickly dry myself off and pull on the clothes that Jack has brought in for me, a huge pair of boxer shorts and a white t-shirt. Thankfully there's a robe or otherwise my boobs would be on display without a bra. I hobble around as I get dressed and I look down at my ankle. It's beginning to swell. "Shit." I sit down to put my shorts on, unable to stand on one leg. I clean up the bathroom and wipe the floor with the towel and then hobble up the walkway. I find Jack sitting at the kitchen counter. I smile bashfully. "Thank you, I feel a lot better."

He sips a glass of amber fluid as his gaze drops to my foot. "How's your ankle?"

"It's okay." I shrug.

"Let me have a look at it." In one quick movement, he picks me up and sits me on the kitchen counter and my heart catches, he's so strong. His eyes flick up to me as if asking for approval and I nod. He peels my robe back and picks up my foot as he studies it. "It's swelling."

I nod. He runs his hand up the top of my foot and then underneath the arch. His hands are rough like sandpaper and I flinch.

"Sore?" he asks.

"Your hands are rough."

He breaks into a slow sexy smile as he concentrates on my foot.

"What?" I ask.

"No woman ever complained about my hands before." His eyes rise to meet mine. "They like 'em rough."

I swallow the lump in my throat, *jeez*. I drop my shoulders as I pretend that isn't the hottest thing I've ever heard. "Well, I guess I'm not used to it." I pull my foot from his clasp. "My foot is fine."

He goes to a cabinet and lifts down a metal box and rats through it and produces a bandage. "I'm going to wrap it."

"Honestly..."

"Just be quiet woman, I'm wrapping it," he interrupts me as he lifts my foot and begins to carefully wrap the bandage around my ankle. I watch him as I feel his hand on my calf muscle. He really seems to know what he's doing. "Are you a medic?"

"I'm a builder."

"Oh," I watch him, "I've never known a builder before. Growing up in New York it's not someone that you meet."

He wraps the bandage around and around.

"What kind of men live in New York?"

*The player kind.*

I shrug. "I don't know, people who work in offices."

He nods. "Suits."

"Yeah."

He fastens my bandage with a small clip. "Yeah, I got nothing in common with suits."

I watch the huge muscles contract under his t-shirt as he moves. "I can imagine."

He picks me up and places me carefully on the sofa, he puts two cushions under my foot to elevate it. "Are you hungry?"

I bite my lip, I'm starving. It was raining so hard that I couldn't see a shop along the way, that is if there even was one. "A piece of toast would be great. Do you have toast?" I ask.

His eyes hold mine. "I have toast."

"I can make it," I offer.

"You stay there," he demands as he gets up. "You want a drink?"

I glance at his glass of amber fluid on the coffee table. "What is it?"

"Whiskey."

Hmm, I love whiskey. "Umm."

"I'll take that as a yes," he cuts me off. He fusses around in the kitchen and returns with a glass of whiskey and ice. "This will take the sting out of your foot," he says as he passes it to me. He goes back into the kitchen. I take a sip and wince as I stare at the glass.

Fuck, what is this...200% alcohol? "Thank you," I call.

I look around the room, it's innately masculine. The walls and floors are timber, a huge rug in muted colors is on the floor. The fireplace is big, and a giant metal tub has a heap of huge timber pieces inside of it, waiting for their turn to burn. The dog that lies in front of it hasn't moved. Is it dead? The couch is tired and slouchy, but very comfortable, and there are curtains and cushions. I wouldn't imagine a man like him to have cushions. I wonder, does he live here alone?

There's a framed photo on the TV cabinet of a family portrait. It looks like a group of people all standing together in front of a waterfall, though it's

too far away for me to see who's in the photo.

"Do you live here alone?" I call.

"Aha," he replies as he does whatever he's doing.

I take a sip of my whiskey. Who bought those cushions?

"Do you have a girlfriend?" I call.

He appears and places a tray down on the coffee table in front of me. It has a big bowl of goulash on it with crusty ciabatta toasted bread on the side. It smells delicious. I look up surprised. "You made this?"

"Last night."

"Wow, I'm impressed."

He holds out a spoon. "You didn't taste it yet."

I smile as I take it from him. "Well, it smells delicious."

He walks back into the kitchen and the rain comes down hard outside. It's absolutely disastrous and sounds so loud on the tin roof.

"Are you not having any?" I call.

"I already ate."

"Oh." I pick up my bowl and take a spoonful. Holy shit...this is good.

I notice he didn't answer my girlfriend question, he obviously has one.

"So, have you lived here long?" I ask.

"In the area, all my life. I bought this farm about ten years ago."

I smile as I eat. "You should open a restaurant, this is really good."

"You obviously hit your head, too," he answers dryly.

I hear him washing dishes in the kitchen.

"How did you see my car?" I ask.

"I was out feeding Rex and I looked down the hill when I saw your headlights spin and then go off the road."

I get a flashback of how scary those few seconds were.

"I thought someone may have been hurt so I came looking for you," he says.

"Thank you." I take a big mouthful. "I don't know what I would've done if you hadn't shown up."

"You would have been okay," he replies. "I get the feeling that you can look after yourself just fine."

I smile proudly. I like that he made that observation.

I can look after myself.... I've had to do it all along.

My douche-bag husband certainly never did it.

I hear the front door open as the rain really hammers down. "Rex," I hear

him call. "Get out of the rain," he calls. I smile as I listen. "Dumb dog," he mutters. "Rex," he calls again, as I hear the rain really come down hard again.

He comes in and slams the door closed.

"Kid troubles?" I ask.

"You could say that," he replies. "He's young and wild, out running around all night. I'm constantly chasing the damn thing and bringing him home."

"What kind of dog is he?" I ask.

"His mother was a wolf. I found her on the side of the road, she'd been hit by a car and been killed. I saw she was nursing so I went looking and two days later I heard them crying in the forest. Brought both pups home, but his sister didn't make it."

I turn to look at him over the back of the couch as I see a new side to the prickly man.

"I think his father must have been a dog though," he continues, "or there is one somewhere back in his family, he's not a full-bred wolf."

I sip my whiskey as I listen. "Is that why he acts different, cause he's half wild?"

"Maybe," he replies. "I don't try and curb him too much. He has free reign. I let him be who he was meant to be. I do spend way too much time looking for him though."

I smile impressed. Jack's a big softy.

I finish my dinner and he comes to collect my plate. "Leave that," I say. "I'll wash it in the morning, you've done enough."

He gives me a lopsided smile as he picks it up. "It's okay, I'm used to doing everything."

I watch him, and suddenly I want to know all there is about Jack.

"Come sit with me and talk," I call, while I hold my empty glass in the air. "We can have another drink together."

He picks up the whiskey bottle and comes and sits down on the other couch. He refills both of our glasses and takes a sip as his eyes hold mine. "What do you want to talk about?"

I shrug. "Is there anything you want to ask me?"

He shakes his head.

"What's your last name?" I ask.

"Stevens."

"Jack Stevens?" I smile.

He nods.

"I'm Holly McMillan."

His eyes hold mine and he takes a slow sip of his whiskey. "You got a man at home, Holly McMillan?"

My stomach flutters. "No."

"Why not?"

I shrug. "I was married once, to a liar."

He listens intently.

"It's ridiculous. I thought he was the love of my life and he thought I was his meal ticket."

He frowns.

"He was a stockbroker and he got caught for insider trading."

"He stole from people?" he asks horrified.

"Aha, and I thought that was the worst of it. But when they were doing his character analysis in court, they brought up all these affairs that he had behind my back with numerous women and it was splashed all over the tabloids."

His face falls. "You didn't know?"

"No idea at all. I was completely blindsided. He even had a child with another woman and paid her off not to tell me." I shrug sadly.

He raises his eyebrows and sips his drink as if lost for words.

"He's in jail."

"You divorced him?"

"Aha." I smile sadly. "It's funny you know, you think you know how your life is going to turn out. But I never imagined I'd be a thirty-three-year-old divorcee, that was never even on my radar."

He nods as if understanding.

My eyes go to him in question. "Did your life turn out to be what you thought it would be?" I ask.

He shakes his head. "No."

I wait for his reply.

"Never thought I'd be a widower."

My face falls. "Your wife died?"

He nods.

I stare at him.

"Brain tumor, seven years ago."

My heart drops. "I'm so sorry."

He smiles sadly. "Me too."

"Were you together long?"

He nods but doesn't elaborate and I get the feeling that he doesn't want to talk about this anymore. I change the subject. "So, what do you build?" I ask.

"Houses."

"Tree houses?" I tease.

He chuckles. "No, not tree houses. I own my own business. I have six guys working for me."

"How wonderful." I smile as I think about this. "It must be so rewarding to see something that you built from the ground up come to fruition."

"It is." His eyes rise to mine. "What do you do?"

"I'm an acquisitions manager."

"What does that mean?"

"I work for a large media company in New York and I buy small companies around the world for them."

He frowns. "You travel a lot?"

"I do." I frown as I remember Clancy. "Oh shit. She's going to be freaking out."

"Who is?"

"My assistant, Clancy. I have no internet on my phone, and I couldn't check in, she'll be worried sick."

"You can use my phone if you want, I have coverage."

"Would you mind?"

"Sure." He gets up and hands me his phone and I dial her number.

"Hello." She answers.

"Clancy it's me."

"Oh, thank fucking God. I thought you were dead. I was about to send out a search party."

I smile. "No, I'm fine. I did crash my car but I'm okay and the weather is horrendous so I'm staying with a...." My eyes flick up to Jack and I pause as I try to think of the right description... *a hot mountain man*. "At a farmhouse. A very kind person brought me in. I just wanted you to know I'm safe and I'll call you in the morning. You can reach me on this number."

"Okay, great. I'm so relieved."

"Speak tomorrow." I hang up and pass the phone back to Jack.

"You have an assistant?" he asks.

"I have three."

He raises his eyebrows in surprise.

"Well you have six," I reply.

"I guess." He sips his drink, amused. He refills our glasses.

## Two hours later

I hate to admit it, but the cranky mountain man is actually quite witty.

And dare I say it.... a little gorgeous. We've chatted about everything, with no real deep subject. He's easy to talk to, and smart. A lot more intelligent than I first gave him credit for.

"Are you working tomorrow?" I ask.

"No, there's more rain in the forecast."

"You don't work in the rain?"

"Depends where we are in the job. If the roof is already on, we do."

I smile as I imagine him being all rough and rugged with a hammer. "So, what do you do for fun up here?"

He shrugs. "Not much. There's a few bars in town."

"Not much?" I tease. "I imagine you would have Alaskan women falling at your feet."

He smiles bashfully. "Well... I'm a one-woman kind of man."

What does that mean? "You don't have a girlfriend or someone you see?"

"No. Not since...." His voice trails off.

"Not since your wife?" I frown.

"No."

I stare at him and blink in disbelief. "I didn't think men like you existed."

"We do."

The air crackles between us as we stare at each other.

"I should get you to bed." He murmurs.

"You should," I whisper.

He stands and picks me up and I put my arm around his neck. We walk into his bedroom and he places me down to sit on the bed. He pulls the covers back and I notice a photograph of a woman on the side table. "Is that your wife?" I ask. I pick it up.

"That's Tara."

She has blonde hair and is laughing, she seems kind. "She's beautiful." I smile.

"She is... was."

He opens the bottom drawer and puts her photograph in it. "About time I put that away," he mutters to himself.

"Don't do that," I say as I open the drawer and pull her picture back out. I

put it back on the side table. "She should always be next to you when you sleep, and when you meet your new love, she will want to sleep next to her as well... because she's a part of you."

He stares at me as his jaw clenches.

A closeness runs between us and I reach up and run my hand down the stubble on his jaw.

His forehead creases and he stands in a rush and turns his back to me. "Do you need anything else?"

"No."

He drops his head and stares at the floor as if contemplating a decision. "I'll see you in the morning."

I close my eyes, shit... I crossed the line. "Okay, goodnight."

He walks toward the door.

"Jack."

He turns back.

I give him a soft smile. "Thank you."

He nods and leaves. The door clicks closed. I turn the lamp off, flop back to lie on my back and stare at the ceiling. I wasn't joking, he really is one of a kind.

I wake to the sound of rain, hard on the roof and I lie and listen to it for a while. I need to go to the bathroom. It's just getting light and I can see the glow of white through the crack in the curtains as the sun gets closer to rising. I climb out of bed and wince while I do so because my ankle is still sore.

I hobble over to the door and peer out. Jack is asleep on the couch. I tip toe past him and make my way out to the bathroom.

After finishing, I wash my hands and open the bathroom door to see Jack standing there waiting for me. "You alright?" he asks.

I nod with a smile. "I'm fine."

He bends and picks me up like a bride once again.

He holds me close and his eyes drop to my lips; my heart stops.

Is he going to kiss me?



## Holly

HIS LIPS softly take mine as he kisses me. It's a soft kiss, with an undertone of suction. My arms are around his neck as he holds me in the air. It's as if I am light as a feather. We kiss again and again and oh... this man is such a different species of male to what I've ever known before. He's not flashy or trying to woo me with smoothness. He just is as he is, and it's so refreshingly honest.

*Real.*

His lips take mine again and this time with hunger. I can feel the arousal as it takes over his body. With every thrash of his tongue, his grip tightens around my body. Seven years is a long time for a person to go without physical touch and I want to give it to him. I want to be the first person that he...

He carries me down the hall and places me carefully on the ground in the kitchen. His eyes hold mine and it's as if he's assessing the situation, thinking carefully about his next move or sentence. Wondering if I'm going to run... or if he should.

I pause as I try to get the wording right. "I like you, Jack."

His arms snake around me once more and he pulls my hips to his and I feel his large erection as it presses against me. "I like you, too."

My stomach flutters... fuck, he's big.

He kisses me and this time with purpose. This isn't a promise of a grand love affair. We both know that's impossible, or rather, it's a decision. A conscious decision to get to know each other physically. And I'm okay with that, and by the feeling of his hard body up against mine, I'm pretty sure that he is, too.

Our kiss turns frantic and he lifts me up to sit on the kitchen counter. The sound of the rain on the roof hammering above is adding to the dramatic feeling between us. His hand snakes up my leg as he wraps it around his hips. His open mouth drops to my neck as he kisses me hungrily, his teeth grazing my skin.

Goosebumps scatter all over.

I glance up and see our reflection in the kitchen window. Me on the counter with my legs spread around him, his two hands on the counter behind me as he holds himself up, his lips on my neck and his eyes tightly closed.

He's completely lost in the moment.

The thought of what he's been through and what he's missed since then tears my usual defenses wide open and suddenly, I'm frantic. I want this man. I want all of this man; I want to spoil him... bring him undone.

I whimper as I pull him closer. His hand runs up my thigh and he slides it into my shorts. He brushes the backs of his fingers through my sex and his eyes flutter closed with arousal. "Fuck," he murmurs.

"Touch me," I whimper. Oh God... don't stop... I want it all...

*Fuck me.*

With his eyes locked on mine, he slowly glides his fingertips through my dripping wet sex. He lets out a low whistle. "You. Feel. So. Good."

I arch my back, searching for a deeper connection.

Reading my queues, he slides his thick finger deep inside of me and I clench around it. His eyes are dark and I clench again to show him what I can do.

He inhales sharply in appreciation. "Fuck yeah."

I shudder hard.

Oh Hell, this could get embarrassing. I haven't been touched for so long. I feel like I'm about to come already. He begins to pump me, first with one finger, then with two. His lips take mine as he kisses me hard. With one hand he grips the back of my head and with the other he adds another thick finger and I clench as I bite his bottom lip.

Oh Hell, that feels good. *Too good.*

My hands grip his shoulders as he works me hard and I can feel his muscles contract with every pump of his hand. His moves get faster and faster, more violent.

And I grip his shoulders as I whimper into his mouth.

"You like that?" he says as he watches me, though it wasn't a question. It was more of a statement.

And I don't like that, *I love that.*

He takes my bottom lip between his teeth and bites down and the pinch of pain on my lips reacts with the wave of pleasure from below and I shudder hard as I clench around his fingers, the orgasm so strong that I convulse. He smiles against my lips in triumph.

I pant as my eyes hold his, well... that's an embarrassing record. I came in three minutes flat.

He scoops me off the kitchen counter and carries me into the bedroom

and stands me next to the bed. He slowly peels the T-shirt over my head and then takes my pants down and throws them to the side. I stand before him, naked and vulnerable.

His eyes roam over my body in reverence. "Holly... you're beautiful," he whispers in awe.

I clench my hands at my sides, nerves dancing in my stomach. I want him to be happy with what he sees.

He lies me back on the bed and spreads my legs and before I can protest, he bends and kisses me there.

I convulse off the bed, still sensitive from the orgasm I had only moments ago.

He smiles into me as his eyes hold mine, his thick tongue licking deep into my core.

His hands are on my inner thighs as he holds my legs open. I try to close them, and he slams them back to the bed. "Don't move," he growls in a warning.

Nerves flutter in my stomach and I get the feeling that Jack likes his own way in the bedroom... not that I'm complaining. His touch is dominant, controlling. And dare I say it, on the edge of control.

His tongue laps my orgasm up and his eyes flutter closed in pleasure.

I can feel it building again and I run my fingers through his thick hair.

Oh Hell.

His hand splays over my lower stomach to hold me down as my back arches off the bed.

"Get your clothes off," I plead. This isn't fair. I'm lying here open and wet at his disposal and he's still fully dressed.

Fire dances in his eyes and he stands and peels his shirt off over his head. His broad chest comes into view. It's thick and wide with a scattering of dark hair and I clench in appreciation.

With his eyes locked on mine, he slowly unzips his jeans and slides them down. His thick hard cock springs free and I have to concentrate on not dropping my jaw.

Fucking hell... *he's hung.*

Thick veins are coursing down the length of him and pre-ejaculate is dripping from its engorged end.

I begin to quiver, knowing what's in store for me. He hasn't been with a woman in seven years and, oh my God, I'm going to get it good.

This is Alaskan porn at its fucking best.

I lean up onto my knees and take him into my mouth. He tastes good and I put my hands on his thick quads as my sex clenches. Hell, he's the perfect specimen.

His hand goes tenderly to the back of my head as he watches on, our eyes are locked, and he has a sexy smile on his face. "How's your ankle now?" he asks.

"What ankle?" I smirk around him. I'm not even joking. The only thing I can feel is my pulse pumping between my legs, preparing for battle. Demanding it.

I begin to fist him with my hand while I suck him, and his eyes roll back in his head. I smile around him. "You like that, baby?" I whisper.

He shudders and screws up his face and I know he's trying to hold it off, but I need him to come. I want him to lose control like I did.

He grabs my hair in his two hands and begins to ride my mouth as his instincts take over. His breathing is labored, and I know that he's close. "Holly," he pants. "Holly." He pumps my mouth hard as he tips his head back to the sky. "Oh fuck... *Holly*." He comes in a rush down my throat and I smile as I drink him down.

I don't know if I've ever seen something so beautiful.

I'm not usually one for swallowing, but damn it... for him, I am.

I keep licking him up, taking my time as our eyes stay locked. A tenderness runs between us and he brushes my hair back from my forehead. I smile softly and then he does something unexpected. He bends and takes my face in his hands and kisses me with everything he's got, and my heart somersaults in my chest.

I've never been kissed like this before, so completely.

He crawls over me and takes me in his arms and for a long time we kiss, making out like teenagers in love who have all the time in the world.

It's not hurried or anxious. The feeling of his skin next to mine is warm and safe. His touch is tender, so unlike any touch I've felt before.

We kiss and we kiss, and after a while I feel his erection begin to grow against my hip. With every thrash of our tongues, I feel him lose a little more control, until our kisses are violent and his hands are spreading my legs, opening up my body for his.

"Shit," he murmurs against my lips.

"What?"

"I don't have any condoms."

"Oh." I think for a moment. "I'm on birth control and I was tested when my marriage ended. I haven't had sex with anyone since then."

He pulls back to look at me with surprise. "How long ago was that?"

I swallow the lump in my throat. "Three and a half years ago."

His face falls and we stare at each other with an understanding hanging in the air between us. A sense of loss and sadness for what each other has been through.

"Baby," he whispers as he pulls me into his arms and holds me tight.

What the hell is happening here? I feel weak and vulnerable... teary. So unlike me.

With his lips locked on mine, he rises above me and spreads my legs. His thick tip nudges my opening and I brace myself.

He swipes himself back and forth through my open lips and then pushes in a little.

"Oh." My back arches off the bed.

He sits up and grabs some lube from the drawer in his side table and rubs it into my sex. "You alright?" he asks as he rubs his cock through me once more. I'm slippery and wet now, ready for battle.

I nod, and then a dark smile crosses my face, "More than alright."

He chuckles and as if that's his green light to go, he slides forward and in one deep movement he stretches me to the hilt.

I hold my breath as I feel the burn of his possession, a stretch like never before. It's sharp and stingy, even with the lube. "Oh... you're big," I whimper.

"No," he smiles against my neck as his teeth graze my skin, "you're small."

I giggle, because that's a blatant lie.

He circles his hips as he holds himself deep, first one way and then the other as he stretches me open. Preparing my body to take him at speed.

His body moves slow and measured, the perfect pressure on my clitoris sets my body on fire.

Oh... he knows his way around a woman's body alright.

Goosebumps begin to scatter up my spine and down my arms.

He does it again and again and damn it, it's so good. My legs begin to rise by themselves, curling up around his waist. My hands roam up and over his muscular back and over his shoulders. His lips are connected to mine and it's

all I can do not to beg him to fuck me hard. He's hesitant and taking his time and I know that I need to trust him to know when my body is ready.

Hurry up and hurt me.

*Hurt me hard.*

His breath begins to quiver as if unable to hold it any longer and he slowly pulls out and then slowly slides back in.

I moan in appreciation.

His mouth hangs slack as his dark eyes hold mine. He pulls out and his control snaps. He slams in hard, knocking the air from my lungs.

"Oh..." I scrunch my eyes shut. "Oh... that's good... Yes," I whisper as I cling to him tighter. My voice is deep and guttural, unrecognizable to my own ears.

He begins to softly moan as he lifts himself onto his straightened arms. He widens his knees to get the traction he needs and he pulls out and slams back in as he begins to fuck me.

Hard.

Deep, thick pumps and the bed begins to hit the wall with force.

He goes up onto his knees and lifts my legs over his shoulders as he continues to pump me. His dark eyes hold mine and he bites his bottom lip to stifle his smile.

I smile at the devious look on his face, "You look like you're pretty happy with yourself there, Jack."

He chuckles as he picks up my foot and kisses it, "I am happy with myself, but I'm even happier with you and your fucking delicious body."

I giggle because I've never been called fucking delicious before, but I like it.

He hooks my legs over his forearms and brings them up and then leans down to kiss me. His kiss is slow and erotic, his body deep inside mine, and Hell.

I don't know what kind of sex I've been having up until this point, but it wasn't like this. Perhaps it's just the fact that it's been so long that I've forgotten what it was like. Yes, that's probably it.

We fall into a rhythm again, with him pumping me hard and me concentrating on not coming. I want to take my time. I know I only have him for tonight.

I need to make it last as long as I can.

Perspiration dusts our skin and as the rain comes down hard outside, I

come undone on the inside. The way he looks at me, the way he kisses me, the way he fucks.

Jack Stevens is one hell of a lover.

His jaw hangs slack and by the speed at which his pumps are approaching, I can tell he's close.

I reach for him and take his face in my two hands and I pull him down to me and kiss him. We fall slow and tender and with our lips locked. I feel him jerk deep inside of me, he screws his face up against mine and I let myself go. I cry out and shudder hard as I lose control. He smiles against my lips, happy that I'm right here with him.

We keep kissing as he moves to completely empty himself... *and oh.*

This man.

He eventually pulls out and with his big arm around me, I snuggle up on his chest. I feel his lips gently kiss my temple as he holds me tight and as the rain comes down, I fall back into a sleepy state.

---

"Holly."

My eyes flutter as they try to open.

"Holly," he whispers.

I frown and stretch thinking don't wake me up I'm having the most wonderful dream.

Me on Jack... Jack on me.

Hmm... so hot.

I feel my body tingle with arousal, and I arch my back as I try to wake.

"I'm sorry," he says softly to someone as he walks out into the living room. "She can't come to the phone right now, she's still sleeping."

Huh?

"I'll get her to call you as soon as she wakes up."

My eyes snap open. What? I sit up in a rush. "Jack," I call. The sheet drops down revealing my bare breasts and I look down and frown.

I'm naked.

Wait... did that actually happen?

Jack reappears, also naked, and he gives me a slow, sexy smile. He bends and his lips take mine and his hand cups my bare breast, his thumb dusts back

and forth over my erect nipple. "Good morning, beautiful," his husky deep voice murmurs.

My eyebrows raise by themselves. Oh... it happened alright. I smile against his lips. "Hi."

He crawls in under the covers and takes me in his arms, "I was letting you sleep in."

"Hmm." I smile against his chest, this is nice. "Who was on the phone?"

"Your friend."

I frown.

"Clancy."

"Oh." I sit up, "Shit, what did she want?"

"She wants you to call her back."

"Okay, can I use your phone?"

He passes it over and then lies back down beside me as I dial the number. "Hello," Clancy answers in a panic.

"Hi."

Jack runs his hand down my body and over my hipbone. Goosebumps follow his touch.

"Oh my God, who the hell are you staying with?" she splutters. "And why the hell was he in your bedroom?"

I open my mouth to say something and then I close it as Jack slides beneath the covers.

"Umm..." He licks my lower stomach and my sex clenches in appreciation. "A very nice man." I reply in a high-pitched voice. I put my hand on Jack's forehead and try to push him away. I can't concentrate on having a coherent conversation while he's doing that.

"I need more information," she urges. "Holly, have you hit your head or something? It's late December and you have a ton to do, should I be worried?"

"No not at all, information later," I snap. I feel Jack smile against my skin. He must be able to hear our conversation. "What's up?" I go to push him away again and he takes my fingers into his mouth and begins to suck on them. His tongue flickers back and forth between my fingers.

*Oh... that tongue.*

"You won't believe it," she says. "Oscar Maddison has appendicitis."

I frown, that's who I'm meeting today. "What?"

"He went in for emergency surgery last night and won't be back at work

until next week on Tuesday. They want to reschedule you for then."

I pinch the bridge of my nose. Shit.

"I'll organize you a flight home," she continues.

Jack kisses his way up my body and takes my nipple into his mouth, he pushes his knee between my legs to open them.

I smile...

"Holly?" Clancy snaps.

"Oh, I'm sorry, what?"

"I said, I'll organize a charter flight to come and get you."

I glance down at Jack and he smiles around my nipple. The look he gives me is naughtiness personified. "Actually....", I pause, "do I have any major meetings this week?"

"Let me look," she says. I can hear her typing on her computer. "You have Edward on Friday."

"I can phone conference him."

"Why?"

"I think I'm going to stay here and work remotely from a hotel for the week."

"What?" She pauses. "Why? You hate staying away."

Jack smiles and bites me hard and I jump and try to push his forehead away. "Stop it," I mouth.

He begins to motorboat my breasts and unable to help it, I laugh out loud.

"What are you doing?" Clancy snaps.

"I'm sorry," I frown. "Terribly distracted."

"No shit."

"I'm... I'm going to stay in Alaska for the week, there's no point in coming all the way home only to come back again. I have a lot to prepare for the meeting anyway."

Jack climbs up over me and slides his hard body deep into mine, my mouth falls open as I stare at him.

"Holly..."

"I can't talk now, Clance," I snap. "I'm fine I promise, I'll call you later."

"Shall I book you a hotel?"

"No, I've got it."

"Holly... what the hell..."

I hang up on her midsentence and wrap my arms around Jack's neck. "That was very rude, to interrupt my conversation like that," I say.

He gives me a slow sexy smile, "Shut up and fuck me."

---

"You ready to go?" Jack asks.

"Aha."

He picks me up and carries me out the front door and down to his truck. It's 3 pm and we are going back to my car to pick up my computer and suitcase. I've been playing hooky from work and in bed doing bad things all day, but in my defense, we've been waiting for a break in the weather. Jack places me in the truck and with a quick kiss, does up my seatbelt. I watch as he walks around to his side. He's wearing a black T-shirt and blue jeans that fit in all the the right places. He has a three-day growth of dark whiskers and I don't know if I've ever seen someone so damn sexy in my entire life, or maybe that's because he's fucked every last brain cell out of my head and I'm not thinking straight at all... it's completely possible. That man has had me every which way and then some. He's making up for lost time, times ten.

I have a dull ache between my legs, I feel swollen and sore.

He gave it to me hard.

He starts the engine and we start down the sweeping driveway. It's so green and there are mountains and trees as far as the eye can see. "This is such a beautiful place."

Jack smiles as he looks around as if trying to see it through my eyes. "It is."

"So... you said you bought this property?" I ask.

"Aha, this is all mine."

I look around, "What's all yours?"

"All this land, everything you can see."

I frown. "How much land is that?"

"Close to five hundred acres."

"Wow." My eyes widen in surprise. "Impressive."

He smiles as he drives over the rough terrain. "The road is rough due to all the rain," he says.

I nod as I think. "Do you think you would be able to drop me off at a hotel?"

His eyes flick to me. "What for?"

"Well," I pause. "I'm here until next Wednesday, that's nearly a week."

"You're staying with me," he snaps.

"But..."

"Holly," he cuts me off as he reaches over and picks up my hand and kisses my fingertips. "You are staying with me. End of story."

I glance down at myself. "Well, we have to go shopping then."

"What for?"

"Clothes," I shrug. "Jack.... I'm wearing your sweatpants, your T-shirt and your huge flip flops."

His eyes flick over to me. "And?"

"Well, there is nothing in my suitcase I can wear really. I only packed work clothes for two days." I gesture to myself. "And I look like an old bag in yours."

"Not to me." He turns the corner. "Sexy as fuck in my eyes."

I smirk and stare out the front windshield. I've never been called as sexy as fuck before. It has a certain ring to it, though.

We pick up my things from the car and I call the car rental company to come and collect the car and then we drive into town. There are about five shops and what looks like a few restaurants and a bar, Christmas decorations adorn the windows.

Jack parks the car and I peer out the window. It feels like I am in another world here. It's so different to my beloved New York. Where are all the people?

"Okay." Jack gets out of the truck and comes around to my side and opens the door.

"What are we doing?" I ask.

"You wanted to go shopping."

"Here?"

He rolls his eyes. "Yes. Here."

I look up and down the street. "There are no clothes shops here."

"Yes, there are, you're blind woman." He goes to lift me out of the car.

"I've got it," I whisper. "My ankle is fine." I limp over to the gutter.

He gives me a smile and takes my hand. "Come on, hop a long."

He leads me into a store at the end of the street. A bell sounds loudly over the door to notify someone of our arrival.

I look around and see there are groceries, alcohol and fruit. "I need clothes," I whisper.

"Up in the back corner."

"What?" I stare at him as my brain misfires. "Here?"

He smirks, amused by my horror. "Yes, Holly."

I limp over to the aisle and peer down toward the back wall. I can see baby supplies and pet food. I make my way down the aisle as I wonder what the hell kind of shop is this?

"Jack," I hear a woman's voice call.

"Oh, hi Michelle," Jack's deep voice answers.

I keep walking toward the back corner. Oh, I see them now. Three tiny stands of women's clothes.

Fuck... I think his clothes actually *are* better.

"It's good to see you," the girl's voice says. "I've missed you at the bar lately."

Huh?

I frown and peer through the shelf to see who he's talking to. It's a woman who looks to be in her mid-twenties. Blonde and pretty, she's wearing tight black jeans and an oversized sweater.

"I've been busy," he mutters.

"Doing what?"

"My girlfriend is here from interstate."

"Girlfriend," she gasps. "Since when?"

What the fuck? He's getting picked up at the store now... ugh, I bet the women around here would all be in love with him.

I hobble to the clothes rack and pick up a shirt as I eavesdrop. Oh God, it's hideous. I put it back on the hanger in a rush. I pick up a pair of pants and hold them up. What kind of fucking pants are these? I put them back on the hanger. He'll never touch me again in this crap.

"Who is this girlfriend? Anyone I know?" she asks.

"Nope," he replies curtly, and I can tell he has no patience with her. I get the feeling that Jack gets hit on a lot.

And why wouldn't he, *he's fucking gorgeous*.

Ugh.

I pick up a white T-shirt. I could tie it up in a knot at the front to make it fit. Now this... I can work with. I hang it over my arm. I glance over to the men's section.... hmm, that stuff looks better. I hobble over to investigate. I find a pair of black track pants meant for teenage boys. I like those, so I hang them over my arm. Some flannel pyjamas. A black nightdress that I could

wear as a dress. I'm getting in the groove now.

Jack ambles up behind me. "How is it going?" he asks as he puts his hand on my behind.

"Who's your friend?" I ask.

He rolls his eyes.

"She likes you."

"Don't even."

I give him a playful smile and bat my lashes. "I wouldn't dare."

The girl walks up the aisle and stops dead in her tracks when she sees me. Her eyes drop to Jack's hand on my behind. "Hello," she says flatly as she looks me up and down.

Oh...*she likes him alright.*

"Do you need any help?" she asks.

I fake a smile. "Do you have any wedding dresses?"

Jack drops his head to hide his smile.

Her eyes widen. "What?"

I smile sweetly. "Is that a no?"

"No," she snaps. "We don't."

"Hmm, pity." I shrug and I go back to looking through the rack while she storms off.

Jack takes me in his arms from behind. "Not nice," he whispers in my ear.

I giggle. "She asked for it when she looked me up and down."

He slaps me on the behind. "Behave." He ambles off to look at something.

I find a few things, enough to get me through the week and I make my way to the counter.

The pretty girl gives me the death stare. "Is that all?"

"Aha," I smile.

She begins to ring the things up. "Where did you two meet?"

"Online."

She scans the pants. "How long have you been seeing each other?"

I glance around the shop, where is he? "About eighteen months." I lie, I can hardly keep the smile from my face, it's fun playing this game.

"Where are you from?" she asks.

"New York."

She rolls her eyes. "Ha, Jack would never move to New York. This won't last."

My heart sinks, because I know she's right. I nod, "I know." I smile as I act like she hasn't just hit a nerve.

"You don't know shit about us," Jack snaps.

Our eyes flick to him.

"I mean... I just," she stammers as she rings up the last item.

"Just don't, Michelle," Jack cuts her off. He puts his arm around my shoulders. "Let's go, babe," he says.

I pay and he leads me out of the shop and back to the car. He helps me in on my side and gets in and starts the car with a loud rev. He seems agitated as he pulls out onto the road.

I look between him and the road. "What?" I ask.

"Nothing."

We sit in silence for a while. "So, I take it you are hot property around here?" I ask.

He rolls his lips and stays silent.

"Well, you better tell your bitches to back off," I tease.

He breaks into a broad smile and reaches over and squeezes my thigh. "Well, with you out looking for wedding dresses, I don't think that will be a problem, sweetheart."

I laugh, "I'm sorry. But her face though."

He chuckles, too. "I know."

He picks up my hand and kisses my fingertips and I watch him in a detached state.

His dark hair hangs over his face, his chiseled jaw and big red lips only add to his handsomeness. He really is a beautiful man.

She's right though, this isn't real. It won't last... and he needs to stop being so damn perfect.

"What do you want for dinner?" he asks, interrupting my thoughts.

"I don't know. Maybe..." my eyes flick over to him, "a bit of Jack Stevens sounds good."

He smiles darkly as he watches the road. "I hope you're hungry."

I unclip my seatbelt and lean over and unzip his jeans. He inhales sharply as I kiss his cock. "I'm fucking starving."

---

I sip my tea and pull the blanket around my shoulders. I'm out on the veranda and it's late at night. I can hear the animals in the forest and the mist is rolling over the hills.

I've had the most wonderful week.

Jack is intelligent and kind and funny and sexy as all fuck. We've talked for hours and laughed and made love. He's shown me around his beloved town. I've been cooking for us and he even took me to meet his parents. But tomorrow it all ends.

After my meeting today, I came back here for one last night. The thought of not being in his quaint little log cabin with him is upsetting me, and it shouldn't.

Because this isn't who I am.

I'm the acquisitions manager for Ferrara Media in New York, the one who wears designer clothes and lives in a multi-million-dollar penthouse. I eat out at the best restaurants most nights, I socialize with the elite and drink fancy cocktails.

So why does it feel like this is the end of the world?

Jack comes out and the screen door bangs shut, "You need to fix that door," I whisper.

"I know."

He picks me up and sits down and puts me on his lap. He wraps me up in the blanket and kisses my temple and I smile, feeling safe in his arms.

Rex walks up the stairs and tries to jump up to me. Funnily enough, I've even made friends with him.

"Don't," Jack says.

Rex tries to get to me but Jack pulls me away. "Don't, she's mine," he snaps as he holds me close.

And I could just cry, because something has never sounded so good.

*Mine.*

I need to snap out of this sappy business.

"You all packed?" he asks.

I nod.

"What time is your flight?"

"Nine."

Jack nods but stays silent.

There's a sense of dread between us. How do you go from not knowing someone at all, to being totally besotted with them in a week?

We haven't discussed what's going to happen when I leave. Up until now, it's all felt so natural between us.

Leaving him, not so much.

I don't like the idea of him being here all by himself. Who's going to look after him?

"It's been a great week," he whispers as he looks out over the mountains.

I smile sadly. "The best." I feel a lump in my throat, and I know our time is over. We helped each other through a rough patch. A light in the darkness.

But our worlds are different, and it would never work between us. Michelle was right, I couldn't live here, and he couldn't live in New York.

"Let's go to bed, baby," he whispers.

I nod and stand, and as he walks inside, the screen door bangs hard again.

I stare out over the view, fog puffs into the air as I breathe out. The air is so still.

And it's not just Jack that I'm going to miss. It's the peace that being here brings me.

"Holly," he calls.

With one long last look, I smile sadly and walk inside, the door bangs hard again. "Can you fix that damn door?" I sigh.

"Yeah, yeah," he mutters under his breath. "Quit nagging me, woman."

"Last call for flight 103 to New York City," the voice sounds over the speaker.

I stare at the man in front of me. Jack has my two hands in his.

We are both quiet, not sure what to say.

"I should..." I go to pull out of his grip.

"Holly." His eyes search mine. "Stay..."

I frown.

"I know I don't..." he pauses as if searching for the right words. "I don't have a lot to offer."

"You have everything to offer," I whisper.

"We met for a reason; I truly believe that," he squeezes my hands in his.

My face falls.

"We can try."

My eyes well with tears. "Jack..."

He stares at me for a moment and then drops his head, already knowing

my answer.

"I'll call you when I get there." I fake a smile.

He steps back from me as he drops my hands.

My heart sinks.

"Thanks for having me," I say.

His eyes hold mine, but he doesn't say anything. I lean up onto my tippy toes and go to kiss him and he turns his cheek.

Ouch.

I kiss his face and then turn, and without looking back I walk through the gates.

*He didn't want to kiss me goodbye.*

With a heavy heart, I get onto the plane and take my seat and buckle up my seatbelt.

"Can I get you anything?" The stewardess smiles.

"Alcohol," I reply flatly as my gaze turns to look out the window. "All of the alcohol."

## **One week later.**

I sit at the restaurant table and stare at the people on the sidewalk.

It's Christmas Eve.

Thousands of people are all rushing to get to their destination, the jovial energy swirling around and around is a confused mess.

I feel lost. Like a stranger from the outside, looking in. I've been walking around in a detached daze since I got back from Alaska.

Something inside of me has changed, and I don't know what it is.

I'm heartsick.

I'm pining for him like a love-struck teenager.

"What's wrong with you?" Gabriel asks.

My eyes flick back to my boss, Gabriel Ferrara. He's always been so good to me and we are close friends.

I shrug. "I met someone."

"This is good." He smiles excitedly.

Gabriel was there for me when I went through my divorce. More than anyone, he knows what I went through.

"In Alaska," I sigh sadly.

His face falls. "Oh."

"And he wanted me to stay and saying no..." I inhale. I can't even say it out loud.

"Was hard," he finishes my sentence.

I nod. "He's... incredible."

"Then go back."

My eyes search his.

"Holly, you can do your job from anywhere."

I frown.

"You don't need to be here full-time. You can work from wherever you want in the world."

"What?"

"I think you and me both know what a sad existence it is to live your life around work. We've both suffered the consequences of such an existence."

"It's Alaska, Gabriel."

"You'll never know if you don't try," he says.

I frown as a million thoughts run through my mind. "What if it doesn't

work out?"

He takes my hand across the table. "Then you come back and move on with your life with no regrets."

I feel hope for the first time in a week. "When can I leave?"

"You're not leaving me, Holly, you are working remotely. Remember that. Ferrara needs you."

I smile.

"You can transfer whenever you want to."

I bite my lip to hide my smile, "I'll finish up in two weeks." We eat our lunch and make our way back to the office, and as we walk through the Ferrara building foyer a security guard approaches us. "Holly, you have a visitor."

"Oh, who is it?"

He points to the corner and I look over to see Jack standing there.

He's wearing a gray T-shirt and blue jeans. He has a small duffel bag slung over his shoulder. He looks so out of place and he looks up and smiles softly as he sees me.

My heart somersaults in my chest and I nearly run to him. "Jack," I whisper. "What are you doing here?"

"I came to bring you home."

*He came for me.*

"It won't be Christmas without you."

Tears well in my eyes. "I was already on my way, baby." I lean up and kiss his big, beautiful lips. "I was already on my way."

THE END

# **THE CHRISTMAS ANGEL**

---



## Zoe

“WHAT’S THAT SOUND?” I glance up to the rearview mirror to see if anything looks out of place.

Thud, thud, thud, I hear it again.

What the hell is going on, the early morning traffic seems to be whizzing by without a care in the world.

Thud, thud, thud.

Wait a minute, is it coming from my car? I glance up to the mirror, it’s getting louder.

Huh?

The thud continues and then my car starts bumping as if I’m running over something. Damn it, it *is* my car.

I indicate, pull off the road, and get out of my car. I walk around to see the noisy culprit, crap. A flat tire.

“Fuck’s sake, I am not in the mood for this shit.” I bend down to inspect the damage, I can hear the air gushing out, it needs to be changed.

What am I going to do? I scroll through my phone, my finger hovers over my brother’s number, and I hesitate. I know he’ll be busy at work, and the last thing he needs is to come out and do this.

I wonder if I could change it?... I mean, how hard could it be?

Surely I could work it out.

I pop the trunk and pull up the lining to reveal the tire and tool kit.

Right....

I take out the instructions and quickly read them, okay, sounds easy enough, I *can* do this.

I get the tool kit and lay it on the ground beside the car and then look at the huge ass tire as it fits snugly into its hidey hole.

It’s such an awkward size to try and lift from this angle. I stretch my arms wide and grab the tire, I lift and lift.... And using all my might, it moves an inch.

*Shit.*

I brace my stomach and lean right over and secure my hands underneath the wheel.

Beep beep.... A car horn sounds as it flies past. Beep, beep.

“Fuck off,” I mutter, wearing black gym tights and a pale pink sports bra

top. What must I look like from behind with my ass in the air?

In my defense, I wasn't expecting this to happen when I rushed out the door to the gym at five this morning, now in hindsight I should have worn a T-shirt or something.

I struggle and struggle and, damn it, I'm working up a sweat here.

Who knew that tires were so heavy? Those mechanics must be buff, they make it look so easy.

I pull on the tire some more, "Come out." I grunt, I put my foot up on the car to try and get some leverage.

Beep, beep, another car horn sounds as it flies by.

"Fuck. Off," I snap, I'm getting infuriated now.

Seriously.... just how weak am I? I can't even get a damn tire out of a trunk. I thought all the gym visits would have at least equipped me to get a fucking tire out of the trunk. I wipe the sweat from my brow and struggle some more. "Seriously, come out, you motherfucker!" I yell.

"Need some help?" A deep voice asks from beside me.

I glance up to see a policeman standing there in full uniform.

He's tall and big, scary looking.

*Fuck.*

"Ahh...." I wince, oh no.... did he just hear me cussing like a sailor?

"Those tires can be real motherfuckers," he says amused.

Yep.... he heard me alright.

I stand up embarrassed, "Oh I'm sorry, it's just....." I can feel myself going red, one for swearing, two for wearing next to nothing, and three.... this damn cop is hot, and I'm a sweaty mess.

"Move aside," he says.

"It's fine, I've got it." I cringe, I haven't, not even close, he's too attractive for me to look like I just crawled out of a dumpster. I will call my brother after all.

"I said, move aside," he says all authoritarian-like. He stands over 6ft3 at a guess, built like a truck, and he has light brown hair that has a little curl to it.

*Hot.*

I move to the side, and he leans over the tire, his forearms are muscular with thick veins coursing down the length of them.

"I was just driving along, and I heard a thumping sound, it scared me," I splutter.

He glances over his shoulder at me, “Not the context you want to hear a thumping sound, I guess.” He turns back to the tire.

*Oh.....*

My eyes drop down to his tight ass in his perfectly ironed police pants, I pull my sports bra down and my tights up higher, I feel overexposed.

“I was coming back from the gym,” I tell him, trying to explain why I look half undressed.

“Aha.” He keeps fiddling with the tire.

“And I couldn’t get the tire out.”

He passes me a bolt, “Well, you need to unscrew it first.”

I stare at the bolt in the palm of his hand, “Oh.” I feel my face flush with embarrassment.

“Right.” I cringe, kill me now. Am I really this dumb?

He lifts the tire out with ease and lays it down on the ground, he gets the jack out and starts to pump it to lift the car, my eyes drop down to his thick quad muscles that I can see through his pants, hmm..... seriously though.

*He’s a policeman.*

I snap my eyes away as I remember where I am.

A trace of a smile crosses his face as if he can read my mind.

I pull my sports bra down again, indignant that he’s caught me perverting.

“I’m fine from here, thank you.” I tell him.

His eyes come to meet mine, “What’s your name?”

“Zoe.” I wipe the toe of my runners over the dirt to distract myself from his big blue eyes. “What’s yours?”

“Dylan.”

I roll my lips to hide my smile, he has a name and holy hell, it’s hot, hot, hot.

“Well, Zoe, there’s something you should know about me,” he says in his deep raspy voice, he gets onto his knees and looks up at me from the ground, “I always finish what I start.” The air crackles between us.

*I bet you do.*

“Well.....” My pea brain misfires, “Umm,” I shrug, “That’s good.”

Oh hell..... that’s good?

Seriously, is that the best reply I’ve got, what the hell is wrong with me?

Quick, say something that’s cute and witty.

Mind blank..... *shit!*

Okay, it’s better to stay silent than to say something ridiculous, I’ll just

keep quiet.

The morning traffic is whizzing by, I can't take my eyes off him as he removes the bolts and takes the tire off, he lies down onto his back with his knees bent and my eyes linger on his quad muscles that I can see through his pants.

*He's a machine.*

Unfortunately, he changes the tire in record speed, and I kind of wish this took all day.

"There you go, Zoe." He stands, "All done." He gives me this big, beautiful smile, complete with dimples and a sparkle in his eyes, and my breath catches as we stare at each other. Holy.....

*Jeez.*

"Thank you, Dylan."

"The pleasure was all mine, ma'am." He gives me a playful wink.

Okay, what the hell? This cop could be a stripper or something.

"I'm sure changing tires isn't in your job description." I smile, grateful for his kindness.

"You would be surprised what's in my job description."

Fucking.... is fucking in your job description because I'm quite positive you would excel at it.

We stare at each other again, an unspoken chemistry swirling between us, after a moment I stop with my staring. "Okay, well I better get going. Thank you so much for your help."

"I'll give you an escort home."

"Really not necessary, officer." I smile.

"Just to make sure the tire is safe," he adds.

"Oh... okay."

I get into my car as he watches on, I grip my steering wheel with force, my palms are sweaty and damn, Dylan the Policeman has me all in a fluster. I pull back onto the road and peek up into the rearview mirror to see him pull out after me, a thrill of excitement runs through my blood.

Please tire, fall off again. Explode or something. I dare you.

We drive the five miles back to my house, and I pull into the driveway, he stops the car against the curb and winds down the passenger side window, I get out and walk over to the car and lean down through it, "See, all safe."

His hand is leaning on top of the steering wheel as he looks over at me, "Your husband is probably wondering where you are."

I hear my heartbeat in my ears, “No husband.”

“Boyfriend?”

I shake my head. “No..... You?”

He gives me a slow sexy smile, “Neither.”

“Oh.”

“Do you live with roommates or.....?” he asks.

“I live alone,” I cut him off.

We stare at each other, as if both waiting for the other to say something.

Ask me out.

His eyes hold mine.

*Ask me out.*

“Well then,” he eventually replies, “You have a nice day.”

Huh.... he’s going?

I step back from the car.

“I’ll see you around, Miss Zoe,” he replies.

*When, when will you see me around? If I had ever seen you before, I wouldn’t have forgotten.*

He’s dismissing me, crap, I’ve totally misread the situation.

I step back from the car.

“Thanks again.”

“The pleasure was all mine.”

I turn and walk into my house; I can feel him watching me, and I internally kick myself, why didn’t I look hotter today?

I hear the car start up, damn it, he’s going.

The car stays running and stationary out the front and once inside, I peer through the sheer curtains.

What’s he doing?

Thump, thump, thump sounds my heartbeat in my ears as I imagine him coming and knocking on my door and kissing me like his life depends on it.

I smile as I imagine how random that would be.

Randomly perfect.

But, alas, my naughty dreams are shattered, and I watch on as he slowly drives away.

My shoulders slump, well shit. I let out a deep exhale, that’s the first time I’ve met an attractive man in a long time, and nothing happened.

Not even flirting... well, kind of flirting.

Ugh, what were you thinking fool, he’s a policeman, and he did a good

deed, it is his job after all. There was nothing in it.

I glance at my watch, oh crap, with all the tire action, I forgot that I'm meeting Avril for breakfast, I have ten minutes to get ready. I take the stairs two at a time, I better hurry.

“What do you mean he changed your tire?” Avril frowns.

“Just what I said, he changed my tire.”

“Policemen don't change tires.”

“I know, I thought so too, this one did apparently.”

“Helpful.”

I sip my coffee, “Helpful on the eyes, too.”

Avril smiles, “Really?”

“Ridiculously so.”

“Why didn't you ask him out?”

“Because he was just being nice and I'm getting back with Rodney.”

“Ugh.” She rolls her eyes, “Rodney is a dick.”

“He's not a dick, he's just going through something right now, so we're taking a break.”

“For six months?” Avril raises her eyebrows, “A break is like a week, Zoe. Six months is a breakup.”

“So, why did he invite me to the wedding next Saturday if we are completely over?”

“Because he doesn't have a date.”

I roll my eyes, she's so annoying. “Oh, shut up, he could get plenty of dates. His mom told me he wants me back.”

“His mother wants you back, Rodney has said no such thing.”

“He's going to ask me to get back together, I can feel it in my waters.”

“Oh, please,” she scoffs. “Why would you even want him to? He breaks your heart and then clicks his fingers, and what, you're supposed to fall straight back into his arms?”

“We've been together for six years, Avril. He was going through something and needed to find himself. Relationships aren't all rosy, things get hard sometimes, and you need to support your partner through the challenges.”

“He hasn't been finding himself, he's been finding out what other vaginas feel like.”

“Not helping,” I snap.

“Besides,” she points at me with her spoon, “is he supporting his partner? What support has he given your poor broken heart?”

“Look, I’ve made a promise to myself that if he doesn’t want to talk about recommitting to our relationship at the wedding, then that’s it.”

“What’s it?”

“I’m moving on.”

“With the hot cop?”

I sip my coffee as I let my mind wander to Dylan for a moment. “He felt familiar.”

“Hot familiar?” Avril teases.

“Definitely hot.”

“You should ask him out.”

I smile, wouldn’t that be something? “I don’t have his number even if I wanted to.”

Avril shrugs, “You never know, maybe he’ll pop up again one day.”

“Maybe.” I sip my coffee with a shrug.

But deep down, I know I’ll probably never see him again.

The music is loud, and the cocktails are delicious, the girls and I have had the best time. It’s Saturday night and we’ve been dancing, laughing, and telling lies to poor unsuspecting men. My name is Ursula, and I’m happily married. Avril is now a brain surgeon, and Macey is a stripper; our fake identities are so much more fun than our real ones.

Men are so gullible, or maybe they aren’t and just like the game.

It’s 4 a.m. and we are on our way home in an Uber, the three of us are jammed into the backseat.

“My feet are so screwed.” Macey winces as she takes her shoe off. “I think my pinkie toe is back on the dancefloor.”

I giggle and look out the window as the car pulls up to a set of traffic lights.

My eyes roam over the people on the packed sidewalk and then I see him, standing on the curb talking to a group of men. He’s wearing jeans and a T-shirt; he mustn’t be working.

“Dylan.”

“Who?” Avril frowns.

“The hot cop.”

“Where?”

“Just there.” Before I know it, I’m winding down the window. “Dylan,” I call.

He glances up and smiles broadly, he comes bounding out into three lanes of traffic and over to my window. “The beautiful Zoe.” He takes my hand through the window and lifts it to his lips and kisses the back of it. “We meet again, off the clock this time.”

I smile goofily up at the god.

“Holy shit,” Avril slurs. “*You’re the cop?*”

Dylan’s eyes dance with delight, he knows I’ve told them about him.

“Where are you going?” he asks me, my hand still in his.

“Home,” I gush, seriously this is the hottest man who ever walked the planet.

His eyes dance with mischief, and I can tell he’s been drinking way too much, like me.

“No, you’re not. You’re coming with me.” He tries to open my door, but it’s locked.

“Go away.” The driver tells him.

Dylan smiles. “Come with me.”

“What?” I laugh.

“The night is young. Don’t go home, Princess Zoe.” He leans in through the window so that he’s waist deep into our car and grabs my face, “We didn’t even kiss yet.” He smiles cheekily.

*What?*

“Did we?”

I’m shocked to silence, is this really happening?

He grabs a handful of my hair and kisses me.

A car horn sounds from behind, and Avril and Macey laugh out loud.

His lips are big and soft and even fuzzy drunk, I feel all tingly.

The traffic lights turn green.

He goes to deepen the kiss, and I pull back, “Dylan.” I laugh, what the hell, he wants to full-on tongue kiss in front of everyone? What must the driver think?

“Get out of the car, Zoe.” He laughs as he holds my face to his, I get the giggles, this is crazy.

“Come with me.” His lips take mine again, “I’ll teach you some

mechanical jobs. We can change tires together,” he whispers against my lips, “Look that car over there has a flat.”

“No, it doesn’t,” I scoff.

“It will in a minute.”

I laugh out loud.

*He’s so fun.*

Car horns sound from the traffic behind us.

“Get out of the car, man.” The Uber driver yells, but Dylan just smiles against my lips; he likes this game too.

Dylan’s friends start pulling him by his legs out of the car. “You’re not going home,” they yell at him.

“She’s coming with us,” he calls as they pull him out, I laugh and then the Uber unexpectedly speeds off.

“Zoe, come back.” I hear him yell after the car, I turn and watch him through the rearview mirror. He’s throwing his arms up in the air as he stares after our speeding car.

“Are you fucking crazy?” Macey whispers. “I can’t believe you didn’t go with him.”

My lips tingle from his kiss, and I turn back to the front, totally frazzled.

“You know, Mr. Uber Driver, that was one of those moments where you shouldn’t have driven off.”

He rolls his eyes, unimpressed. “Yeah, yeah, whatever.”

My lips tingle as I smile goofily out the window.

*I didn’t imagine it.*

## **Monday night.**

I roll over and punch the pillow, it's 3 a.m. and darkness has rolled in. My mind is racing, only this time it's different, I'm not lying here wondering what Rodney is doing.

I'm thinking about Dylan.

I'm here kicking myself that I didn't ask him where he lived, or his surname, or get out of that damn Uber and go with him. I hope he doesn't think I'm not interested, because I am.

Really interested.... and not about flat tires, but about the thick quad muscles he had under those pants.

I get an image of him on his knees looking up at me, *I always finish what I start.*

I smile into the darkness.

I imagine what it would be like to sleep with a man like him. He'd be strong and rough and ready.

Powerful.

I wonder why he's single. Was he married, has he had a breakup, or is he a player?

I have a feeling he's a good guy. The kind of man who looks after his own... maybe it's the uniform? I smile again at all the possibilities.

Policeman Dylan woke something up in me, something that... if I'm honest, I haven't felt in years. Not even with Rodney.

Excitement.

I'm freshly showered and wearing a white cotton nightgown with spaghetti straps. My hair is wet, and I get back to decorating my Christmas tree. I've put on the twinkling fairy lights and have all the baubles laid out. I hold up the Christmas Angel and stare at her. My most prized possession, it was the last thing my mother bought me before she passed. She's white with gold wings, her dress is sparkly, and she's wearing a halo. As soon as I put her on the tree, I'm reminded that all is well in the world, that I'm okay, and I've made it another year without my mum.

This angel is special, no idea why she holds such a powerful significance,

but she does.

I put her back into her box and set her to the side, she goes onto the tree last. I get back to my baubles, this year I'm going for a specific theme, the baubles are red and glittery, and the white ones are shiny and white. I've even gone all out and bought new red and white cushions for my couch this year.

This place is going to look as Christmassy as fuck, if it's the last thing I do.

"Knock, knock." Sounds on the front door. It's a forceful knock, as if someone is pissed off.

"Knock, knock." Sounds again.

I frown, who the hell is that?

I go to the front door and peer out the peephole onto my front porch.

Dylan.

*What the.....*

I can't unlock the door fast enough, and I burst the door open and there he stands, all 6ft3 gorgeous inches of him, he's in full uniform, and wearing his hat.

"Dylan," I gasp.

His sexy eyes hold mine and suddenly I remember what I'm wearing. I adjust the spaghetti strap on my nightgown.

"Good evening, ma'am, we've had a call reporting that there's been a disturbance on the premises."

My eyebrows shoot up in surprise and a smirk flashes across his face.

Huh?

I glance out to the road to see the pickup in my drive, which must be his personal vehicle, I look down to notice he doesn't have his gun on.

*He's not working.*

"Oh."

"If you're home alone, I'd like to search the premises," he says all boss-like.

Excitement screams through my body, and I step aside to play along, "Of course, officer. Please, come in."

He walks in and looks around, he goes through to the kitchen and as I follow him, I look around my house at what he is seeing for the first time, thank God I cleaned my house today. "What kind of disturbance was called in?" I ask.

"A woman in a white nightdress." He turns toward me; his eyes drop

hungrily down my body.

“She sounds like trouble.” I roll my lips to hide my smile.

“My imagination tells me that she is.”

The air crackles between us.

I have no idea what’s going on, but holy shit, it’s good.

“Do you have any dangerous weapons on your body?” he asks in his powerful police voice.

I want to play along but I also want to laugh out loud.

*This is hot!*

“Maybe,” I mumble.

“Maybe?” he yells. “Don’t give me a maybe, ma’am. Yes or no, do you have any dangerous weapons on your person?”

I do smile this time, unable to help it.

A smile tugs at his lips too, but he hides it well. “Answer the question.”

“I don’t have to do anything you tell me,” I spit.

In one sharp movement he grabs me, spins me around and pushes me up against the kitchen counter. “Put your hands on the counter and spread your legs.”



## Zoe

HOLY SHIT, is this really happening?

I put my hands down and widen the stance of my legs, he taps the inside of my foot, and I spread my legs wider.

“This is your final warning, if you want to keep yourself out of a compromising position, young lady, then you need to speak up *right now*.”

Seriously, this is off the hook. Do they teach this stuff at cop school? If not, they should.

He comes up really close behind me, and I can feel his breath on my neck, goosebumps scatter up my arms. He steps forward, and I can feel his erection as it digs into my behind.

“Everything alright here?” he says.

He’s asking for permission to play this game.

I nod.

“Answer the question.”

“Everything is..... perfect.” I breathe.

I’m going straight to hell on the ho’ bag express.

I scrunch my eyes shut as I begin to hear my heartbeat, arousal pumps through my blood like warm chocolate.

“I’m going to pat you down now as I search for any concealed weapons. Anything you say, can and will be used against you.”

I smile, damn it, I wish a camera was recording this, Avril will never believe this story in a million years, I can hardly believe it myself.

He runs his big hands over my shoulders and down my arms.

“Are you cold?” he asks.

“No.”

“No, sir.” He corrects me.

Excitement rushes over me. “No, sir.”

His hands pat down my arms and around to my breasts, he brushes over my nipples as they harden.

My heart races.

They drop lower, this time, his fingers curl around my waist and he jerks me back onto his body, I’m reminded of who’s in charge. His thick erection digs into my behind and I hold my breath as I wait for his next move.

His teeth graze my ear and tingles run all over.

“You smell fucking good,” he whispers darkly into my ear; his teeth graze my ear again and this time he bites me. Hard enough that I whimper.

Holy.....

My heart hammers in my chest, and I scrunch my eyes shut as I try to control my breathing.

He puts his lips to my ear, “Open your fucking legs,” he growls in a whisper.

I am not this kind of girl, and I don’t even know this man, but there is no way I’m stopping.

My sex tingles at the order, and I widen my legs.

*Is this really happening?*

He bends and his hands pat all the way to my ankles as I hold my breath, on the way up my legs he slides them up my inner thighs. His thumbs dust my sex through my panties, and I just about convulse.

His lips are at my ear again, “I need to search.... everything.”

His teeth graze my neck, and I almost convulse.

“Say when,” he adds.

I pant, trying to get a hold of myself.

“I said..... say when. Do you understand me?” he repeats.

I nod, he’s giving me a chance to stop if I want to.

“Keep going,” I demand.

I feel him smile against my ear. “You *are* a troublemaker.”

Excitement screams through me. “Yes, sir.”

His fingers slide under the leg of my panties as I hold my breath.

I shudder, fuck, I’m going to come, and he’s hardly touched me.

He drops to his knees behind me, I close my eyes as he slides my panties down my legs and puts them on the counter in front of us. “I’ll use these as evidence.”

“Evidence of what?”

“Evidence that you came like a fucking truck for me.”

My eyes widen.

Okay, what the actual hell is happening right now?

This is the stuff pornos are made of... Have one of my friends set this up because it’s too crazy to be true.

He pushes me over the counter and pulls my nightdress up over my behind.

His thick arousal can be felt from here, he’s desperate to have me.

His hand slides lower and lower, his thick fingers slide through my wet lips, and he lets out a low whistle as he slides his finger deep into my sex.

I shudder, hardly able to breathe.

He takes his time and finger fucks me, his lips at my ear as he stands behind me. One finger, then two..... by the time he gets to three, I'm desperate.

Dripping wet and swollen in anticipation.

The sound of my body sucking him in echoes through the kitchen.

"What do you want, Zoe?" he asks.

I turn my head and look him in the eye, "A kiss."

"A kiss?" he whispers.

We stare at each other, so crazy aroused, but somehow there's a tenderness to this moment.

He takes my face in his two hands and kisses me as if we have all the time in the world. Slow and erotic.

It's the perfect kiss, and we lose control and next thing he's lifting me onto his lap on the couch and straddling me over him.

"Condom." I breathe into his mouth as we kiss like animals.

Nothing like this has ever happened to me before, this is insanity.

He pushes me up onto my knees and unzips his trousers and pulls himself free.

My heart hammers as I watch him roll a condom on and then he slides his tip through my lips as we stare at each other. "You need to get on my cock," he breathes.

Every cell in my body is on fire, and I slide down onto his hard shaft.

Ouch..... he's big and thick.

Rock hard.

We stare at each other as my body ripples around him, and he tenderly pushes the hair back from my face. "How does that feel?"

"Good," I whimper. "So good."

I'm completely at his mercy.

He grabs my hipbones and circles me down on him, first one way and then the other to loosen me up. "Just like that," he whispers into my mouth. "That's it, good girl," he coaches me. "Little deeper now." He pushes in further, and I wince.

Oh..... he's big.

Experienced, so different to any man I've been with before.

My body finally loosens up, and he slides all the way home.

“Fuck,” he moans, his eyes are rolling back, and I get the feeling he’s having a hard time controlling himself.

He lifts me and slides me back down onto him, gently at first and we go harder and harder.

Until we are fucking like animals, my knees are up around his ears, the sound of our skin slapping together is echoing through the space, and I see stars.

*All the stars.*

I cry out as I come hard, and he pulls me close as he comes too, our bodies convulsing as they feed off each others. We pant heavily, both gasping for air.

He kisses me softly, and it’s there again, a sweetness. So unlike the way this night is going, it’s unexpected and to be honest, a little frightening.

Our foreheads touch as we come back down to earth, and he smiles shyly.

“What?” I smile too.

“Nothing.” He chuckles as if having a private joke with himself.

“What were you going to say?” I ask.

“The plan was that I came here to try and make you come on a date with me.”

“What the hell was that then?” I laugh.

“Things were just going too well, and I couldn’t help taking the fourth date up front.”

“A fourth date?” I ask hopefully.

His eyes hold mine, “There better be a fourth date.” He stands and lifts me carefully down to the floor. “You need a shower, you’re filthy.”

He turns me around and pushes me toward the hall as he slaps my behind.

“My bathroom is the other way,” I tease.

“Oh.” He turns me in the other direction and pushes me that way and slaps me again.

I hear him rustle around, and I glance back to see him taking another condom out of his wallet and I raise my eyebrow in question, and he gives me a playful wink. “You never know.”

The sun shining through the crack of the drapes notifies me that it’s time to wake, and I drag my sleepy eyes open.

Hell, what a night.

My body feels heavy and sated with a warm glow of just fucked.

A large hand slides up over my hip from behind and pulls me into the warmth of his body, and I smile softly.

Dylan.

It wasn't a dream, he's still here.

He rolls me onto my back and with his hand splayed across my stomach he gently kisses my shoulder, "Good morning."

I smile shyly up at him, "Hi."

I remind myself to play it cool, pretend that I'm more experienced than I actually am. How the hell does this scenario go, what happens now?

Dylan traces the tip of his pointer finger across my shoulder and down my arm, it's as if he's choosing to remain quiet, wanting me to say something first.

"So...." I whisper up at him, "What happens now, I've never woken up with a stranger before."

Surprise flashes across his face before he covers it with a smile, "You kiss me." His lips gently take mine, "And I kiss you." The kiss is sweet and gentle, unlike the love we made last night.

Who am I kidding? There was no love making, we fucked like the strangers we are. His tongue slowly slides through my lips.

Ahh..... I didn't even brush my teeth yet.

He kisses me again, deeper this time, and I feel my arousal roll in as my hands curl through his hair, his hand slides between my legs and I wince. I'm swollen and sore.

"Are you okay?" He frowns.

I nod, feeling self-conscious. "I'm fine, just a bit tender."

"I hurt you." He retracts his fingers immediately.

"No." I shrug, "I just haven't ....." I stop myself, not wanting to sound stupid.

"You haven't what?"

"It's been a while."

He breaks into a big, beautiful smile, and I feel it all the way to my toes.

"You seem very happy about that?"

He pushes my hands up above my head and bites my neck as he smiles against my skin. "Maybe a little." He bites harder and I laugh out loud as I try to get away from him.

He leans up onto his elbow and falls serious, "Would you like to go out tonight?"

“Where to?”

“Dinner.”

“Like, a date?”

“Yes. Like a date.”

“Ummm.....” I pretend to think it over, and he pokes me in the ribs.

He widens his eyes in warning. “Careful.”

“Can you wear your uniform?” I ask.

“No.”

“So, what will you wear?” I tease.

“I don’t fucking know. Date clothes.”

I giggle and he puts his hand over my mouth. “Shut up or you’ll be more than tender in a minute.”

“What will I be?”

“Pulverized.”

I laugh out loud, oh man, he’s so fun. “Are you making breakfast?”

“No.” He lifts my hand to his lips and kisses my fingertips. “You are.”

This wake up is the opposite of what I imagined; it doesn’t feel awkward at all.

“What do you want to eat?” I ask.

“What I want to eat has been taken off the menu.” His dark eyes drop to my lips, and I know exactly what he’s thinking about.

Butterflies dance in my stomach.

*I really like him.*

I get out of bed and put my hands on my naked hips with a sashay, “Prepare yourself for the best breakfast of your life.”

He smiles with a twinkle in his eye, he sits himself up against the headboard and rearranges the white blankets as they pool around his waist, “I’m already prepared.”

I put on my robe and make my way to the kitchen, I wasn’t even joking, I am going to make him the best breakfast of his life.

I just have to work out what the hell that is.

I open my pantry and look in, hmm..... there’s, oatmeal, pancake mix. I keep looking, I open the fridge and take out the egg carton and open it.

One measly egg sits inside, and I have no bacon. No bread either.

Shit.

I begin to panic, damn it. Now I don’t even have the ingredients to make even a crappy breakfast. I pull the cupboards open at speed and look in the

freezer, I find some frozen blueberries. I have a banana too...

Right.... pancakes it is.

“Hurry up with my breakfast, wench,” he calls from the bedroom.

“Shut up, or I’ll poison it,” I call back.

I hear him laugh and I smile too.

I get to making the pancakes and from the corner of my eye I see him go up the hall to the bathroom and then go back to my bedroom, he obviously wants his breakfast in bed.

“Do you want coffee?” I call.

“Are you going to poison it?” he calls back.

“Maybe.” I smile goofily as I flip the first pancake in the pan.

“You know, you could come and help me.” I call.

“I’m good.”

“Well, if I’m in charge of the best breakfast of your life. I better be coming to the best date of my life tonight,” I call back.

“You’ll be coming alright, don’t doubt it.”

I giggle as I serve up the pancakes into a pile, I drizzle the berries and maple syrup over them and then sift icing sugar over the top.

I look over my handiwork.

Ha.... pretty impressive, if I do say so myself.

I arrange the plate onto a tray with a glass of orange juice and a cup of coffee, and I twist my lips, it’s missing something.

I peer out the kitchen window and spy my target, that’ll do it.

I tiptoe outside and run to the fence, hanging over from the next-door neighbor’s house are pink flowers. I pick one and scamper back into the house, I put it into a tiny glass vase and proudly carry the tray into my bedroom. This shit really is the best breakfast of all time.

“Ta-da.” I smile.

Dylan’s eyes light up, “Wow.”

I sit down beside him on the bed.

“Where’s yours?” he asks.

“I’m not much of a breakfast person,” I lie, I totally am, but I ate the first two disaster pancakes and now I’m full.

He pulls the pink flower out of the vase and tucks it behind my ear, we stare at each other as a perfect moment runs between us.

“I like you,” he whispers

I smile softly, this really is the best breakfast of all time. “I like you.”

“You know.....” He pauses as if choosing his words carefully. “If I had my time again, I would have asked you on a date, so we could have done this the right way round. I didn’t mean for.....” He pauses, “What I’m trying to say is..... you deserved better than I offered last night.”

He’s feeling guilty about the wham bam way last night went.

“Well..... Don’t beat yourself up, I loved every minute of it, officer.”

His eyes hold mine as he sips his coffee, “Shut up, or I’ll cuff you.”

“You shut up, or I’ll suck your dick.”

He chuckles, “A cook who goes above and beyond, this restaurant is five stars.”

“You know it.”

We stare at each other, and I get the feeling that magic is happening here. There’s something about him, about the way I am when I’m with him.

I feel like myself, and yet, as cliché as it sounds, I feel exciting and new.

Naughty.

“Can you eat your breakfast, so I can kick you out?” I smirk.

“What happened to sucking my dick?” he scoffs as he shovels a forkful of pancake into his mouth.

“You can’t have dessert before breakfast. Stop being a pig.”

He smirks as he keeps eating and nods in approval. “These are good.”

“Are you surprised?”

“No.”

We stare at each other, and again, the air swirls between us.

*Does he feel it too?*

He brushes the hair back from my forehead before softly kissing me, “You’re beautiful.”

My heart somersaults in my chest.

“And I wonder.....,” he pauses for a moment as if stopping himself from elaborating.

“You wonder what?”

“I wonder how I’m supposed to eat pancakes when all I can think of is you giving me a head job.”

I smile, I get the feeling that’s not what he was originally going to say.

“Well,” I smile as I kiss him again, I take the fork from him and fill it up with pancake, I fly it through the air to his mouth as if he’s a child. “You open your big mouth and you put the pancake in.”

He frowns and opens his mouth, and I shove the pancake in so far that he

nearly chokes. He coughs with a laugh and wrestles the fork from me. “I wouldn’t be shoving anything in my mouth if I were you.”

“Why not?”

“Because I have something much bigger that I can force feed you.” He makes a grab for me, and I run, he chases me down the hall and crash tackles me onto the couch as he growls like a monster. We laugh out loud, and he kisses me, and just like that.

The morning is perfect.



## Zoe

“HE DID A CAVITY SEARCH?” Avril shrieks, wide eyed. “What the hell??”

“Sshh,” I look around at the people in the café. “Keep your voice down,” I whisper.

Avril leans in across the table, “You’re kidding me, right?”

“I was a total hoe bag,” I whisper. “Big time.”

The rose-colored glasses have come off and in the light of day, my morals are guilt tripping me.

“Bad?”

“Porno bad.”

“Good porno or bad porno?” Her eyes are wide, and she sips her coffee as she hangs off my every word.

“Platinum, top tier.”

“What’s that?” She frowns.

“The fucking best.”

“I knew something was going to happen.” She sips her coffee, “Nothing this dramatic though, obviously. I thought like a date.”

I roll my eyes. “I don’t even know what happened, one minute he was all, let me search your house, and then I was bent over the kitchen counter, next minute we were fucking on the couch.”

Avril’s eyes widen, “Jeez, why doesn’t this shit ever happen to me?”

“Because it only happens on Pornhub that’s why.” I hold my temples. “I’m going to hell.”

“Well if he’s the devil..... sign me up too.” Avril holds her coffee up in a cheers symbol.

“I totally should have played hard to get, and the worst part is that I really like him.”

“What’s the problem with that?” She frowns.

“Well, now I can’t marry him, obviously,” I scoff. “Are you completely clueless?”

“Why not?”

“Because you never end up with someone who you meet like this, and I can never tell my kids or anyone for that matter that this is our meeting story.”

“Imagine if you did, though.” She giggles, “Daddy came around in his

cop uniform and did a cavity search and then he fucked Mommy before she knew his surname.” She holds her coffee up in another cheers symbol.

I throw my hands over my eyes in horror, “Stop! It sounds so bad.”

“Well,” she then thinks for a moment, “what did he say before he left this morning?”

“He asked me on a date.”

“He asked you out on a date,” she gasps. “When?”

“Tonight.”

“Tonight?”

“I know, so I need to be hot.”

“I thought you wanted to get back with Rodney?”

“I know. But I had so much fun with Dylan so I’m just going to see what happens.”

Avril smiles broadly, “I like this plan.”

I pull the red dress up and look at my reflection. “Nope.” I put the next dress on and turn and look at my behind, “Yuck.” I tear it off over my head. I tap my chin as I go over the contents of my wardrobe. I want to be sexy but cute with a side of irresistible.

Damn it, nothing here fits the bill.

I’ve been floating on air ever since Dylan left this morning. I get an image of the two of us kissing goodbye at my front door.

How I didn’t want him to leave.... And how I could feel that he didn’t want to go.

I turn and look at my behind in the mirror, fuck it. Total crap.

I tear off the dress.

Well, this is going to be a disaster if I can’t find something half decent to wear.

Why didn’t I buy something new today?

I flip through my coat hangers with renewed determination.

I have to look perfect.

The car pulls into my driveway right on seven, and I run up the hall pretending that I hadn’t been secretly waiting at the window for him to arrive.

The doorbell rings and with my heart thumping hard in my chest I take one long last look in the mirror. I’m wearing a pink fitted dress, it’s off the shoulders and clings to my curves. I have nude-colored, strappy stilettos on,

and my long dark hair is out and full.

He hasn't seen me dressed up before, I want him to be wowed.

Right...., this is it.

Don't fuck it up, Zoe.

I open the door and there he stands, 6ft3 of gorgeous man and it's me who is wowed.

Black jeans that fit perfectly and show his sculptured thick quads, and a light blue shirt that hangs perfectly from his broad shoulders. Tanned muscular forearms that have thick veins coursing down to his perfect hands.

I nearly swallow my tongue at the sight of him.

Wow.

His brown hair is sitting in messy curls and his aftershave is next-level intoxicating.

"Hi." He smiles, his eyes drop down my body.

"Hi." I beam.

"You look fucking delicious," he says as he steps forward and takes me into his arms.

*Delicious.*

He thinks I'm delicious.

Touch down!

I giggle as he walks me backwards into the house, with his lips locked on mine, his hands are on my behind, and I can feel his erection through his pants. "Screw going out, let's fuck instead." He smiles against my lips.

"No."

He kisses me hungrily before he drops to his knees and begins to pull my dress up.

"Dylan." I laugh as I step back from him. "We're acting like grown up humans tonight, remember?"

"I prefer to be an adolescent animal." He walks forward on his knees to try and grab me again.

"We're going out on a date." I grab his hands and pull him up from the floor.

"Ugh, fine." He grumbles, he takes my hand in his. "You ready?"

"Aha."

He leads me through the front door and out to his car, it's a beat-up pale blue pickup truck, and I roll my lips to hide my smile. He couldn't be more different to Rodney. Rodney is all about appearances, he drives a Porsche and

wouldn't be seen dead in this car. I look around at the dings and scratches, this car has character. I kind of like it.

Dylan opens the door for me and as I slink into the front seat I say, "Such a gentleman." I smile.

"If you say so." He slams the door shut and gets into the driver's side and looks over at me, "So where do you want to go?"

He doesn't have anything arranged, *what?*

"Umm... I don't mind."

"I didn't know what you liked so I made reservations at a few different restaurants," he says casually as he starts the car.

I frown.

"You get to pick, either Italian, Thai, Vietnamese, à la carte, or good old fashioned country food".

My heart swells. "I'm happy to eat whatever you want."

"Oh no you don't, you pick. I'm not having this on me if you don't like the food."

"Trust me Dylan, I like all food."

He raises an impatient eyebrow.

"Okay then, Italian?"

"Sounds good." With his eyes on the road, he reaches over and takes my hand and puts it on his muscular thigh, I smile out the window.

This is already the best date of my life.

He booked five restaurants so I could choose.

He's a thoughtful god.

The restaurant is small and quaint, candles adorn the tables and Italian music is being piped through the speakers.

We both sit quietly as the waiter fills our glasses.

"Thank you," we both say in unison as he finishes, he walks away leaving us alone.

"So," he says as his eyes find mine across the table.

"So..." I beam.

"I have many questions for the beautiful Miss Zoe."

I smile into my wine glass, "Same."

"Such as?" he asks.

"What's your surname?"

He bursts out laughing, “Good opener.”

I laugh too.

“My surname is Andrews.”

“Dylan Andrews.” I smile. “I like that name.”

“I like you,” he fires back without hesitation.

Nerves dance in my stomach, *he likes me*.

“Do you want to know my surname?” I ask.

“I know your surname.”

“What else do you know about me?”

“I know how to make you moan.” He gives me the best come-fuck-me look of all time.

*He’s so naughty.*

“Your name is Zoe Armitage, you’re 26. Single, live alone. Grew up in the area and ...” He frowns. “Would never have picked you for a lawyer though.”

“You’ve done your research, impressive.” I smile, “You must be a cop or something.”

He gives me a sexy wink.

I twist my wine glass as my mind temporarily wanders.

*I never picked you as a lawyer.*

Sensing my sudden mood decline, he asks, “What is it?”

“Oh nothing.” I shrug embarrassed. “Just..... It’s funny you say that about the lawyer thing, I’m in the middle of a mid-life crisis as we speak.”

Why did I tell him that? I haven’t told a soul.

“How so?”

“I don’t know, I studied for years to do this, I work for the top law firm in town, and now,” I shrug, “I hate it, I hate everything about it. I’m miserable and drag myself to work every single day. I’ve never cried so much in my life.”

He listens intently.

“But I think that’s normal, right? When anyone starts a dream job that there’s a settling in period. It’s never what you think it’s going to be,” I add.

“How long have you been doing it?” he asks.

“Two years.”

He nods and thinks for a moment, “What made you pick law?”

“I don’t know, I got the marks at school and the writing was on the wall for a long time.”

“Who’s writings?”

“My parents, my teachers, my boyfriend at the time. Everyone.”

“Everyone but you?” His eyes search mine.

I sip my wine, feeling uncomfortable. “It’s a good job.”

“It is,” he agrees. “But what did you want to do?”

“I don’t know.”

“Yes, you do. If you could have been anything in the world, what would you have been?”

I shrug.

“Don’t shrug, be honest with yourself. What did you want to do?”

“I wanted to be a nurse.”

He frowns as he listens intently, “So, what stopped you?”

“Everyone told me it was a shit job with terrible conditions.”

He sits back, annoyed by my answer. “Looking after sick people is the highest form of social service. Probably the most rewarding job of all. Whoever doesn’t see that is a fucking idiot.”

“The pay is terrible.”

“Money means jack shit, Zoe,” he snaps. “Do you think I’m a cop for money?”

I stare at him, confused. I’ve never met anyone quite like him. “Why *did* you pick that job?” I ask.

“Because if I could help just one person feel safe then it would be worth it.”

Oh.....

“Did you feel safe when you were a child?” I ask.

He concentrates on folding a napkin on the table as he avoids my gaze.

Did he grow up in an abusive home?

“Did you.....”

“Can we change the subject?” he cuts me off.

My heart constricts as I watch him. I take his hand over the table, “Well, you make me feel safe.”

He leans onto his hand and gives me that I’m-going-to-fuck-you-hard look, again, “I’m the last person you should feel safe with.”

I smile, “Probably.”

*He* doesn’t feel safe.

I lift his hand and kiss his fingertips; his eyes rise to meet mine. “We can keep each other safe.” He turns his hand and cups my face.

*What the hell is going on here?*

This is something, something big. I'm not imagining it.

"So, are you going to work the rest of your life in a job that you hate?"

He changes the subject.

My shoulders slump, the thought is depressing, "I'll get over it."

"Maybe you should start being honest with yourself."

Why are we talking about this? "I'm ready to order," I announce.

"Don't change the subject, Zoe. If you're unhappy, do something about it."

"Look, it's not that easy," I snap, annoyed. "You know nothing about the situation."

He holds his two hands up in a surrender symbol.

Deep down I know he's right. It's my turn to change the subject now.

"Tell me about your past girlfriends."

He chuckles, "Nice deflection."

"You like that?" I smile.

"Not really." He smiles back, "What do you want to know?"

"Girlfriends? Player? Cockshot sender? Where do you sit in the dating pool?"

"Cockshot sender?" He laughs. "There's a cockshot sender demographic?"

"Yes." I laugh too.

"Girlfriends, plural." He puts his fingers up to do quotation marks.

"Childhood sweetheart, we broke up a few years ago and....." he pauses, "Nothing serious since."

"Player?" I smile.

"I wouldn't say player, more like currently actively playing."

"Currently.... as in right now?" I gasp as I fake heartbreak. "You shouldn't tell me that, I thought we were falling in love!"

"No." He laughs too, "Not right now. We're on a date, I mean....." He shrugs embarrassed. "That came out wrong, you know what I mean."

I smile goofily over at him.

"Why did you break up?" I ask.

"Because I loved her for the wrong reasons."

I think on his answer for a moment, "She was your safe place?"

"Yes," he replies without hesitation.

"You loved her.... but you weren't in love with her?"

He smirks, “I didn’t want to fuck her through the wall, if that’s what you mean.”

He gives me that look again, sex god personified.

“What wall do you have in mind?” I breathe.

“The wall behind your bed looks pretty damn good.”

I feel myself flutter down below.

*Honestly.*

“I’ve got a bed that needs breaking too.”

“Don’t I know it.”

The air crackles between us.

With his eyes fixed on mine he puts his hand up to the waiter.

“Yes, sir,” the waiter asks as he arrives at our table.

“We are in a bit of a hurry; can we order please?”

We burst through my front door, and he tears my dress over my head as he walks me in backwards. “Get on your knees.”

I fall to my knees on the floor and struggle to get the zipper of his jeans down, I can’t do it quick enough.

He takes his cock out and holds it for me and with his dark eyes holding mine, I take him in my mouth.

His eyes flutter closed as he tenderly brushes the hair back from my forehead. “Good girl,” he moans softly.

“Fuck my mouth,” I whisper as I suck him, he tastes so good.

His knees nearly give out, and he grabs the back of my head with both hands. “Don’t tempt the dragon, baby, not even I can stop him.”



## Zoe

I LIE in the semi-dark bedroom as my mind wanders. Morning has come, along with some stark realities.

Last night was perfect..... better than perfect.

It was the best date I've ever been on.

My eyes roam over the dreamy man sleeping next to me, the white sheet covering his body as he lies on his back. Brown hair, dark tanned skin, and muscles for miles.

So different to anyone I've ever met before and yet, somehow so familiar.

I like him, I mean, I *really* like him. Our connection is just so easy and fun. And I know it's all about sex and probably doesn't mean it's going to turn into anything long term but what has scared me the most is the realization that I don't have these feelings with Rodney. As much as I thought I wanted us to be back together, I realize now that he was right.

Our relationship had run its course, it was a childhood love built on comfort and familiarity.

Dylan told me that he broke up with his girlfriend because he loved her for the wrong reason.

She was his safe place.

I think back to when Rodney and I broke up and although he never said those exact words, I see now that he meant them.

Hell.

*I've been such a fool.*

Holding onto a relationship because I thought we belonged together. Regret swims deep in my stomach, I've put myself through heartbreak, let past feelings put me in an emotional prison.

Dylan stretches and his eyes flutter open, and I smile at his beautiful cheeky face. "Morning."

He leans forward and kisses my shoulder, his sleepy eyes still closed.

"Do you want some breakfast?" I ask him.

He smiles and slides his hand down to between my legs, "I've got it right here."

"Behave." I giggle as I inch back from him. "I want to get to know you better."

"You know my dick." He grabs for me again.

*And how incredible it is.*

“What are your plans today?” I ask him, I want us to build on the relationship part of us, I already know the sex part is perfect.

“I have the day off.”

“Ahh,” I smile. “I have a few hours off this morning, you can be my assistant and help me.”

“Help you what?”

“Put the last of my Christmas decorations up.”

He sits up abruptly, “I...yeah, no.”

“No?”

“I’m not....” He pauses as if thinking of the right words, “I’m not much of a Christmas fan.”

I frown, “What?”

He gets out of bed and disappears down the hall to the bathroom.

“What do you mean?” I ask as I follow him, I stand at the open door and lean on the door jamb. “You don’t like Christmas?”

He shrugs as he goes. “Not really.”

Confusion fills me, “Since when?”

“Since always.” He finishes up and washes his hands and then walks past me out of the bathroom, I follow him up the hall like a puppy.

*Everyone likes Christmas.*

He goes back into the bedroom and throws on his T-shirt and as I watch on, he grabs his jeans and pulls them on too. “I’ll let you get to it.”

“Dylan.” I frown.

“It’s fine, babe.” He kisses me quickly, “You do your Christmas thing, and I’ll catch up with you later.” He walks toward the front door.

“What?” My face falls, “Are you going?”

He keeps walking toward the door.

“Dylan?”

He turns back and seeing my disappointed face, must feel guilty. “I’ll see you tonight?” He kisses me softly.

Something has upset him.

“Is everything alright?” I ask.

“Everything is perfect.” He kisses me again, “I’ll see you tonight, yeah?”

“What time?”

He smiles as he pulls me closer into a hug, “Look at you, getting all demanding.”

My face falls, fuck.... I am. "Oh...."

"I like it." He smiles. "Demand all you want, baby."

I twist my fingers, feeling embarrassed. He's right, I am being demanding, what the hell is wrong with me, I'm getting clingy after two nights.

He can leave whenever he wants to.

I need to chill the hell out.

"Have a good day," I say before taking a step back from him. Just go, I need some distance. I'm way too attached to you. If I'm like this after two nights, imagine the damage he could do to my heart if I actually fell for him.

A trace of a frown crosses his brow, and I force a smile.

"I'll be over about seven," he says.

"Yeah.... well," I pause, "I'm probably busy tonight," I lie.

"Doing what?"

"I just remembered I might have to work, just call me and we can figure something out."

His eyes hold mine.

"Okay?" I smile as I walk to the front door, I open it in a rush. "Goodbye, Dylan."

He stands on the spot and stares at me, he's trying to figure out what's going on here, and I can't tell him because I don't even know myself.

"I don't have your phone number," he replies.

I close my eyes, embarrassed.

I'm clinging to a guy who doesn't even have my phone number. What the hell is wrong with me?

"Oh... um... of course." I walk to my handbag, dig out my phone and swipe it open. "What's your number, I'll text you."

He tells me his number, and I send a text.

Hi

His phone dings in his hand, "Got it."

"Okay."

His eyes hold mine, "Okay."

Emotion floods through me, damn it, why do I like him so much?

As if reading my mind, he takes me into his arms and kisses me tenderly.

"Have a good day, baby."

I nod through the lump in my throat, and we hug each other tight.

Did we just have our first fight?

He makes his way down the front steps and out to his car, and before he even gets in, I close the front door and storm down the hall and turn the shower on.

Stop it, Zoe.

Get a hold of these emotions.

**Dylan**

**I sit on the couch and pretend to watch television; I glance at the time on my phone.**

**9pm.**

**I called Zoe two hours ago, and she hasn't called me back yet.**

**What the fuck is going on?**

**All was fine this morning and then she just flipped a switch.**

**And it shouldn't bother me because we just met..... but it does.**

**I've had a shit day.**

**My first day off in weeks, and I've been wound up like a top.**

**I like her more than I should.**

**But how can I help it, she's perfect. My mind goes back over the last few days, the laughter, the hugs, the ridiculously good sex.**

**Every moment in her arms just feels..... more.**

**Don't fuck this up.**

**I scroll through my phone and my finger hovers over her name, "Call me back," I snap. I march to the refrigerator and grab a beer and pace as I drink it. If I call her back, I look needy.**

**If I don't call her back, I don't seem invested, but if I do call her back, I seem stalkerish. There's no win in this situation; I keep pacing.**

**Fuck it, I am stalking her.**

**I dial her number and wait on the line, ring, ring. Ring, ring.**

**"Dylan," she answers.**

**It's loud, I can hear that she's in a club or something and I frown, "Hi."**

**"I'm sorry I didn't call you back yet," she apologizes, I can tell she's been drinking. "I've been busy."**

**My angry heartbeat sounds in my ears, "It's fine." But it's not, she's out and not calling me back, I can take a hint. "I can hear that you're out, I'll let you go," I snap, annoyed.**

**"Don't go," she says softly.**

**Silence hangs on the line between us.**

**What the fuck is going on, she doesn't call me but then doesn't want me to go.**

**I can't hold it any longer, "What are you doing, Zoe?" I snap.**

**“I’m at the Roxy.”**

**“With who?”**

**“My girlfriends.”**

**I drag my hand down my face in frustration, I get the feeling that something else is going on, something involving me.**

**“I’ll call you tomorrow,” she says, the line goes dead.**

**What?**

**I tip my head back and scull my beer, fuck tomorrow.**

**I want answers now.**

**I storm into the Roxy and walk through the interconnecting bars. This club isn’t new to me, I’ve been here many times before. Never looked for one specific person like this though.**

**What the fuck is she playing at?**

**I go through the main bar, into the sports area and then onto the Karaoke lounge, there’s a different kind of crowd here tonight. Everyone looks like they have come straight from work and my eyes roam over every corner as I search.**

**Where is she?**

**I go up the staircase and come to the cocktail bar, and I see her, she’s sitting at the end of the bar alone, she looks preoccupied while drinking a Margarita.**

***What the hell?***

**I walk over and sit on the stool beside her, “Hi.”**

**She looks up surprised, “Dylan.”**

**“What are you doing?”**

**“Keeping myself busy.”**

**“Why?”**

**Her eyes hold mine and she shrugs, her eyes betray her and show me all the emotion she isn’t saying.**

**“What’s wrong?”**

**“Nothing.” She sips her drink as she acts casual.**

**“You are here to stop yourself from thinking about what, Zoe?” I snap in frustration.**

**“You, Dylan.”**

**“Why don’t you want to think about me?”**

**“Because you are too fucking perfect and it’s freaking me out,” she spits. “And I can’t like you this much after we met like two minutes ago because that would make me completely fucking pathetic.”**

**“Calm down.”**

**“Calm down,” she gasps. “How the hell can I calm down? she whispers angrily.**

**I feel that slow throb between my legs, the one I get every time she is near. My eyes drop to her lips and my cock swells in anticipation. “It’s you who is perfect, Zoe,” I whisper, I lean in and take her lips with mine, my tongue slides into her mouth, and I get a rush of arousal. We kiss for a moment, right here in the bar for all to see. Until I can’t see straight any longer. “This way.” I take her hand and lead her through the club, I need her.**

*Now.*

**We walk down the corridor, and I open the staff bathroom and push her in. “You’re about to be punished.”**

**“For what?”**

**“You fucking call me when you say you will,” I demand.**

**Her eyes widen.**

**“Now, get on my cock, where you belong.” I slam her up against the wall as we kiss like animals, I unzip my jeans and slip her panties to the side and slide my hard length through her wet lips. “You need me.” I keep teasing her with my cock, back and forth, back and forth. She’s swollen and wet. Waiting for what I can give her. “Admit it, you need me, Zoe.” I tease her some more as I feel her creamy body craving mine.**

**“I know. I do.” She kisses me softly; her hands are in my hair.**

**“I’m right fucking here. Take me.” I hold her legs back and slam in deep, pinning her to the wall.**

**“Dylan,” she whimpers as she feels the burn. “Oh god, it’s so good.”**

**I begin to ride her, hard and fast as we stare at each other.**

**Lust takes over, but every slap of our skin brings an undercurrent of emotion closer to the surface.**

*I need you too.*



## Zoe

WE LIE IN THE DARKNESS, a tangled mess of naked skin. It's late and we've been making love for hours, each time I can feel us get a little closer.

My head is on Dylan's chest, his lips are at my temple and his fingers trail idly up and down my arm. He seems distracted, as if miles away.

"Christmas makes me sad," he says softly.

I frown, "Why?"

"It reminds me of what I don't have."

I kiss his chest and remain silent as I listen.

"When I was a little, I used to pray that the Christmas angel would come and save me and give me a family of my own."

"You don't have a family?" I whisper.

He pauses as if getting the wording right in his head, "I was a ward of the state. The government took me from my parents when I was a baby, they were drug addicts. I bounced between foster and group homes until I was old enough to do it on my own."

My heart constricts, I imagine him as a little boy praying for a Christmas Angel who never came, and my eyes well with tears.

"When you wanted me to decorate the tree....."

"It's okay," I cut him off. "I get it." I trace my finger on his chest as I try to think of the right thing to say.

"It's impossible for me to believe that living with my parents could have been worse than the places I grew up."

I can feel the sadness seeping out of him, it's overpowering, and suddenly I feel like an entitled princess by getting upset that he didn't want to decorate a stupid fake tree.

"Your family would have been so proud of you, Dylan. If only they could see how wonderful you turned out," I whisper into the darkness. "Look at you, you're a cop."

I feel him smile above me, "I probably would have busted their ass."

"Or changed their tire." I smile.

We fall silent for a while, and I want to change the subject, he doesn't have to explain himself any longer, I get the whole traumatic picture now, and I don't want him to think about it.

"I've been thinking about what you said to me," I whisper.

“About what?”

“About living a lie and doing a job I hate.”

“And?”

“And I think you’re right.”

“What are you going to do?”

“I don’t know, but I’m going to think about going back to school.”

He smiles proudly as he brushes the hair back from my face, “Look at you.”

“Thank you.”

“For what?”

“For coming to find me tonight.” I kiss him, my lips linger over his. “I feel like I know you a lot better than I actually do.”

“Same.”

I smile broadly, “Maybe we were destined to meet.”

“I don’t believe in destiny, but I am glad that you got a flat tire.”

“I’m glad you had to search my premises.”

He chuckles, “I’m glad about that too.”

I hug him tightly, “This Christmas will be different.”

“I’m working.” He kisses my temple as if to soften the blow. “I always offer to work on Christmas, I’d rather the people with families get the day off.”

I stare at him in the darkness, *always putting others first.*

“You don’t work all day, do you?”

“I usually do a double shift.”

“Just do the day shift this year and then we can have dinner together.”

“Zoe..... I just,” he cuts himself off. “Trust me, my company is not good on Christmas day.”

“But mine is.” I smile hopefully up at him. “Maybe I can blow you under the tree. Give you some new memories to keep.”

He chuckles, “Now you’re talking.”

I smile as I lie on his chest and eventually, I feel him relax, “Good night my beautiful Dylan,” I whisper.

He kisses my temple, “Goodnight, baby.”

How do you describe the best week of your life..... when you’ve hardly left the house?

It’s the strangest thing, Dylan and I have done nothing special and yet it’s been everything special. We’ve cooked, we’ve laughed, we’ve watched

movies. He's grumbled about Christmas while I put up more decorations.

But more than anything, we've listened to each other, and for the first time in a relationship, I feel seen.

My opinion matters. My feelings matter to him, and dear god, how did a man who had such a hard upbringing, turn out to be so beautiful?

He is the opposite of what he should be, or perhaps he's so good because he takes nothing for granted.

Either way, there's one thing I know for sure.

It's him, it's always been him. Even before we met..... it was always going to be him.

And that's why tonight, I'm going to the wedding with Rodney to end it forever. I need to walk away with dignity, and a shitty phone call can't end a six-year relationship, I owe it to myself and his family to end this the right way. In person, with the truth.

"You have that family dinner on tonight, don't you?" Dylan says as he dries himself.

Guilt fills me, I should tell him. Tell him what.... that I'm going out with my ex. No, I don't want to make him feel insecure. "Yes, but I'll be home here by ten, you're coming over after, aren't you?"

He kisses me, "Try and stop me."

I hear the car pull up and I cringe, I just want this night to be over. I really don't want to go, but I feel that after all these years I owe it to Rodney to finish us forever with dignity.

I'm going to tell him on the way to the wedding that I've moved on, and he will tell me he has too, and then hopefully, we can go tonight as friends.

If he doesn't want to take me as his date, I'll completely understand. But at least I can hold my head high because I stayed true to my word, I did promise to go with him after all and I'm not one to break plans for something shiny and new.

Dylan is so shiny and new.

"Knock, knock." Sounds at the door.

I exhale heavily and open it; Rodney's eyes drop down my body. "Well, hi," he says all sexy like.

Huh?

"Hi." I fake a smile.

Oh no, I know that look.

"You look fucking hot." He steps forward and makes a grab for me, and I

take a step back. “What are you doing?”

“Kissing my girl.”

“I’m not your girl, we should get going.”

He leans in to kiss me, and I quickly turn my head, *I’m not kissing you.*

“Now, now, look who’s playing hard to get,” he teases.

I stare at him, shocked. Is he kidding me right now? It isn’t an act, asshole. Why the fuck am I going to this wedding? I’m beginning to regret it already.

“Hardly,” I fake a smile. “We should go.” I grab my purse and shawl; I walk to the front door as his hungry eyes look me up and down.

Ugh...

How times change; for years I’ve wanted him to look at me like this and now that he is, I don’t want a bar of it.

I just want to see Dylan.

*Focus.*

Tell Rodney that it’s over, give him an out option of tonight and then call Dylan.

Right, I can do this.

We walk out the front door and look out to his car and stop on the spot.

What?

Rodney’s mother is sitting in the front seat of the car, she waves, and I fake a smile.

What. The. Actual. Hell?

“Your mother is coming with us?”

“Isn’t she your best friend?” he mutters deadpan.

Not tonight, asshole.

I get into the backseat and shuffle over. “Hi Mary.”

“Hello, Zoe, you look lovely.”

“Thanks. So do you.”

Rodney starts the car and pulls out onto the street.

Is this a joke?

I want to talk to him, but I can’t do it in front of his fucking mother.

Unbelievable.

What if I really was planning on this being a romantic get back together night?

Ugh, this is the night from hell already.

I take out my phone and text Dylan.

Missed seeing you today

I wait for a reply, but it doesn't come. He must be busy.

I really did miss him today, and I smile as I picture his beautiful face. Maybe I should call and ask him to come and pick me up, would that be weird?

Rodney and his mom chat happily in the front seat, and I stare out the window as we drive along.

I have this sick sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach, I'm feeling guilty for not telling Dylan I was coming here tonight, but I didn't want him to think the worst. I wouldn't be happy if he was going to a wedding with his ex.

Fucks sake.

Why is Mary in the damn car?

"The church service is private," Rodney says.

"Oh, is it?" I reply, distracted. I'm trolling my brain for a plan.

This is not going how I want it to, it's a nightmare.

"Yeah, only the bridal party and their parents are attending. We are going straight to the reception hall," he replies.

"Okay, that's different."

Good for them, doing what they want to do. An intimate wedding would be nice.

"Rodney told me the exciting news." Mary smiles over at me from the front seat.

"What news?" I ask.

"That you two are getting back together," she gushes in an over-excited way. "The future is so bright for you two."

"What?" My eyes flick to Rodney in the rearview mirror, and he winks.

"Oh..... that's." Words fail me. Fuck, all I've wanted is for this to happen and now that it is, it's my worst nightmare. "Rodney and I are just good friends," I tell her.

"Yeah right," Rodney laughs, "If you say so."

"Rodney....."

"We were always getting back together, babe," he cuts me off. "Like you said, it was just a break," he says as he drives along.

"It's been a long time and things between us have changed." I fake a smile, take a hint asshole.

“You missed me, I know you did.” He winks all playful-cements it all like again.

I did.... but now, I don't.

*Awkward.*

What do I do? If I tell him now in front of his mother, I look like a raving bitch.

Shit.

“Zoe is playing hard to get tonight, Mom.” Rodney smiles over at her and then his eyes flick back to me. “It’s kind of a turn on, actually.”

What?

*You idiot.*

My god, this is going from bad to worse. Okay, what’s the plan?

I begin to sweat.

I think of all the times I’ve cried to his mother about my broken heart and now, when I finally realize that we are not meant to be together, it’s come to this case of the worst timing ever..... oh hell, this looks so bad.

“This is turning out to be the best night, isn’t it?” Mary says happily from the front seat. “Our family is getting back together.”

I fake a smile.

*Fuck.*

The ballroom is grand and beautifully timeless.

There are huge bouquets of white flowers, candelabras with white candles, and the finest silver dinnerware on the perfectly set tables.

Mary smiles and waves at a friend.

“Wow.” I smile as I look around, “This is beautiful.”

“Meh,” Rodney says as he looks around. “How much would this crap cost?”

“Rodney, it’s a wedding. The most special day in a person’s life,” his mother says.

He rolls his eyes and curls his lip, “I’m not into it.”

I stare at him as I have an out of body experience.

The statement that cements it all.

Everything in Rodney’s life is about Rodney, and all the insecurities I’ve been feeling for years, was just my gut warning me that something wasn’t right.

*That he wasn’t the one.*

I smile, and for the first time ever, my future feels crystal clear.

Unencumbered.

“Oh, look. There are the guys,” says Rodney. “I’ll be back in a minute.”

“Okay.”

I watch him walk away to the other side of the room, and I look around at the beautiful room and then I see a familiar figure talking with a group of men.

The blood drains from my face.

Dylan.

What the fuck is he doing here?

He catches sight of me at exactly the same time, and his face lights up in surprise, he makes his way over.

“Hi, baby,” he gushes as he kisses me softly on the lips. He’s wearing a tux.

“What, what.... are you doing here?” I stammer.

“I’m a groomsman, I knew you had a family thing on, I can’t believe it’s the same wedding as mine.”

Oh.

My.

God.

I awkwardly fake a laugh.

“You look breathtaking.” He puts his arm around me and kisses my temple, “I just got your text, I missed you today too,” he whispers in my ear.

“Dylan...”

Oh no.

“Who’s this?” Mary asks.

I swallow the lump in my throat as I look between them.

This can’t be happening.

“This is Dylan. Dylan this is Mary.”

She fakes a smile as she looks him up and down, she knows something is up by our familiar greeting.

Please earth, swallow me up.

Dylan smiles proudly over at me, and I feel the blood start to drain out of my face.

“You’re in the bridal party?” I ask.

“Sure am.”

“How do you know the groom?” I squeak as I try to think of an escape plan.

“We went to the Police Academy together, been best of friends ever since. What’s your connection?”

I hesitate,

“Dylan,” I hear a familiar voice yell with a laugh.

“Rodney,” Dylan smiles, he and Rodney shake hands.

Oh fuck, it gets worse, they know each other. This can't be happening.

“This is my mother, Mary, and I see you've met my girlfriend, Zoe,” Rodney smiles as he puts his arm around me.

Dylan's face falls as he looks between the two of us.

“I'm not your girlfriend, Rodney,” I say uncomfortably as I step out of his grip. “We’re friends, we're just friends,” I stammer in a panic.

Dylan takes a step back as if hit by a physical blow, his eyes flick between the two of us. “So.... you are here together on a date then?” he asks.

“Just as friends,” I snap.

“Now, now,” Rodney smiles. “Zoe and I dated for six years and we're just getting back together. Aren't we, Zoe?” He puts his hand around my waist, I inwardly die a little,

Dylan tips his head back and drains his glass. “Excuse me,” he says before rushing out of the room. I stare after him as my heart races in my chest.

“Rodney,” someone calls from behind us, Rodney turns and shakes his hand, and my eyes go to Mary.

“This isn't how it looks.” I whisper.

She raises an unimpressed eyebrow, “How do you think it looks, Zoe?”

My eyes dart to the door to where Dylan has disappeared, I need to speak to him. “Excuse me,” I say.

I rush out and look around, it's just on dusk and getting dark.

My heart is hammering hard in my chest.

Where is he?

I walk through the car park over to a Gazebo.

I catch sight of him in the garden staring out over the pond, and I tentatively walk over.

“Dill?” I say softly, “I can explain.”

“Don't.”

“He's my ex, and I was going to tell him tonight that we're not getting back together and it's just..... complicated.”

“Okay.” He looks straight ahead, cold and hard, seemingly unaffected.

“What do you mean, okay?” I ask.

“It's fine, Zoe, go back to your date.”

“What do you mean?” I stammer as I begin to panic. “I'm with you. I just.”

“Have you told him that?”

“I haven't had a chance to yet, his mother was in the car.”

“Well.... that just sounds like a great family date, doesn't it?” He smiles sarcastically, “See you around, yeah?” He walks back into the reception area.

“Dylan,” I call, “Can we talk about this?”

“Nothing to talk about.”

“Dylan.”

He disappears into the function center without another word.

I put my head into my hands, “Oh my god.”

I walk back to the ballroom to see Dylan sitting alone at the bridal table and my heart breaks. I can't talk to him up there and I don't want him to have to watch me all night while I sit at a table with Rodney and his mother.

What do I do.....? What do I do.....?

I'm going to leave, I have to. It's the only way.

I weave through the crowd and up to Rodney, “Can I speak to you for a moment please?”

“I'm talking.” He frowns, annoyed at my interruption.

“Now,” I whisper angrily. Fucks sake don't give me your crap Rodney, you asshole.

He follows me outside, and I turn to face him. “I'm leaving.”

He screws up his face. “What?”

“I'm sorry, I just don't feel the same way about you as I used to.”

He stares at me.

“And I shouldn't have come here tonight, but I wanted to end it as friends.”

“Has Dylan got anything to do with this?”

I stare at him, *fuck*.

“Why would you say that?” I ask.

“Because my mother just told me that you two were very cozy.”

*Mind your business, Mary.*

“Actually..... yes. I'm seeing Dylan. It's very new and unexpected and the good news is that you were right all along, we don't have that zing anymore.”

“What the fuck are you talking about, Zoe?” he explodes. “We love each other,” he cries.

I look around at all the people staring. “Sshh, keep your voice down,” I whisper angrily.

“What... so he doesn’t fucking hear us?”

“Rodney,” I whisper. “This isn’t about Dylan, the truth is that our relationship had run its course a long, long time ago.”

“Bullshit, I’m going to fucking knock him out.”

“Who?” My eyes widen as I connect the dots. “Dylan?” I gasp.

“That’s right.” He goes to march back inside, and I grab his arm. “Are you crazy, don’t be ridiculous, Dylan would kill you in a fight. Have you seen the size of him?”

“Not if I kill him first.”

“Stop it,” I cry.

People really are watching now.

“He can’t have you, Zoe, you belong to me.” He marches off inside.

What the ever-loving fuck?

Oh.

My.

God!

I put my hands over my mouth in horror and take out my phone and call Dylan, I need to warn him that Rodney is acting like a psychopath. Ring ring.... ring, ring..... “Pick up..... pick up.”

No answer.

I dial again and this time it goes straight to voicemail, he’s declined the call.

Fuck.

What the hell do I do?

I have to go, no good can come of my staying here. My presence is just going to escalate everything.

With my heart pounding hard in my chest I walk out the front gates and down the road, and I call an Uber. I stand in the dark as I wait for it, and I can hear the laughter and music in the distance.

Why didn’t Dylan tell me he was in a wedding today?

Why did I come?

Why is Rodney acting like a caveman?

Why am I such a fucking idiot?

The questions are endless.

The Uber pulls up, and I jump into the backseat, “Please, get me out of here.”

I pace back and forth in my kitchen, it’s 12 a.m. and Dylan’s phone is still turned off.

Maybe he’s still at the wedding?

I text him again.

Dylan, I only went to end it.

I’m with you, please come home.

I’m worried sick.

It’s 2 a.m., and no word from Dylan.

I know the wedding is definitely over by now.

Is he out? Is he in jail for killing Rodney? What the hell is going on over there, why hasn’t he got back to me?

I’ll try and call him again; I dial his number.

***The number you have called is not available from this service.***

Huh?

I dial his number again.

***The number you have called is not available from this service.***

What? Why am I getting that message?

I type into Google, why am I getting the message, *the number you have called is not available from this service.*

A reply bounces back.

**Your number has been blocked.**

The air leaves my lungs, he's blocked my number.  
I try again,

*The number you have called is not available from this service.*

I screw up my face in tears, "Dylan. Don't do this."

I sit at my desk and stare into space.

Life gives out hard lessons, the kind that break your heart.

I'm a broken mess, a shell of who I thought I was.

I think this is my saddest heartbreak because I know I've lost something really special.

It's been five days since Wedding Armageddon and not a single word from Dylan.

He left me.

He left me because I lied, and I really can't blame him.

And the joke of it is, as connected as we are, I don't even know where he lives. With my number blocked, I can't track him at all.

"You coming for Christmas drinks tonight?" Marla asks, interrupting my thoughts.

"Oh.... Umm, no I can't. I've got something on. Sorry."

"Well, I hope it's fun." She hugs me from behind. "I've never seen you so flat."

I fake a smile, "I'm fine."

I watch on as the office packs up their desks and one by one leave for the office drinks.

I stay seated.

Because if I go home then I'll just cry, and damn it, Marla is right. I've never been so flat.

It's Christmas Eve.

The twinkling fairy lights light my living room and the carols are on the

television.

I wonder what Dylan is doing.

My heart constricts, I was just another person who let him down.

Being sad at Christmas is nothing new to him.

He's used to it.

I've never been so regretful of anything in my entire life, and I just want my mom. I drag a chair over to my Christmas tree and get up and take down the Angel, and I sit back on the couch and stare at her for a long time.

Dylan's words come back to me, *When I was a little, I used to pray that the Christmas angel would come and save me, give me a family of my own.*

I run my fingers over the Angel's wings, "Send me a miracle Mom, tell me what to do."

**Dylan**

**I slowly pack up my things and make my way toward the door. I've lingered as long as I can in the office, it's time to go home. Well, I'm not going straight home, I'm going to the gym, I'll run for a few hours on the treadmill. The plan is to be too exhausted to notice that I'm having takeout for Christmas dinner. It worked last year; no doubt it will work this year too.**

**"Merry Christmas," I smile to Rowena on the desk as I walk past her.**

**"Merry Christmas, Dylan." She smiles warmly, "Big family celebration tonight for you, I guess."**

**"Aha," I lie, "and you?"**

**"Me too," she says with a smile, "big family dinner planned." But her smile doesn't touch her eyes, and I get the feeling that she's lying too.**

**"Have fun."**

**"You too."**

**I walk down the front steps and through the parking lot to my car and as I get closer, I see someone sitting on the hood of my car.**

**Zoe.**

**My step falters, she is the last person I want to see today.**

***Fuck.***

**She sits up when she sees me coming, and I drop my head, I don't even want to look at her.**

**I can't.**

**I unlock my car and throw my bag onto the backseat.**

**"Hi, Dill."**

**"Hi." I twist my lips annoyed. "What are you doing here?"**

**Her face falls and she jumps down from the hood, "I came to wish you a Merry Christmas."**

**"Merry Christmas," I snap. "You needn't have bothered."**

**Her eyes search mine. "Can we talk?"**

**"Nope." I go to open my car door and she pushes it closed. "Dylan I just went to finish it with him, that's all. I mean.... we were already broken up, but he wanted to get back together, and I had said that I would go with him for months."**

**“So why lie to me?” I yell as I lose control.**

**Her eyes well with tears. “I was trying to protect your feelings.”**

**“By lying?”**

**She angrily wipes a tear as it escapes from her eyes. “I know, this doesn’t make sense.”**

**“It doesn’t.” I push past her to get into my car, and she steps in front to block me.**

**“Goodbye, Zoe.”**

**“Will you listen to me for a moment, you stubborn fuck.” She cries. “The truth is, I was getting back with Rodney and then I met you and everything I thought I wanted wasn’t true anymore.”**

**I stare at her.**

**“Because even though I’ve known you for two fucking minutes, I fell in love with you.”**

**“Don’t.”**

**“And I know you don’t love me because you wouldn’t have blocked my number if you did. But what if it’s me Dylan?” She hits her chest. “What if it came true? I asked my mom for a sign last night and it came to me. It’s been there in front of us all along.”**

**I frown in question.**

**“What if I’m her?”**

**“What the fuck are you talking about?”**

**“What if I’m the Christmas Angel that you prayed for to bring you a family of your own.”**

**I take a step back from her, shocked by her declarations.**

**“We could have it all, Dill, love, marriage, a future so bright. A family of your own..... just like you prayed for.” She smiles hopefully.**

**My nostrils flare as I try to keep it together.**

**Her teary eyes search mine, “Tell me that you love me too..... please. I’m begging for forgiveness.”**

**Her silhouette blurs.**

**“Dylan?”**

**“I can’t,” I whisper.**

**Her face falls. “Can’t or won’t.”**

**I can’t do this.**

**I push past her and get into my truck, “Goodbye, Zoe.” I start the engine and pull out of the parking lot.**

**I keep my eyes on the road, I can't look into the rearview mirror.  
*I won't.***

## Zoe

I carve the turkey; my father and brothers are at my house for dinner. I wanted to have it here this year because I thought Dylan would be coming.

I was wrong.

It's hard to love someone who's damaged, it's even worse to lie to them.

I brought this on myself.

After Dylan left me in the parking lot today, I cried a river and then an ocean.

I really thought.....

Knock, knock sounds at the door.

"That will be Rodney," my father says as he steals a piece of Turkey from my platter. "I knew he'd turn up," he teases.

I roll my eyes, "He'd better not." I flick him with the tea towel, "Don't even say such a thing."

Turns out, Rodney is a douche, the truth is, he has been sampling every single girl in town. Even my cousin.... just what the hell?

I dodged a bullet with that one, I'm going to push that fucker down the steps. I march to the door and open it in a rush.

"Dylan," I gasp in surprise.

His eyes search mine, "Hi." He holds out a bunch of tacky flowers that he's obviously bought at a gas station.

Hope fills me, "Hi."

"Can I...." He frowns as he tries to find the words. "Can I stay for dinner?" he asks softly.

I smile through tears, "You can stay forever."

Merry Christmas

XOX

# **THE BONUS**

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## Grace

MY NAME IS GRACE PORTER, and I am the personal assistant to Gabriel Ferrara, CEO of Ferrara Media in New York.

And it's the perfect job; great pay, beautiful office, everything I ever dreamed of, if not for one small detail.

I am utterly and hopelessly in love with my boss.

Every day it starts the same, at precisely 8:20 a.m. I make my way into his office. By this time, he's already run on his treadmill, had an infrared sauna and showered, we run through his day while he dresses.

Watching Gabriel put on his suit each morning is the highlight of my day, who am I kidding it's the highlight of my fucking life.

I pick up my notes and knock softly.

"Come in," his strong voice calls.

I tentatively open the door to see him standing at his coffee machine, white towel around his waist. Tanned muscles, broad back and dominance for miles, the lethal trifecta. "Morning, Gracie."

"Good morning, Gabriel," I reply, my eyes drink him in while he has his back to me, it's the only time I can stare uninterrupted.

He turns and passes me my cup and saucer, "Your coffee, madam."

"Thank you." I tentatively take a sip, warm and delicious, even his coffee is smooth. He goes back to making his coffee while I take a seat at his desk, I open his computer and log into his diary.

My eyes flick over the screen to his sculpted back, damn it.

Why is he so delicious? How could any female work in these conditions and not be completely besotted with him?

And then he opens his mouth..... and I remember why.

"Did you sleep at all last night; you look like shit."

"Thanks," I mutter as I refocus on his day.

"I didn't sleep much either, actually, can you remind me later to send flowers."

I bite the side of my cheek.

*Fucker.*

Not only do I have to watch him date every beautiful woman in the world, I send them fucking flowers too.

“Of course,” I reply as I act unaffected.

I’m positive that I could win an Academy Award for the acting of casual that I do.

“What have we got today?” he asks as he disappears into his large closet. From my peripheral vision I see the white towel drop as he puts his briefs on.

*Focus.*

I exhale as the screen jumbles, he’s busy.

Even reading his schedule is exhausting. “Board meeting at nine.”

“Let’s run through that agenda.” He walks out of the closet in black briefs, his suit and shirt on hangers.

“You are talking about the flow on effect from the defamation case against Noble Industries,” I reply.

“Yes, that’s right. Did we get that information?”

“Bryce has sent it to your email, and it’s saved in your Noble Industry file.”

“Thank you.” He pulls on his white shirt and slowly does up the buttons. “And do I have the graph?”

“Aha.” I bite my bottom lip as I try to focus on the screen, something about him standing there in his briefs doing up a white shirt..... it scrambles my brain. Every.

Single.

Morning.

“Okay, so what then,” he asks.

“You have a meeting with Roger at 10:15.” My eyes flick up to him, “Why do you have a meeting with Roger?”

“I’m letting him go.” He pulls up his navy suit pants and zips up.

“What?”

He shrugs, “He’s not performing.”

“You can’t fire Roger; he’s going through a lot right now. His wife left him.”

“Probably wasn’t performing in bed either,” he mutters dryly as he puts his gold cufflinks on. “Wouldn’t surprise me.”

“Now is not the time, can you just give him a warning please?”

“It’s amusing that you think you have a say in this matter.” He pulls his suit coat on. “Next appointment?”

“You have a phone conference with Holly, you are closing on the land for the shopping mall at 1 p.m. today, and she needs to run through a few details.”

“Aha.”

“At eleven you have a walk through the finance department to see the new refurbishment of their office.”

He screws up his face in disgust, “Why?”

“Because you do,” I snap in frustration. “You paid for it, the least you can do is be excited.”

“You’re getting a bit lippy this morning, Grace,” he snaps. “Don’t piss me off before nine.”

He walks back into his wardrobe and the scent of his aftershave wafts through the office.

Fuck it.... why does he spray that when I’m in his office?

It’s morally wrong.

I keep reading through his diary, “You have lunch at 12.30 with...” I frown and my eyes rise to meet his, “Veronica.”

“Aha,” he says casually, “Drink your coffee, so I can collect your cup.”

I sip my coffee as I plot his death.

*Is it Veronica Rothchild?*

That’s a new name, I don’t know a Veronica other than Veronica Rothchild the super model, and I know that they met two weeks ago at a charity event.

I’m happy with his regular women because I know that he sees them just as that.... regulars. But every time he meets someone new, I panic a little, this could be the woman whom he finally falls in love with.

As well as acting, another job I excel at is an undercover detective. I know who he is sleeping with before he does.

“Well, you don’t have long for lunch, you have to be back at the office at 1.30 for a very important meeting.” I focus on the screen.

“Cancel it.”

“Impossible.” I keep typing and try to change the subject. “Who am I sending flowers to today?”

“Hmm.” He purses his lips as he thinks. “Melissa.”

“The card reading?” I act uninterested.

“You were incredible last night.”

I clench my teeth so hard I nearly break my jaw. “Is that it?”

“Umm.” He walks over to the window and looks down over New York.  
“Come away with me this weekend.”

My eyes linger on his back as sadness sets in.

I can't do this anymore.

Every time I send one of his girls flowers or gifts, I die a little inside.

I'm thirty-two years old and for seven years I have hung off Gabriel Ferrara's every word, waiting for him to notice me.

Waiting for even a scrap of his attention, for him to admit his undying love and sweep me off my feet.

But it's never going to happen, is it?

He doesn't see me like that, he is *never* going to see me like that.

I run through the rest of his day on autopilot, my mind off in another place, and I know that while he is away with Melissa this weekend, I will be at home wishing the time away until Monday so that I can see him again. So that I can be a personal assistant to his full and exciting life.

*Pathetic.*

“What are you waiting for?” he snaps.

I glance up, huh? Was he talking?

“I beg your pardon?” I ask.

He gestures toward his door, “Leave, I have work to do.”

“Oh... right.” I stand embarrassed, I walk toward the door.

“Gracie,” he calls, and I turn back to him.

“Yes.”

“Don't wear that perfume again.”

I frown in confusion.

“I don't like it.”

I bite my lip to hold my tongue and make my way out of his office. I take a seat at my desk, deflated.

*He doesn't like my perfume.*

Well, fuck him!

I do, asshole, and I'm going to slather it all over myself tomorrow until he throws up.

I might even spray it in his eyes for added effect.

One by one, the office fills up and then like clockwork, right at nine, his office door opens, and he marches out like the king of the people.

Gabriel Ferrara in all his bossy glory.

“Maria,” he barks.

“Yes, sir,” she stammers.

“Why isn’t the advertising report in my email?”

“I... I...”

“You what?”

“I haven’t finished it yet, I thought you didn’t need it until tomorrow.”

“You thought wrong.” He strides through the office and stops in front of Allen’s desk and his eyes roam over it. “Why does your desk look like a fucking dumpster fire, Allen?”

“Ahhh.” Allen begins to nervously collect the coffee cups and stacked papers. “Sorry, Mr. Ferrara. I’ll clean it now.”

Gabriel glances up and his eyes meet mine, he strides back to my desk. “Miss Porter.” He calls me Miss Porter in front of everyone, I’m only ever Gracie in private.

“Cancel my 1:30 appointment,” he demands.

He wants to extend his lunch date with fucking Veronica.

“Impossible Mr. Ferrara, I told you that already. Please listen,” I fire back.

You have *one* hour with her, mother fucker.

*That’s it.*

“Then you can go in my place because I won’t be at the meeting.” He marches back into his office and slams the door.

The staff all let out a collective sigh of relief that the tyrant is gone, I tap my pen on the desk while my blood boils.

Asshole.

The sun shines down on me as I sit in the park, my lunch break is the best part of my day. I love the fresh air, watching the dogs play off-leash and the birds fly around. I never realized how much I love nature until I hardly see any. As beautiful as New York is, it’s the city of concrete.

When I moved here seven years ago, I was going to work for twelve months, get some experience with a big firm and then move back to the suburbs somewhere.

Being infatuated with my jerk of a boss was never in the plan.

A dog runs up to me, and I bend and pat him, he’s big and brown. “Hey there, cutey.” I smile as I pat him.

His owner walks up, he’s in running gear and all sweaty. “He likes you.”

“I like him.” I smile.  
“Do you have a dog?” the guy asks.  
“No, I wish.” I keep ruffling up the dog’s ears. “What’s his name?”  
“Bernard.”  
I giggle, “Hello, Bernard.”  
“You should get a dog,” the guy tells me.  
“I will one day when I buy a house in the suburbs.” I smile.  
“One day?” He frowns.  
“When I get my act together.” I smile.  
Code for, when I get over *him*.  
“You should do it now,” the guy says.  
I shrug.  
“What are you waiting for, life is now. Decide what you want and take it.”  
I smile sadly, “I wish.”  
“Don’t wish for it. Do it. If you want a house in the suburbs, save and buy one. You never regret the things that you do, only the things that you didn’t.” He throws the ball and Bernard takes off after it. “Catch you later.”  
“Bye.” I frown after him as he runs off.  
*You never regret the things that you do, only the things that you didn’t.*  
Hmm.....

Eight twenty a.m. and I inhale deeply to calm the beast within.

I’m furious.

Like a cornered animal waiting to strike.

Mr. Ferrara didn’t come back from lunch yesterday. He messaged me to say he was taking the rest of the day off and to cancel all his appointments.

Must have been some lunch date, he’s never done that before.

This is it, she’s the one. It’s finally happening, and I have no one to blame but myself.

Stupid fucking fuck face.

I hate him, I hate everything about him.

I collect my diary and pen and knock tentatively on his door. “Come in,” his deep voice purrs.

I open the door and with one look at him, I melt into a puddle of patheticness. He’s just gotten out of the shower; the towel is around his waist.

Water is beading all over his skin and his black hair is hanging in curls. “Good morning, my Gracie.” He smiles.

My eyes drop to his big red lips, and I want to stab my eyes out with my pencil.

Anything to stop me seeing this perfection.

“Good morning, Gabriel,” I reply. “Last time I looked, I was not your Gracie.”

He lets out a deep chuckle, “You will always be my Gracie.” He walks to the coffee machine and begins making us coffee. “What’s on the agenda today boss?” He smiles.

I stare at him as a clusterfuck of emotion runs through me.

*Did you fuck her?*

Of course, you did, I slump into my chair at his desk.

I open his computer and see him bend and pick something up from the floor, “What’s this?” he asks.

“What?”

He opens a booklet, “It’s a pamphlet on Sardinia.”

“Oh, it must have fallen out of my dairy.”

His eyes rise to meet mine. “Why do you have this?”

“Because I never want to go there, what do you think?” I roll my eyes as I click through to his diary.

“You want to go to Italy?” he asks as if surprised.

“Of course, I want to go to Italy,” I scoff, “Everyone wants to go to Italy.”

He sits down onto the corner of his desk. “I’ll take you one day.”

I twist my lips annoyed; I hate you.... remember?

Get with the program.

“What, you don’t believe me?” he asks.

I exhale heavily, “Will you just get dressed.”

He holds his hands out as if surrendering, “You don’t like me in a towel?”

“No. I don’t actually,” I lie.

*I love you in a towel.*

“It’s off-putting having to watch you get dressed every day and frankly, very annoying. I don’t make you watch me get dressed.”

“Ahh.....” He laughs, “Wouldn’t that be something; Gracie Porter getting dressed in my office.”

I glare at him as I point to the coffee machine. “Make my coffee, Gabriel.

You have a very busy day seeing as you didn't come back from lunch yesterday." I widen my eyes to try and stop myself from throwing a tantrum on the floor.

He smiles, amused, and begins to make our coffee.

Calm, calm.... keep fucking calm.

"At 9:30 you have a teleconference with London." I begin to read through his day, from my peripheral vision I see his towel drop in his wardrobe, I glance up to see his bare bottom, and I die a little inside.

*I really can't do this anymore.*

I love him, completely and utterly love him, and I'm just..... I don't count to him at all.

The diary on the screen blurs as my eyes fill with tears.

Focus.

I continue to read out his day as he dresses in his power suit and puts his aftershave on..... and shock of the century, I didn't wear the perfume he hates.

"And that's your day." I smile as I close my diary, I stand and make my way to the door.

"Gracie," he calls.

"Yes." I turn back.

"Can you book me a hotel for the weekend, somewhere hot and heavy."

I stare at him, my heart breaking in my chest.

*Ouch.....*

"Of course, sir," I reply through the lump in my throat.

He gives me a sexy wink. "What would I ever do without you?"

*Fall in love.*

I fake a smile and walk out to my desk and slump in my chair.

That's it.

This is the sign.

I've got to get out of here.

As much as I love Gabriel Ferrara, I can't do this to myself anymore. I'm getting older, my biological clock is ticking, and I won't even date anyone because I'm so blinded by my fatal attraction to my boss. Nobody ever stands a chance while I work with him.

I need to start thinking with my head and do what I know is right for me.

Make a future without him.

My heart constricts at the thought of not seeing him every day.

How could I bear it?

But then, it could be worse. Staying here, watching him fall in love and marry, start a family with someone else is a torture I cannot deal with.

It's time to rip off the band aid, I need a fresh start.

I open google and type into the search bar.

### ***Properties for sale in Greenville, Maine***

I went to Greenville for a wedding a few years ago and I just fell in love with it, and for some reason, it's always been in the back of my mind that one day I'm going to move there.

Maybe, one day is now.

I scroll through the pages, wow, it's cheap, you can buy a three-bedroom home on a quarter of an acre for a fraction of the price of New York.

I scroll through the towns and options with my mind going into overdrive.

I could get a dog of my own.

I smile, and for the first time in a long time, hope blooms in my chest.

I'm going to do it.

Gabriel's office door opens, and we all jump to attention. I quickly close my real estate screen. He marches through the office, "Geoffrey," he snaps. "This isn't a fucking marathon. Hurry up."

"Yes, Mr. Ferrara," Geoffrey stammers.

Without another word Gabriel walks to the elevator and gets in, I stare at the doors as they close.

You're right Gabriel, it isn't a fucking marathon.

I'm going for a sprint.



## Grace

### Six months later

I PRINT the letter out and carefully fold it, with my heart in my throat, I slide it into the envelope.

Today's the day.

I've bought a house in Greenville and am moving interstate.

It's my last week working at Ferrara Media.

*My last week with him.*

I'm about to resign; I'll only have to work the four days until Christmas. I've already booked my owed four weeks' vacation leave for January and that will count toward my one month's notice that I must give.

I'm trying to make this as seamless as possible and in a perfect world, everything will run smoothly, but I know Gabriel is going to make my life a living hell once I tell him. I've already trained Greg to cover my position while I'm away and I'm hoping that he will get to keep my job in the new year. And yes, it's true, I know what you're thinking, and to answer your question, yes.

Yes, I did. I trained up Greg, do you really think I'm going to hand over Gabriel to another female PA to watch him get dressed every morning?

I'm moving on..... not stupid.

Right, this is it.

I let out a deep breath and knock tentatively on the door.

"Come in," his deep voice calls.

I push the door open and there he stands, wearing white briefs, his suit and shirt in his hand, I could just cry. I would give anything to see him get dressed at the end of my bed, even just once.

*Focus.*

"Good morning, Gracie," he says as he takes his suit pants from the hanger. "You look lovely today."

*So do you.*

"Morning." I smile, my heart is racing, and I just know this isn't going to go down well.

"Before I forget, can you drop down to Tiffany's and pick up a gift for

me today?”

Huh?

Actually..... good.... a reminder of why I'm doing this, thank you, universe, I needed this.

Hit me straight in the face with it.

“Sure thing, what am I getting?” I ask.

He pulls his shirt around his shoulders, “I don't know. Earrings, necklace.... some bullshit.”

I roll my eyes and take out my notepad, “Umm...what are we talking? Gold, silver.... platinum?”

He twists his lips, “Gold.”

“What's the budget?”

“I don't know, you pick.”

I exhale as I write it down, “Diamonds?”

“Fuck no.” He fakes a shiver as if disgusted.

I glance up, “Why, fuck no?”

“I'll only ever buy a diamond for someone I love.”

“You should probably buy yourself a few then,” I mutter deadpan.

He smirks as he buttons up his shirt. “I *am* the diamond.”

I roll my eyes, no shit, Sherlock. A diamond python. Looks pretty.... but if left unattended, will suffocate you to death.

“Okay..... if you say so.” I roll my eyes.

Thump, thump, thump goes my heart. I can't wait until the end of our meeting; I need to tell him now. I pull out the envelope and hold it out to him. “I've got something for you.”

He turns and his eyes fall to the envelope and then rise up to me.

“What's this?”

I swallow the lump in my throat. “It's my resignation.”

His face falls. “What?”

“I.....”

“No.”

“Gabriel.... I'm not asking for your permission. I *am* leaving.”

He snatches the envelope from my hand and tears it in half and then throws it in the rubbish bin. “You will do no such thing.”

*Here we go.*

He marches to the door and opens it in a rush, “Go back to your desk and get to work.”

“No.”

“Do. As. I. say,” he growls.

“No.”

“Do not tell me no!” He’s about to go into cardiac arrest. “You work for me, not the other way around.”

“You’re in your underpants, you know?” I gesture down at his body. “The whole office could walk in and see you.”

“I fucking know that,” he screams, but he must realize that I’m right and he slams the door shut again. He marches over to his suit as it lays on the chair.

“And where do you think you’re going to work, hey?” He picks up his pants and being so angry, he struggles to put them on. “Do you think you are going to work with a competitor? Because I call fucking bullshit.”

“I’m taking some time off for me.” I cross my arms as I watch his tantrum unfold.

He flicks his pants angrily in front of him. “You can’t afford to take time off.”

“Yes. I can.”

“Well, you can get this harebrained idea out of your head right fucking now, Grace,” he yells, he pulls his pants up so fast that his leg gets caught, and he nearly falls over. “Fuck off,” he cries in frustration.

I roll my lips to hide my smile.

“Get out,” he screams, the veins in his forehead are bulging, and he’s going red.

I let out a deep exhale, “There is no need to be this dramatic, Gabriel.”

“I tore up your letter, it doesn’t count. Take the day off and come to your senses.”

“That’s not happening, I’ve already emailed my resignation to HR and will be finishing up on the twenty-second of December.”

“What?” he explodes. “That’s four days away.”

“I know.”

“Get out,” he screams as he loses all control.

“Fine.” I walk out and he slams the door behind me, it echoes through the whole of New York.

Jeez.

I sit for a moment,

**Bang.**

I jump when I hear something hit the back of his door; I think it was his pen holder.

Ugh..... he's always so over the top.

Bzzzzz,

I push the button to answer my intercom, "Yes, Mr. Ferrara?"

"Get to work!"

I smirk, man.... I need caffeine, it's way too early for all this drama.

I make my way to the kitchen, and I hear the elevator ding.

Gabriel comes flying out of his office like a hornet.

"There is a gas leak on this floor, go away," he yells to Geoffrey.

"What?" poor Geoffrey stammers wide eyed. "Should I call someone?"

"I already have. Work from level two today," he barks. "Tell everyone else from this floor to work from there too, put a note in the elevator."

I pinch the bridge of my nose.... seriously?

This is going to be the day from hell.

I walk back out into the office with my cup of coffee.

"We need to work from level two today," Geoffrey tells me. "There's a gas leak."

"Oh, okay." I act oblivious. "I'll grab my things."

Gabriel narrows his eyes and points to his office, "A word Miss Porter," he sneers.

Geoffrey looks between us in confusion.

"It's okay Geoffrey, you go on without me. Mr. Ferrara has been sniffing too much gas, he's having a meltdown."

Geoffrey's eyes widen as he looks between us, "Oh no. Should I call an ambulance?"

"Go to level two, Geoffrey!" Gabriel screams.

Geoffrey scrambles to get his things and half runs to the elevator.

I sit down and open my computer, Gabriel paces back and forth in front of my desk, his hands are on his hips, and his eyes are crazy.

"Fine, twenty percent pay raise, that's it," he snaps.

I stay silent.

He continues to pace, "Hardball hey.... Twenty-five percent and that's it."

I begin to type as I act uninterested, "No, thanks."

"What do you mean no thanks?" he barks.

"It's not about the money."

“Everything is about money,” he fires back.

I roll my eyes and go back to my computer.

“Fifty percent pay raise and that’s totally fucking it.”

I keep typing. “No.”

“Double your wage and do not fucking talk to me again. This is daylight robbery,” he screams. “You are trying to fuck me up the ass, and I won’t have it.”

I was expecting a tantrum, but this is the living end. I shake my head in disgust, “Can you even hear yourself right now? The last thing I want to do is fuck you up the ass.”

He puts his hands on his hips and begins to pace again, his mind is racing.

I continue to pretend to type, and I do have to admit, him groveling is doing wonders for my confidence.

“Fine, don’t go to Tiffany’s today, it doesn’t matter. I won’t get her the gift.”

Huh?

I look up from my computer, *does he know?*

“Why would you say that?”

“That’s it, isn’t it?” he says.

“We are not having this conversation, Gabriel,” I snap.

“Yes. We. Fucking. Are.”

“I’m leaving because I’ve bought myself a house.”

He takes a step back, completely shocked. “You bought a house?”

I nod, “In Greenville.”

“Where’s that?”

“Maine.”

“Why the *fuck* would you buy a house in Maine?” He screws up his face in horror.

“Because..... it’s time.”

“For what?” he bellows. “To turn fucking Amish?”

“I want a family home with a garden and a dog, maybe even a family. Renting a tiny apartment in New York is never going to get me there.”

He blinks as he processes my words.

“I need to get out of New York, Gabriel.”

“New York is your home.”

“New York is *your* home. I’ve been here for eight years and I ....” I shrug, not wanting to elaborate on my loneliness. “I haven’t met anyone and

it's time for me to pull up my big girl panties and move on.”

He pauses for a moment as if processing my words.

“You're leaving me?” he whispers.

“I have to.”

His eyes search mine.

“I'm sorry.”

His jaw clenches and then without another word he marches back into his office and slams the door, it echoes as the walls shake.

Hot tears burn my eyes.

*You were supposed to beg me to stay.*

It's 6 p.m. and everyone has cleared out for the day, Gabriel hasn't left his office all day, not even for lunch.

I've been hoping to have a quick word on his way out, but there's still no sign of him.

The office is deathly silent, and I quietly knock on his door.

“Yes,” he calls.

I open it and peep in, “I'm going to head off soon.”

He doesn't look up from his computer, “Okay.”

I wait for him to look up at me..... he doesn't.

“Close the door on your way out,” he replies flatly as he picks up a pen and starts signing some documents.

Great, now the tantrum is over, he's going to give me the silent treatment. “Are you not talking to me?” I ask.

“I have nothing to say.” He keeps writing.

“Gabriel...”

He lets out an over-exaggerated sigh as he glances up, “What is it?”

“I don't want this to end badly.”

“It's already ended. You can finish now. No need to come back and work this week, I've signed the last of your leave documents. You are free to go.”

I get a lump in my throat as I stare at him... that's it?

*He really doesn't care.*

He keeps his head down as he writes, seemingly totally unaffected.

I will not cry in front of this selfish bastard, it's all about him.... it's always been about him.

I quietly close his office door and walk to my desk, I take my bag from

the drawer and with one long last look around the office, I feel my heart break.

Maybe he's right, maybe I *am* doing the wrong thing. Who's to say I'm going to like Greenville anyway.

*No.*

This is what he wants, if I give up on my dream now, I'm only cheating myself.

No pain, no gain.

The thing about being a glutton for punishment is this....

Nothing.

Turns out that I'm a total hoe for gluttony punishment and there is no excuse for my needy behavior. After tossing and turning all night, there's only one thing I know.

I am *not* a quitter.

Just as I said I would, I will work until the end of the week and then I'm going to the Christmas party looking shit hot and then I'm walking out on my terms. He cannot finish me up on a whim.

Who the fuck does he think he is, anyway?

Right on 8:20 a.m. I knock on his door.

"Yes," he barks.

I smirk, he's annoyed that I came back. Well... prepare to be angered, fucker. I open the door in a rush and step back as my eyes widen in horror.

He's making coffee in his briefs. Black, sexy Calvin Klein ones.

Lingerie for men.

He turns toward me, giving me a full frontal. "What are you doing here?"

I open my mouth to say something, but no words come out.

"Ahhh." My eyes bulge from their sockets. "What are you doing...." I put my hands up toward his body, I'm flabbergasted as my eyes drop to the bulge in his briefs. "Doing that," I gasp.

"I'm making fucking coffee, what does it look like?"

Something snaps in my brain, "It looks like you're being a poser, that's what it looks like. This isn't a Calvin Klein runway show, you know."

"Nobody has a gun to your head to look." He angrily tips the coffee into his cup. "I think you like what you see, that's what I think."

"Oh..... you think that!" I yell, infuriated that he's onto me. "I think

you're..... hideous."

"Hideous?" he screams infuriated. "*You're* hideous."

Something about my boss standing there in his underpants yelling that I'm hideous tickles my fancy, and I burst out laughing.

"Nothing is funny about this," he fumes. "Look away while I dress."

"Oh please, I've seen it all now," I scoff. "Stop acting frigid, we both know you're not." I sit down and open his computer.

"Apparently I'm too hideous to look at," he mutters as he disappears into his closet.

I smirk as I open his diary.

*Not really.*

I take one long last look in the mirror.

This is it.

My last time at Ferrara Media, the Christmas party at the office.

Most people stayed back straight from work, but I wanted to duck home and shower, try and pull a miracle together and make myself irresistible.

I'm wearing a red wrap dress, and I feel as self-conscious as fuck.

I never wear red; I have red hair and that's enough. Well, it's not really red, it's a deep auburn but you get the gist. It's out and full, my makeup a little sexier than usual.

The dress has a V neck that shows a peek of cleavage and a tie around the waist, it feels happy and Christmassy. I wanted to wear something different, he's never seen me in something like this before, so I wanted it to be wow.... not sure if it actually is, but that's the plan.

I am waxed, fake tanned and moisturized to within an inch of my life, who knew it takes so much work to look hot. I really need to step up my self-care routine when I get on the dating scene in Greenville.

I smile to myself, *the dating scene in Greenville.*

That's the first time I've let myself consider the possibilities of dating in my new life.

Apart from the leaving Gabriel part, I'm really beginning to get excited. I've been saving for years and with the cost of the house being cheaper than I thought, I have enough money to buy myself new furniture and do up the house exactly how I want it.

I even booked myself a trip to Hawaii next year, all by myself.

Who even am I?

Right, I collect my coat and bag, let's do this.

Carols ring out as the band on stage do their thing.

***Jingle bell, Jingle bell, Jingle bell rock***

The ground floor of Ferrara Media has been transformed into a magical wonderland. The Christmas decorations are over the top and waiters are walking around with silver trays of eggnog and champagne.

People are wearing bright dresses and Christmas outfits; laughter rings out as people chatter, and the mood is jovial and jolly. I'm glad I wore my red dress now; I feel better knowing that everyone else is dressed up too.

It was the last day of work today and everyone is pumped for the holidays and celebrating together.

I walk in and, feeling self-conscious, I flag down the first waiter I see, "I'll have one of those, please."

He smiles as I take a glass of champagne, "Thank you." I smile.

I wonder could I take two?

No, don't be an animal.

"Grace." I hear someone call, I turn to see Geoffrey and some of the others from our floor.

"Hi." I make my way over.

"Wow, you look gorgeous." Geoffrey smiles as he looks me up and down. "Like, really, really good."

"She does, doesn't she," says Paul.

"Who knew you were so hot, Porter."

I smile as I take a sip of my champagne.

*Awkward.....*

Fuck it.

Don't tell me this dress is going to bait the wrong one. I try to act casual as I look around, "Where is everyone?"

And by everyone, I mean your boss.

"The girls are at the cocktail bar and accounting is dancing. Marlene from level three flashed her tits on stage."

I giggle as I scan the room and then I stop still as my eyes meet Gabriel's.

He's wearing a dark gray suit, white shirt, Santa hat, and my heart on the bottom of his shoe. He gives me a slow sexy smile and raises his glass.

I smile and raise my glass right back.

He goes back to talking to the people he's standing with, and I watch him,

waiting for him to glance back over at me.

He doesn't.

My heart freefalls from my chest at his totally unaffected demeanor, it's not going to happen.... is it?

I don't know who I was kidding.

"Tell us about your new house." Geoffrey smiles excitedly, "I can't believe you're actually doing this."

"Me, neither" chimes in Paul.

I smile, grateful to the people who actually do give a crap about what I'm doing.

I drain my glass; I need to forget about my asshole boss and just enjoy the night.

It's 11:30pm and Gabriel left hours ago; he didn't even say goodbye.

Wow.

More than wow, *fucking* wow.

What a prick!

I'm going to get going, my eyes linger on the elevator, and I just.... I want to see my office one last time. I don't know why, but I do. I take the elevator to the top floor and make my way to my desk.

I look out over the view, it's so different at night up here, the lights of New York light up the entire skyline.

Unlike the busy and bustling daytime.

It's peaceful.

Serene.

I sit at my desk and look around.

So, this is what closure feels like. The end of one era and the beginning of another. I swivel on my chair, feeling proud of myself.

I did it, I made a plan and stuck to it. Did exactly what I needed to do.

I'm moving on.

I sit for a long time as I process everything that has happened over the last seven years, the dressing diary sessions, the fights and tantrums. The sarcastic snark. The laughter, the crush.

Oh.... the crush. I crushed hard, but in my defense, I am only human.

I walk to his office and open the door; it's darkened, lit only by a lamp and his bathroom light, I look over his desk and smile sadly. It's hard to

believe I'll never see him sitting here again. I run my hand over his desk, the back of his chair, over the keyboard that houses his fingers all day.

His presence is so strong in here, I can almost feel him.

"Couldn't even say goodbye," I mutter to myself as I cross my arms and look out over the view.

"Goodbye," a deep voice says.

I spin to see Gabriel sitting in the darkened corner of the room.

He's got an amber drink in his hand, his elbows resting on his thighs as he watches me.

"Gabriel," I gasp, "I ..... didn't see you."

He stands and puts his drink down—his eyes are dark and dangerous—and walks over to me and stands so that his face is an inch away from mine.

The air leaves my lungs as I feel the heat from his body.

"You didn't get your Christmas Bonus yet," he murmurs.

I swallow the lump in my throat.

He raises his hand and rubs the back of his fingers over my breast as his eyes follow.

*What the fuck is happening right now?*

"I....."

He puts his finger over my lips, "Don't. Say. Anything."

He puts his two hands around my waist and walks me back to his desk and then pushes me down onto it.

Thump. Thump. Thump..... goes my poor weak heart.

He puts his hand on my chest and pushes me back so that I am lying down.

I stare at him, unsure what the hell is going on right now.

His large hands glide up my thighs, and he slides my panties down my legs and takes them off.

Lifting them to his nose and inhales deeply.

Goosebumps scatter all over.

*Dear god.*

He pushes my legs apart and his eyes linger on my sex, "Hmm." He lets out an aroused purr as he parts the lips of my sex with his fingers. I can hardly breathe.

What the actual.....

With his dark eyes locked on mine, he bends and licks me.

Deep and intimate.

“You taste fucking good.”



## Grace

I NEARLY CONVULSE on the desk, and he licks me again. Deeper.... better.

I see stars.

His grip on my thighs tightens as he begins to lose focus, his stubble burning the most tender part of my body.

He reaches under his desk, and I hear the door click as he locks it.

*Oh hell..... Here we go.*

He lets loose and really lets me have it, licking and sucking.

He lifts my legs up over his shoulders as he drops to his knees.

“I have needed to do this.... for years,” he murmurs into me.

My back arches off the desk as he slides three thick fingers deep into my sex as his tongue flickers at just the right place. I let out a deep moan.

“Oh.... God.”

My body convulses around him, and he lets out an evil chuckle.

“You’re going to fucking get it, Gracie,” he warns. “Parading this perfect ass around my office all this time. Driving my cock fucking crazy.”

*Ahhh!*

“Do you know how many times I’ve jerked off in my office bathroom, imagining it was you on your knees, sucking me off?” He works me hard with his fingers, and I grip the desk.

Say something sexy..... anything.

Quick.

I’m so shocked by what’s happening that my mind is completely blank.

“I fucked myself with your computer mouse.”

He stills and his eyes rise to meet mine.

*Oh hell... that did not just come out of my mouth.*

His eyes flicker with arousal. “You fucked yourself with my computer mouse?”

I think he liked it.

“Aha....” I cringe, this could go either way.

He stands, “And what else of mine have you fucked yourself with?” He unzips his suit pants and pulls out his supersized cock.

My eyes bulge from their sockets, nothing as fun-sized as that.

He’s engorged and hard, thick veins course down the length of it and it’s a wonder there’s any blood left in his body.

“Ruler.”

“My ruler?” he gasps.

*Oh, for the love of God. Stop. Talking.*

“How dare you use my stationery in this manner.” He widens his eyes; he likes this game.

I do too.

“That’s right.” I grab a handful of his hair and drag him back down to me. “Less talking, more fellatio.”

He chuckles into me and kisses my thigh, “In a minute.”

Standing, he undoes my dress at the waist and tears it open, I lie on his desk in only my bra.

His eyes linger on my skin, he trails his finger from my jaw down between my breasts and then down to the lips of my sex.

“Pink,” he murmurs almost to himself as he spreads me wide. “I’ve watched a lot of redheaded porn to try and imagine what you’d be like.” His eyes rise to meet mine, “But nothing could prepare me for your beauty.”

“You’ve thought about my body.”

“Every fucking day.”

The air crackles between us.

“Have you thought about mine?” he asks.

“Every fucking night.”

“When you fuck yourself?”

I nod, “Yes.” I take his hand in mine, “When you stretch me open and give me what I need.”

He inhales sharply, his eyes flutter, “Gracie,” he whispers darkly.

I sit up and by his hand I pull him close, our lips touch as we kiss.

Softly at first, barely a whisper.

But it’s so good, he takes my face in his two hands and I kiss him again. He frowns against me as our kiss deepens.

An intimate kiss in a sea of arousal, it’s unexpected.

Confusing.

“Gabriel.”

“Don’t,” he cuts me off with another kiss, and I can feel his arousal grow, hitting fever pitch.

Something changed with our kiss.

The fire is out of control, a blazing inferno.

He pushes me back down onto the desk and with his eyes locked on mine

he unbuttons his shirt and drops his pants.

His huge dick springs free.

My eyes widen..... Is this really happening?

He bends and licks me between my legs and spits a little to lubricate me.

*Oh my god.*

He did not just do that.

Don't wake me up because if this is a fantasy dream..... I am all in. This is porn sex, big dick, spitting, fucking your boss on his desk, porn sex.

His skin has a sheen of perspiration all over and with his dark eyes fixed on me, he licks his lips in anticipation.

My arousal hits fever pitch.

He's just so..... Never have I seen someone so ridiculously hot.

He stands and swipes the tip of his cock through my swollen lips as we stare at each other.

Then, without hesitation, he pushes forward and slides into the hilt. "Ohhh....." My body ripples around his.

The air leaves my lungs at his size. "Good lord," I moan.

Thankfully all the stationery fucking has prepared me for this wide load.

Ouch.... That smarts.

I'm grateful for my trusty vibrator right now. Well done, Bob.

All our intimate nights alone have paid off, if I hadn't been fucking you all this time, I would have just been split in half.

He slowly pulls out and slams in hard.

Actually, I still might..... ahhhh, fuck.

I'm completely at his mercy like this.

He slams into me again and the air is knocked from my lungs, it's a wonder the desk doesn't break.

"Gabriel..." I whimper. "Easy..."

*Fucking hell.*

"Sorry," he mutters distracted, he slows, and in a more measured and controlled way he slowly loosens me up.

With his hands gripping my hip bones, we fall into a rhythm. Strong thick pumps, and I can't speak, I can't breathe, and fuck.... I can't even see.

"Oh fuck," he moans, his breathing is labored as he struggles for control, perspiration beads on his brow, "So fucking good, Grace." He pumps me hard. "So." He pumps me again. "Fucking." Another deep pump. "Good."

The sound of our skin slapping echoes throughout the office.

Looking up at him, doing that..... is too much, and I explode head first into an orgasm as I cry out loud.

His eyes roll back in his head, and he really lets me have it, deep punishing hits and then he holds himself deep and lets out a guttural moan.

We pant, trying to get precious air into our lungs. Both red and puffing, covered in perspiration.

He moves slowly to completely empty himself into me and then he pulls out. His chest rises and falls, and his eyebrows shoot up as if surprised. "Well....."

I giggle, "Well....."

He takes my hand and pulls me up to a seated position and then cups my face and kisses me, soft and tender. His lips lingering over mine.

*Oh.....*

"I've been wanting to do that for seven years." He smiles against my lips.

"And now that you have?" I whisper.

"I'm glad I didn't, we would never have gotten any work done." He grabs my sex and tugs it, "Having this perfect pussy in my office would have been a major distraction." He turns and picks up my dress.

I giggle, feeling relieved.

*Perfect pussy.*

"Get dressed." He kisses me quickly before collecting my clothes and passing them over.

"I'm a hot mess, I need to use the bathroom."

He gives me a slow sexy smile as he opens his bathroom door, "Okay."

Okay? I walk past him into the bathroom, and he closes the door behind me.

*Oh....*

He's not coming in then?

I was dreaming of having round two in his shower. I've only fantasized about it every day for seven years.

I clean myself up and quickly dress and then I stare at my flushed reflection in the mirror and smile goofily.

"Oh, my fucking god," I mouth to myself.

"I know," I mouth back.

I walk back out into his office to see him completely dressed in his suit, looking completely calm and unaffected. "We should get back to the party."

*Oh...*

“Okay.”

He pushes the hair back from my face as he stares down at me. “You were incredible.”

*Were* is all I hear.

He walks to his desk and takes a small, long black box with a black silk ribbon and passes it over to me. “Your Christmas present.”

I smile, “Thank you.” I go to undo the ribbon.

“Open it later, it’s a pen. Nothing exciting.”

“Oh,” I smile, feeling embarrassed. “I got you something, too.” I walk out to my desk and take out the oversized parcel.

He frowns as he looks down at it.

“Open it later, it’s a robe.” I shrug.

He smiles, “Thank you.”

It’s a robe with the letter G embroidered on it. The G is code for Grace so I can always be with him.... But I know he will think it’s for Gabriel because it’s all about him.

The gift that is sneaky but relevant.

He gestures to the elevator, “Let’s go.” He walks to the elevator seemingly unaffected. “I have to get back to the party.”

“Oh.”

He’s just going back to the party? What the hell?

*That’s it?*

I get into the elevator beside him, and we turn to face the doors. He straightens his tie and twists his neck as he stares straight ahead. My mind is racing a million miles per minute, what the hell is going on here. I glance over at him and rather than make eye contact with me, he looks down and fiddles with his cufflinks.

He’s hard and cold.

There’s no banter, no conversation.

Nothing.

The elevator dings as we hit the ground floor and the doors open. The party is in full swing now.

“Let’s get a drink,” he says casually as he looks around.

I stare at him, what the actual fuck is happening right now?

Did I just imagine that whole entire thing?

“No, I’m going to head off,” I reply coolly.

“Okay.” He puts his two hands into his pockets. “Do you want me to

walk you out?”

I'm taken aback that he would even have to ask that.

Wow.

“No. I'm fine.” I fake a smile. “Goodbye, Mr. Ferrara.”

“Goodbye, Miss Porter. My car will take you home.”

I glare at him, “Have a nice life.”

He tilts his chin to the sky as if angered. “You too.”

Ha, and there it is.

Proof.

That he's an asshole and I'm pathetic.

Well, fuck you.

I turn and walk out the front doors as my angry heartbeat sounds in my ears.

Fucking fuckface, big dick, fucking twathead, asswipe.

His blacked-out Range Rover is parked in his bay, and I storm over to it. His driver Mark is behind the wheel, and he jumps out when he sees me.

“Good evening, Grace.” He smiles.

“Hi Mark, could you give me a lift home?”

“Sure thing.” He opens the door, and I climb in.

“Did you have a good night?” He smiles as he pulls out into the traffic.

I fake a smile as I look out the window. “It was just okay, a bit boring if I'm honest.”

He chuckles, “Aren't all work Christmas parties?”

I stare out the window as New York flies by.

The sky is red as my apocalyptic anger begins to burn.

*Fuck. You.*



## Grace

I CANNOT BELIEVE that just happened.

All those years of longing and pining.... and damn it. I hate that the sex was as good as I imagined it would be. But... to act like that after it? Just, what the fuck?

The car comes to a halt as a traffic control holds up a stop sign for a delivery truck that is reversing onto a building site.

My mind is running at a million miles per minute, I'm shocked. Shockder than shocked, and shockder isn't even a word.

We wait for the delivery truck as I go over the last hours' events. You know what..... this is good.

This is the closure that I needed. The proof that man I stupidly pined over for all these years, doesn't even exist. He's not sweet and loyal underneath. He doesn't care about anyone but him selfish self.

Gabriel Ferrara is a bona fide bastard to the bone.

Just like the world thinks he is.

"Just going to take a call," Mark tells me, he's wearing a headpiece, so I didn't hear it ring.

"That's fine."

He taps his ear to answer. "Hello," he says, he listens for a moment. "Yes okay." He listens again. "Tomorrow is fine." He listens again. "Okay, I'll chase it up. Goodbye." He hangs up.

Must be Mark's girlfriend or something, I wonder what it's like to date someone like him where he's working all hours.

I go back to my daydream, also known as the murder plot.

You know what..... fuck him.

Who the hell does he think he is, seduces me in my office, fucks me on his desk, comes inside of me? He didn't even offer a fucking condom; I probably have an STD now.

I run my hand down my face in disgust.

Ugh.

What the hell, that was a complete fucking disaster.

Thank fuck I'm moving, and I never have to see him again.

I picture how cold he was, *do you want me to walk you out?*

No.

I want your dick to fall off, that's what I want, asshole.

How dare he have a good dick!

I'm infuriated.

Rich, handsome, endowed..... selfish, mother fucking fuckface.

I glance up, why is it taking so long to get home? Where even are we?

"What's this way?" I ask.

"I had to take a detour for the accident back there," Mark replies.

"Oh." I didn't even notice an accident, that's how preoccupied I am.

"Okay." I slump back into the seat and continue my pity party for one.

The car finally pulls up, "Here you go, Grace."

I frown as I peer out the window. "This isn't my house, Mark."

"Mr. Ferrara called and asked that you be dropped back at his house."

"He did what?"

The door opens from the outside and Gabriel looks down at me, "Get out."

"Go to hell." I spit.

He grabs my hand and pulls me out of the car, and I snatch my hand out of his. "Do *not* fucking touch me."

The doormen at his fancy building all turn to see the commotion.

"Up. Stairs," he growls in a whisper. "People are watching."

"I am *not* going anywhere with *you*," I whisper angrily. "You think you can treat me like that."

"What did you want? The whole office to know that we just fucked on my desk?" he whispers angrily. "Upstairs now."

I stare at him, my mind a clusterfuck of confusion.

*What?*

He grabs my hand and leads me into the building, but I'm too mad to focus on a thing, next minute we are in the elevator, the doors slowly close and we turn to face them.

My angry heartbeat is hammering in my chest, and I rip my hand from his, "Do *not* fucking touch me, Gabriel. I swear to God, I'm about to lose my living shit with you."

He smirks, clearly amused. "Anger is an aphrodisiac to me, Grace. I wouldn't push your luck; my control is hanging by a thread as it is."

I cross my arms and glare at the back of the doors, I have never been so infuriated.

"You're an asshole," I spit.

“I have been told that once or twice.”

“Per hour, no doubt,” I fume, “And just what the hell makes you think you can ejaculate inside of me without asking? How fucking selfish can you be? I probably have an STD now.”

“I always wear condoms; trust me, you do *not* have an STD,” he snaps. “And I know you’re on the pill, I just.... I couldn’t help myself.”

“How the hell do you know I’m on the pill?” I fume.

“I see them in your purse all the time and on occasion, I even look at where you are in your month.”

“What?” I explode.

“Well, some days you hate me more than others, and I want to know why?”

“Because you’re an asshole, Gabriel. That’s why I hate you more on some days. Today being a prime example.” I can hear my angry heartbeat in my ears. “I don’t even know why I’m here with you?”

“But you *are* here.”

“I was ambushed.”

He does smile this time, and it’s waving like a red flag in front of a bull.

“I’m not one of your bimbos, Gabriel.”

“I am well aware of that.”

“So why bring me here?” I huff.

I want answers, all of them. *Start talking, motherfucker.*

He stands silently as if contemplating my question and the elevator doors give a soft ding as we arrive at the floor. They open and my heart drops.

Fuck.

The elevator has opened straight into his apartment, or should I call it an.... Italian Coliseum.

He steps out of the elevator, but I stay still as I look around.

I’m too shocked to move.

“Out.” He grabs my hand and pulls me out of the elevator, and I stumble forward.

I swallow the lump in my throat as I look around.

*Jeez.*

I always knew that Gabriel Ferrara had expensive taste, but this is next level. The walls are a soft hue of gold. The ceilings are sky high and huge dark wooden archways interconnect the rooms. The arches remind me of something you would see in an historic church or something. Grand and

oversized.

The furnishings are all beautiful dark wooden antiques, and huge navy and maroon Aubusson rugs are on the dark timber floors. Beautiful artwork in huge gold gilded frames is hanging on the walls.

It's like a step back in time to a King's palace or something.

"Welcome to my home." His eyes twinkle with pride.

Suddenly I remember the mission, *that's right, I hate you.*

"It's nice," I lie through gritted teeth. It's not nice, it's fucking fabulous, but I'm not giving him the satisfaction of gushing over it.

His dark eyes hold mine.

"Don't look at me like that." I drop my shoulders to try and look tough and in control.

"Like what?" Before I can answer the question, he cuts me off. "Like I want to taste every inch of your skin?"

I feel myself melt into a puddle, don't start talking dirty, I won't stand a chance.

"Yes."

"But I do, Gracie. I cannot hide it. I won't even try to. I haven't even touched the surface with the things I want to do to you."

Arousal begins to steal my brain, "You shouldn't be such an asshole then," I whisper, that didn't sound convincing, even to me.

"Do you know me at all?" He smiles as he lifts my hand to his lips and kisses my fingertips. The hairs on the back of my neck stand to attention.

*Oh...*

I watch him softly kiss my hand. "That's the problem, I do," I whisper distracted.

He's just so.....

"I'm not your plaything, Gabriel," I say as I pull my hand from his grip.

"But I *am* your toy to play with." He smirks. "Only too happy to donate my body to science."

"You think I'm a science experiment?" I squeak.

He tips his head back and laughs out loud, and I bite my bottom lip to stop myself from smiling too.

"Would you like a drink?" he asks.

"That depends."

"On what?"

"On whether I'm getting an apology for your assholiness or not."

His eyes dance with delight, and I get the feeling that it is me who is the toy. “Gracie.” He takes me into his arms and drops his lips to my neck, “I am sorry for acting like myself at the office.” He bites me and goosebumps scatter up my arms, “I should have acted like someone else.” He teases me as he bites me again. “Because the very least you deserve is for me to act like I want the entire office to know my business.”

He bites me again and my body melts against his as I grab his hair.

Okay, what the hell is this?

He’s taunting me while not apologizing, and my body is lapping it up.

*Asshole.*

I take a step back from him, “I’d like that drink now, please.”

“Of course.” He licks his lips as his eyes hold mine and the darkness behind them sends a shiver down my spine.

I get the feeling that I’m going to get it.

Hard.

He walks into another room off the living room and down a corridor, and I tentatively follow.

Holy..... what the?

It’s a bar. A fully fledged huge bar, the walls are dark green, and the bar is a rosewood timber.

He begins to pour the drinks as my eyes look around the space.

There’s a pool table, a card table, even a roulette table. It’s like a damn casino in here. To the right, there’s a sunken room with a black circular leather couch around a pole.

Huh?

“What’s the pole for?” I ask.

“Strippers,” he says casually as he takes a sip of the drink he’s just poured.

I stare at him as my brain misfires, what do you even say to that?

“You have strippers to your house?” I gasp.

“Of course, I do. I certainly don’t want to go to their house,” he replies casually as he passes me a heavy crystal glass.

What the....

I’m shocked, shocked to my core. He has a fucking stripper pole in his bar room.

I take a sip and wince, so strong. Ugh it’s horrible. “Is this stripper juice?”

He raises his glass in the air with a cheeky wink, "Something like that."

"Figures," I reply dryly. I imagine all the hot women he must have here and insecurity creeps in. What could he ever see in me?

Damn it, maybe I do need this liquid bravery. I take a huge gulp, and it burns all the way down.

Ugh.... Oh, hell.

Perhaps tonight's stripper may be throwing up after drinking this, but whatever. He asked for it.

"Sit." He points to a stool at the bar and without thinking I do as he says and drop to the seat. He sits down beside me; his eyes linger on my lips as he takes a slow sip of his drink.

He's imagining something, God knows what, but it's perverted, I know.

I glance over to the sunken lounge and the pole; I imagine him sitting there watching a naked girl writhe and dance for him, it's too much to bear, and I snap my eyes away.

Seriously.... what am I doing here? He isn't in my league. We aren't even in the same stratosphere.

This is going to break me.

"What is it?" He asks.

"Nothing," I say softly.

He puts his finger under my chin and lifts my face to his, "Gracie?"

My stupid eyes well with tears, betraying my bravado act.

His face falls, "What is it?"

I put my drink down onto the bar. "I should.... I'm going to get going." I stand. "Have a merry Christmas." I force a smile, "It was really," I pause as I try to get a hold of my emotions, "nice working for you.

He stands abruptly. "Gracie, the night is young. Don't go."

"I'm not a stripper, Gabriel. I'm not even a player. The last time I had sex was over a year ago and this is...." I gesture to the room. "Isn't....." I shrug, embarrassed that I'm not the bad girl I want to be, that my heart is already broken after one cheap fuck on his desk. "It's not who I am. I'm sorry if I gave you the wrong impression." I rush back out to the living room with him hot on my heels.

"Grace."

I keep walking.

"Grace."

"Don't."

“Grace.” He grabs my hand and spins me toward him, “Forgive me.” He pauses as he searches for the right words. “I shouldn’t have taken you in there..... it’s been a long time since.” He pauses.

“Since what?”

“Since I’ve been with someone like you.”

*Someone who stupidly loves you?*

I stare at him, hating myself that I can’t forget tomorrow and be lost in the moment tonight.

He cups my face in his hands and kisses me softly, his lips linger across mine, “Don’t go.” He kisses me again, “Please?”

His demeanor has changed, somehow, he’s gone from hunter to something softer, more in tune.

“Sweetheart, I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have...”

His lips linger over mine and my feet start to float from the floor.

“Tomorrow, you’re leaving me forever.”

My hands rise to his face, don’t even say that. I can’t bear the thought of never seeing him again.

“Can’t we just spend the night together to say goodbye properly?” He murmurs against my lips.

*Oh...*

His kiss deepens, “I’ve wanted you for so many years, Gracie. Give me one night. It’s all I ask.”

“I can’t deal with this alpha bullshit, Gabriel,” I whisper, our foreheads touching.

There’s a tenderness between us, the one we have when we are alone in the mornings at work before the world gets in the way.

He kisses me softly, “It’s who I am, Gracie.”

“It’s not,” I whisper. “You’re in there somewhere, I know you are.” We kiss softly, “Show me the man I care about, it’s him who I want.”

He frowns as he kisses me as if internally torn, then he bends and in one sharp movement picks me up and with his lips locked on mine, he carries me up the hallway to a large bedroom. He walks into the bathroom and carefully puts me down and turns the shower on.

When he turns back toward me, the air is electric.

Finally, he’s here.

This is him, the man who I want.

His gaze is fixed on his hands as he slowly undoes my dress, it falls open

and he takes it over my shoulders and throws it to the side, his eyes linger over my body.

“Your skin,” he breathes. “It’s perfect, so peaches and cream.”

He bends and kisses me softly on the chest. “I’ve wanted you for so long, Gracie. I can hardly believe you are here with me, my love.”

*My love.*

My heart somersaults in my chest at his tenderness.

He slides my panties down my legs, his lips follow his hands as he drops to his knees in front of me.

I have an out of body experience, and it feels like I’m watching us from way up above. Him kneeling before me, my heart beating out of my chest.

And the alarm bells scream all around me. Like a car crash waiting to happen.

This is bad.

Gabriel being tender and loving is a new level of dangerous.

Because unlike the alpha hole who I love to hate, this version of him is.....

He takes my bra off while we kiss, and then undoes the buttons on his shirt. I take it off over his shoulders and am blessed with the sight of his broad muscular chest with a scattering of dark hair. I unzip his pants and he steps out of them, and I slowly slide down his briefs. His large, engorged dick springs free, and I bend and softly kiss him there.

Oh.... Physically, he’s a beautiful man, in every way.

This is weird, I know we’ve already done it.

But it feels like the first time.

He pulls me into the shower, soaps up his hands and carefully washes my body, up over my back, down my stomach and between my legs.

The feeling of his big hands, along with the hot water is so good and for the first time tonight, I feel the adrenaline slowly begin to leave my body.

We kiss, long and slow. Like we have all the time in the world and damn it, why isn’t he like this all the time. A little voice from deep in my psyche says something stupid.

*He’s been saving it for you.*

We stay in the shower for a long time, our hands roaming over each other’s. Exploring all the things we wondered about.

I look up at him and can hardly believe what I’m seeing, his dark hair hangs over his face, beautiful big brown eyes look down at me, and the water

is beading on his skin. “Bed,” he mouths.

“I want you,” I whisper. “God, how I want you.”

He smiles, his first genuine smile of the night and it sends my heart freefalling from my chest.

“Not half as much as I want you.” He dries us both and leads me up the hall to his bedroom and lies me down on the bed, he spreads my legs and lies beside me. We kiss as his fingers slide through my wet flesh, “You’re so fucking creamy,” he whispers. “Waiting for my cock.”

I smile into his mouth as we kiss, my hand finds his dick, it’s rock hard and pre-ejaculate is dripping from the end.

I can’t wait any longer.

“Now,” I whimper as he rolls over me. He nudges my opening as he stares at me, a beautiful warm glow growing between us, and it’s too much.

He’s too intense, my heart can’t take it.

Fucking hard on his desk was a lot safer than this, whatever *this* is.

He slides home, in one deep movement, and I cry out as my body ripples around him.

“Fuck..... Gracie,” he moans as if pained. “So. Fucking. Good.”

We hardly move, kissing and taking our time, and fuck.

This is next level.

His body is huge, stretching me to the hilt. His lips are on mine, and he stays close, holding me as he loves me.

He moans into my mouth, and I feel the telling jerk of his cock as he comes.

“I’m sorry,” he murmurs, “It’s too good.”

But I can’t focus on a word he’s saying because my own orgasm is hitting me like a freight train. My back arches from the bed as I moan into his mouth. He pumps me harder to let me work it out and we pant against each other as we kiss.

Holy hell.

Perfection.

It’s late, later than late.

I’m lying with my leg over Gabriel’s body and he’s facing me on his side.

We’ve been at it for hours; I’ve lost count of how many times we’ve come. What started out as gentle love making has turned into a rough and

ready fuck fest.

I loved every single minute of it.

We are freshly showered now, and I can hardly keep my eyes open.

Gabriel's fingers are slowly sliding through my swollen sex as he stares at me. It's not a sexual kind of fingering, it's a worship kind of touch. He's feeling where his body is inside of mine.

My eyes are so heavy and they slowly close, he slides his finger inside me and I flutter my eyes back open.

"Sleep sweetheart" he whispers. "You're exhausted."

My heavy eyelids close and I feel his fingers deep inside me, his lips on my neck.

"Hmm." I smile sleepily.

"Can I touch you while you sleep?" he whispers, his fingers slowly sliding in and out of my body. I'm so wet, my body is filled with him.

I smile sleepily, "Please," I whisper.

I battle to keep my eyes open, to keep up with his needs, but I can't.

Exhaustion takes over.

Dreams of technicolor.

I'm dozing through the ecstasy. Not awake and yet, not deeply asleep.

In between worlds.

Kisses and nibbles, fingers and tongue.

Gabriel's quivering breath in my ear, whispering beautiful things in Italian.

My body being rolled one way and then the other as it fills his every craving.

Pillows underneath me.

His tongue on my behind, his soft moans as he comes deep inside my body.

Again, and again..... he takes me.

He worships my body and uses it for his pleasure.

Unable to stop himself, he keeps going and going.

Taking it all.

Sleep robs me of my time with him, and I'm not sure if I'm dreaming or if this is truly happening.

But whatever it is, don't wake me up. This is the best night of my life.

I'm in heaven.



## Grace

I WAKE WITH A START.

The room is dark, but I can tell that it's morning, I sit up and look around. Gabriel is nowhere to be seen.

I drag my hands down my face as I go over the night we had.

*Wow.*

Incredible doesn't come close for words to describe it.

I go to the bathroom and stare at my reflection. I look a right wreck, racoon eyes and all. I tame down my hair and wash my face and throw on his robe that was hanging on the back of the door.

He must be making breakfast; a thrill of excitement runs through me, and I go in search of my man.

I walk up the hallway and out into the kitchen, no sign of him. I can smell freshly brewed coffee, he's been up.

I walk through the living room and the television is on CNN news. "Gabriel," I call.

"In here," he calls back.

I smile and make my way up another corridor; this apartment is so huge. I find him sitting behind a desk in his office, he's fully dressed in a suit and, on his computer typing away.

*Oh...*

I linger at the door and finally he looks up, "Good morning."

"You're working?" I frown.

"I am."

I know for a fact that he finished for the year yesterday. "I thought you finished?"

"You thought wrong." He smiles, but it doesn't touch his eyes and I instantly know that the sweet man who made love to me all night is gone.

Gabriel Ferrara is here in his place.

Maybe I'm imagining it, I walk over sit in his lap and he kisses me quickly. "Give me a minute to finish up here, Grace, and I'll take you home." He taps my behind to get me off his lap. "Go get dressed."

*What?*

I walk to the door, feeling awkward, not quite the greeting I expected. I make my way up to the kitchen and pour myself a cup of freshly brewed

coffee.

What the hell was that?

With my heart in my throat, I drink my coffee, I'm not getting dressed. We need to talk.

I wait and wait and wait....

Twenty minutes later he walks out, his back is ramrod straight and he looks me up and down. "I thought you were getting dressed."

My eyes search his and he snaps them away. He goes to the coffee machine and pours himself a cup of coffee, he can't even look me in the eye.

"Is this about me leaving?" I ask softly.

He stays silent and sips his coffee, his eyes are wild as if he's about to lose control.

*It is.*

"I guess," I smile hopefully, "I could rent my house out and...." I shrug. "We can't work together anymore, but...."

He walks over and stares out the window with his back to me.

Yes, why not? I could stay. After the magical night that we had, *I have to see where this goes.*

"I'll get another job, and I mean." I begin to pace as I think out loud, "I'll have to rent another apartment but as long as the rent covers my mortgage.... then."

He remains silent, his back still to me.

"I mean, of course, I'll have to go for a week to collect the keys and stuff, but I'll come right back."

"You need to go to Connecticut."

I frown, "Connecticut?"

"Wherever the fuck it is your moving to," he spits angrily.

I step back, shocked by his venom. "But ....

I thought?"

"You thought wrong," he cuts me off.

"What?"

He stays staring out the window, back straight, shoulders squared.

"Look at me?" I whisper.

He turns, "You need to go," he whispers.

"Why? I don't understand. We had the most incredible night?" I whisper.

"I know." His haunted eyes hold mine.

"Then why?"

“Because I can’t give you what you want, much less, what you deserve.”

“It’s okay.” I take his hand in mine and lift it to kiss his fingertips. “We can work out this dating thing together.” I smile softly.

“I can’t marry you.”

I frown, “Well, we just got together.” I chuckle, “Who knows what will happen?”

“I know.” His jaw ticks as it clenches, his eyes hold mine. “I am to marry an Italian girl.”

“What?” I drop his hand.

“My heritage is very important to me. I want a strong bloodline; I want an Italian wife; I want my children’s first language to be Italian.”

I step back from him, the sting from his words cuts like a knife.

“I’m sorry,” he murmurs. “I....” He pauses. “There is no excuse for my selfishness last night.”

“It’s the twentieth century, Gabriel. Why would you think that you need to marry an Italian?” I snap as my anger rears her ugly head.

“Because I want to, Grace,” he snaps. “Because I want to.”

His silhouette blurs.

“So.... last night....” I screw up my face in tears, “Meant nothing?”

“It meant everything,” he whispers, his nostrils flair. “It was a gift that we gave to ourselves. One that I will hold dear forever.” He pushes the hair back from my forehead. “You will never be forgotten.”

And I feel it coming, the pain, like a tidal wave, as my heart shatters into a million pieces. I turn and march up the hall to the bedroom. I rush into the bathroom and see my clothes folded neatly on the chair, and I put my hands over my mouth and sob. When he folded these..... he knew.

He knew that we never stood a chance, all along. He knew.

*My god.*

I’m such a lovesick fool.

I just need to get the hell away from him.

I throw on my dress and shoes and rattle through my handbag for a pair of sunglasses. I put them on and walk back out.

His eyes hold mine, “Gracie....” he whispers as he reaches for me.

“Don’t fucking touch me,” I whisper, I march to the elevator and push the button.

He stands quietly behind me, unsure if I’m about to take a swing at him.

The elevator doors open, and we ride to the basement in silence.

With my dark glasses on he can't see my tears, but the lump in my throat hurts so bad as I try to hold them in.

Once in the basement parking lot, he strides in front, and I follow him as pieces of my heart drop onto the concrete like confetti.

He gets to a fancy black car and the lights flash twice as he pushes the button. I don't even know what kind of car it is, only that it's cold.

Like him.

We drive to my place in silence, and I pray to God that he's going to change his mind once we get there.

How could he not, we are meant to be together.

He pulls the car to the curb outside my building, and we sit in silence. "Gracie...." he whispers. "Don't hate me."

I close my eyes, verging on a full meltdown. "Goodbye, Gabriel."

"Goodbye," he whispers.

I can't even see him through the tears, but I know I need to get the hell out of this car before I start to beg for his love.

*I would give anything.....*

I get out and slam the door and as I walk up the steps, I hear his sportscar roar up the road, he didn't even wait until I got inside.

I sob my way through the foyer and into the elevator. After the best night of my life, came the worst day in history.

He's gone.

The removalist loads the last box onto the truck and pulls the door down, "That's the last of it."

"Thanks." I smile.

"I'll see you in Greenville tomorrow?" he says.

"Aha." I step back from the truck, "Drive safe."

"I will." I watch on as the truck pulls out into the traffic, and I look up the road.

*He's not coming.*

It's been seven days since Gabriel dropped me home and for some reason, I thought he'd come back. In the back of my mind, I hoped that it was going to be a fairy tale romance, where the hero comes back at the last second to declare his love.

But he's not.

He's in Italy, he flew out the night after we were together.

I know this because I checked his email which confirmed the flight. The next day he changed the passwords to everything, pushing the finality of our situation home.

I get a vision of him in Italy with all of those beautiful Italian women and my heart twists, he's probably looking for his future wife right now.... that's if he doesn't already know who it is.

Of course, he knows, *she's not me.*

I drag myself back up to my apartment to start the final clean up, I'm staying in a hotel tonight and fly out first thing in the morning.

I can't cry anymore, there are no tears left.

My heart is an empty vessel, broken beyond repair. And the worst part is, that I miss him.

I miss him so bad that I can hardly breathe.

And I want to hate him, but I can't even do that right.

I look around my apartment and there are a few odds and ends on the floor, my red clutch purse is sitting on the counter, the removalist found it under the cushion on my lounge when they were moving it.

I walk over and throw it into my suitcase, I've packed a bag of clothes to get me through the next few days. It clunks as it hits the side, what's in there that is hard? I pick it up and look inside to see the black box with silk ribbon. "Gabriel's pen." With all the heart breaking, I completely forgot all about this. I quickly undo the ribbon, "Maybe he had it engraved." I open the box and frown, there's another felt box. I open that and gasp, I take it out and my eyes widen, it's a diamond tennis bracelet. He bought me a diamond.

Not one diamond, but an entire bracelet.

His words come back to me; *I'll only ever buy a diamond for someone I love.*

"What?" I whisper. "The hell?"

There's a small card underneath, and I take it out of the envelope.

***To my Gracie,  
Forever yours,  
Gabriel  
xo***

I screw up my face in tears as I hold the bracelet to my chest, he loved

me.

In his own messed up way, he loved me.

## Six weeks later

Greenville is new, different to New York. I've met a few people and have taken my time unpacking, trying to find a new normal.

I still suffer from my affliction; I miss him every day.

I haven't spoken a word to Gabriel Ferrara, he never called, and I couldn't bring myself to talk to him now, even if I wanted to.

He broke something between us that can't be repaired.

I wear my diamond bracelet all the time, I will never take it off.

It is my most prized possession and as fucked up as it is, knowing that he did care, makes me feel a little better.

I hope he suffers too.

I sit on the side of my bathtub and stare at the stick in my hand.

"Please be negative, *please be negative.*"

I'm late, and I shouldn't be because I was on the pill.

With my heart in my throat, I watch as two lines light up and I put my hand over my mouth in shock.

No....it can't be.

I do another test and get the same result.

Oh my god.... no, this can't be happening.

Gabriel's words from that morning come back to me, loud and clear.

*It was a gift that we gave to ourselves.*

Did he know?

I put my hand over my stomach and look down at myself..... a baby.

What the.....

I'm having his baby.

A little piece of him who I can love forever.

*Oh....*

I smile softly.

I imagine the future with just the two of us and a weird sense of calm falls over me.

I can do this, bub and me will work it out.... together.

We can build a new life for the two of us.

Gabriel gave me the ultimate gift.

His child.

**THE END.**

Full book coming in 2024.