



THE
Kiss

PLAYBOY PACT SERIES
Sealed with a kiss...

WALL STREET JOURNAL & USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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PLAYBOY PACT BOOK 1

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AUTHOR NOTE

Hey guys! I'm so excited and terrified that The Kiss have officially landed on kindles! I've had a few readers ask what makes this release different, or these books, and I have an answer for that. But first... brb gonna go throw up.

Ok good now!

This is my first jump into Rom Com, while I'm so so blessed to have so many readers who love my angst ridden books, I wanted to try something new and different, and scary. I know with author's names and brands come certain expectations which is frankly terrifying, so I thought it would be helpful to explain that these books are meant to be funny, light, exciting reads that leave you laughing out loud one minute and fanning yourself the next. The angst I'm known for still exists in these books but it took more of a co-pilot role while the comedy and sexy times took the wheel! I hope you take a chance on these books and take another chance on me! This is a friends to lovers rom com with some drama!! Enjoy the tears of laughter which I have still received from a few readers.

And remember we all need a bit of light these days!

Thank you and I hope you love Leo and Mila!

Love you all, M!

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DEDICATION

Bossman.

Thank you for being my inspiration in all my hero's. You are the reason I write smartass males.

PROLOGUE

—Leo—

There I was...

Sitting on her fucking swing in the middle of the night, freezing my balls off. It was October, and it was already cold in Tennessee. There I sat for the last hour, waiting.

For her.

We'd spent half our lives on this very swing set, me pushing her, talking about nothing... and everything.

That was our friendship.

Our dynamic.

Our relationship.

We were friends—*best friends*.

It was easy.

Simple.

Comfortable.

Like Donna and David, Cory and Topanga, Monica and Chandler—I don't know why I was comparing our friendship to a bunch of 90's chick flick shows but here we were. She made me watch them all on Hulu.

Fuck my life.

She was my neighbor for as long as I could remember. The person I counted on to be there for me, aside from my other three best friends who were more like family too. The difference between her and them...

She had tits.

An ass.

A pussy I wanted to have sit on my face.

I know, I know, so very vulgar. But hey, that was me. I was a guy, a dude, I scratched my balls and belched on command. I was a man who said and did what he wanted. No questions asked.

I didn't do long term.

I didn't commit.

I didn't fall in love.

I hooked up.

I messed around.

I plowed my hose into any garden that needed a good weeding.

To put it in laymen's terms, I fucked.

A lot.

I enjoyed hooking up. I was damn good at it, and my reputation preceded me. In fact, my big dick was the talk of the town. Big dick Leo, it was what everyone knew me as. Not really, but a guy could dream. Don't shit on my parade, okay? This was my story and in my story my cock was king.

Mila saw who I was, how I was. It was never a problem or an issue, more of an eye roll, and a shake of her head.

She accepted me.

Hell, she even helped me score chicks and seal the deal sometimes. She was the best wing woman, better than my boys. Shit, our setup went hand-in-hand. I helped her score dick, get laid, go on dates.

We had a system.

An understanding.

An unspoken arrangement.

We were there for each other, through thick and thin. Nothing could break our tight ass bond.

At least I thought so.

Everything was fine.

Perfect.

No drama.

No bullshit.

Just Leo and Mila.

Mila and Leo.

Until she started dating one of my boys. Yes, one of the three best friends I just spoke about. He asked me for permission, but it didn't matter. She wasn't mine. I didn't claim her.

We were just best friends. However, a guy and a girl couldn't just be close without emotions getting involved, right?

Jealousy.

Possessiveness.

Mine.

Yeah, I felt all of that. For the first time in my life, Mila wasn't merely a girl I trusted and hung out with on a regular basis.

She had become...

The woman I was in love with.

I was ready to break the almighty Playboy Pact.

The one I created, stood by, and lived since I was sixteen years old. For the last six years of my life, it was my code.

My allegiance.

It represented loyalty to my other three best friends to stay single and never fall in love.

It was my idea.

Brilliant fucking idea that was!

To form unity.

A bond that could never be broken. A connection so strong that no girl could ever come in between us.

God, I sound like a fucking pussy.

In order to explain, I was going to have to go back to the beginning. The very beginning that fateful night all those years ago, the night that would change the course of our lives and have me sitting on a swing set in the middle of the night, my balls now completely numb from sitting on this cold ass swing.

Waiting...

For her.

CHAPTER 1

Six years ago

“How’s he doing?” I asked my best friend Leo, sitting next to him on the couch, which looked more like a bed, in his cabin while he played Halo on Xbox.

Him and his father spent months building this cabin on their land. They owned twenty acres filled with beautiful trees and greenery. Their home was massive, a full staff was needed just to keep up with the landscaping. Leo’s dad was the best general contractor in our small town of Monteagle, Tennessee. Everyone knew who Mountainside Building belonged to. He had more work than he knew what to do with, and jobs were piling up on a daily basis.

This was why he was hardly ever around, and I was pretty sure this was why he appeased Leo and built this cabin for him to have a place we could all hang out. We were on the other end of his parent’s land. We could literally do anything and they’d never know. Leo was an only child and he was spoiled because of it.

We called it a treehouse, given it was surrounded by tons of trees. It was bigger than a treehouse but still kind of built like one. It was about six hundred and fifty square feet. When you walked in, you felt the vintage vibes Leo wanted. He had an appreciation for the retro era. The cabin was a big open room and the kitchen was to the left from the front door. Vintage turquoise metal cabinets and an island shaped like an aircraft wing that Leo pulled inspiration from a 1950’s plane was what caught your attention first. There was a full-sized stove and oven, mid-sized refrigerator, and microwave. The kitchen was fully stocked with everything we’d ever need, from pots and pans to dishes and silverware.

The living room was in the middle of the open space and it was just as colorful as the kitchen with wood walls, colorful

decorations, and accents. The apple didn't fall far from the tree in the Hawkins genes, Leo had an eye for building like his father, grandfather, and great grandfather before him. He came from a long line of carpenters. A flat-screen TV was above the gas fireplace and the couch was a day bed that converted into a queen-sized mattress with a coffee table in between the couch and television.

To the right of the front door, there was a bathroom and a bedroom next to it that had its own flat screen TV and queen-sized bed which would be the hook-up room I was sure. This place would definitely be a party pad.

One of my favorite spots in the treehouse was the ladder that was to the right of the television. There was a small nook area above with a bed and window that overlooked the forest that engulfed the cabin. The glass doors that led to the porch, hot tub, and lower deck was another one of my favorite places. It was smack dab in between the bedroom and living room, you could once again see the woods that were just as scenic as the treehouse itself.

Leo built a firepit with five green lounge chairs to host bonfires and make s'mores. It felt like you were camping when you went outside. Beside it was a swing he said was for me. I had a jungle gym we grew up playing on, built off my back porch, and Leo spent hours pushing me on those swings.

It was our thing.

"His parents are getting a divorce, Lala. That's like a swift kick in the balls."

He'd been calling me Lala since we were in diapers together. He couldn't pronounce Mila when we were babies and Lala stuck.

"Yeah..." I sighed. "I feel bad for him."

"We'll get him laid tonight, it'll help smooth it over." He jolted to the left, hitting the button on his controller for more ammunition to blow on the television screen.

I shook my head. "So, sex solves everything?"

"For a minute it does."

“A minute? That’s all you can hold out, Leo?” I shook my head again, smiling wide. I could see him looking at me through the corner of his eyes with amusement in his gaze.

This was how we were with each other. No one at our school understood our friendship. Everyone thought we were hooking up behind closed doors, but it wasn’t like that for us. We were neighbors and grew up together. Our moms were pregnant at the same time and bonded over that fact. Since then, we’d spent most of our time together. I didn’t know a life without Leo in it.

We were best friends.

“A minute is about the average time it takes for a male to think of something sexual, so yeah. That sounds about right.” He grinned at me and I rolled my eyes.

“I honestly don’t know who’s worse out of the four of you.”

“Well...” he hesitated, concentrating on his task at hand. Shooting three opponents in the face before he continued on, “It depends on who you ask. If you ask any female in this region of Tennessee? It’s definitely me.” He paused again, muttering under his breath, “Cocksucking bitches,” referring to his game. “Now if you ask guys from our opposing high school, then it’s Cain, because everyone knows he fucks anything that walks.”

“Bro,” Cain interrupted, walking into the cabin with Ashton and Sawyer right behind him. “I resent that. I don’t fuck freshman girls. They get too clingy for my liking.” He grabbed a soda from the fridge.

While Sawyer called him out, “What about that freshman Laura you screwed last month?”

Cain looked up at the ceiling, narrowing his eyes like he was thinking about something. “Laura... hmmm... Laura...” he accentuated, shaking his head. “Nope. Name doesn’t ring a bell. I don’t know a Laura.”

“And you just proved my point,” Leo chimed in, making me chuckle.

“Oh! Do me next, Mr. Know It All,” Ashton insisted, grabbing the other controller off the coffee table and hitting the button to request in the game.

Leo approved his request, adding, “A guy who’s still trying to find his dick.”

I choked on my drink.

“Mila.” Ashton glanced over at me. “Why don’t we go into the other room and you can tell Leo how easy it was to find my cock because it’s *so fucking huge*.”

“Uhhh...” I mocked. “I can think of a hundred other things I’d rather do than see your dick.”

“A hundred? Damn,” Ashton scoffed out. “My dick is offended. It might be hiding now.”

I laughed, I couldn’t help it. These guys were hilarious with their constant smartass banter. This was how they’d always treated me, like one of the guys. However, Ashton, Sawyer, and Cain weren’t my best friends, they were Leo’s, and they constantly questioned our friendship as well.

“Now I feel left out,” Sawyer stated, pulling himself up onto the kitchen island to sit down. “What am I?”

Leo killed two more enemies and smiled. “Yours is pretty obvious, dumb shit.”

“What’s that supposed to mean, jackass?”

“It means, anywhere we go, everyone knows you. Life of the party, Sawyer. Usually drunk, fucking shit up, and messing around with more than one girl in a night.”

Sawyer shrugged. “I can’t help I gravitate towards the center of attention. It’s natural for me. Plus, girls throw themselves at me. What the fuck am I supposed to do, say no? I’m not a pussy like you.”

“Sawyer!” Leo exclaimed. “I can’t even cross county lines toward Tullahoma to go hiking without worrying about my tires getting slashed because you thought it was a good idea to fuck around with twin sisters.”

“Hey! You said go for it!”

“Only if you were ready to deal with the consequences. Shit!” Leo threw his controller on the coffee table. “You assholes just made me lose.”

“You lost because I started playing and kicked your ass,” Ashton countered, leaning to the left, trying to take out his next opponent.

“The fact that you guys play video games like we’re still in middle school should be the bigger issue here.” I took another sip of my sweet tea.

“Playing a video game?” Cain questioned, side-eyeing me. “We’re saving the world one game at a time.”

“What?” I challenged. “That doesn’t even make sense.”

Ashton bumped my leg with his knee. “Makes perfect sense, Mila. We’re preparing for the zombie invasion.”

“Oh my God,” I murmured. I was over hearing about the zombie invasion. “Zombies are not invading. You know what?” I held my hand out in front of me. “The only one of you hoe bags I can stand is Sawyer.”

“I don’t know why,” Leo said. “Last year he slept with the only female friend you have or had...”

Cain defended Sawyer, “She was hot. Plus Mila, that was kinda your fault, we told you it was a bad idea to have a girlfriend. You started bringing her around and it was only a matter of time before one of us nailed her.”

“More like railed her,” Ashton added.

“I hate all of you,” I jokingly remarked. “I have no girlfriends because of your reputations. They don’t trust me.”

“Sorry not sorry,” Cain somewhat apologized.

I took a deep breath, changing the subject. “At least you look like you’re handling the split okay, Cain. I’m sorry about your parents.”

His demeanor immediately changed, and I regretted bringing it up.

Ashton nodded at me. “Way to kill the mood, Mila.”

“I’m sorry, Cain. I didn’t mean to—”

“I have a great idea,” Leo stated out of nowhere, bringing all our eyes over to him.

It was one of those moments where you knew something was about to go down. I just never imagined the next words out of his mouth would have such an impact on all of us.

Especially *me*.

I hated seeing my friend in pain. It was obvious he was hurting and trying to play it off like he wasn't. I wanted to be there for him, be a good friend. Cain was more like my brother.

They all were.

“Why do I feel like whatever you're about to say is going to be life-changing?” Mila recognized.

I glanced at her. “Because, my lovely Lala, you know I'm wise beyond my years.”

“You still think James Bond is a real person.”

“He's not ready to talk about Sean Connery, Mila. None of us are,” Sawyer explained.

“It's too soon,” Ashton added.

“Oh my God. I'm surrounded by idiots. How many times do I have to tell you Sean Connery is an actor? He's not James Bond.”

Our eyes went wide.

“Don't you ever say that again!” Cain ordered in an offended tone.

“You respect the dead!” Ashton demanded, following his lead.

“Guys!” I shook my head. “I was having a moment here. Can I continue?”

The guys nodded while snapping their attention back to me. I looked at my boys and without any hesitation, I said the six words that would change the future of our lives, “We're going to make a pact.”

They peered back at me like I was crazy and hey... maybe I was. All I knew was that these guys were like my family and I was going to make sure we'd stay that way.

“What kind of pact?” Ashton asked.

“A lifelong one. The Playboy Pact,” I replied.

Cain chuckled, “You sound like a needy chick.”

When you’re sixteen years old you think you know everything, we didn’t.

I sure as shit didn’t.

I thought what I was about to say was going to ensure we stayed tight no matter the girls who may come into our lives. Mila didn’t count. She was my best friend and that was the end of it.

I nodded. “Bros before hoes.”

“Guys before lies,” Sawyer uttered.

“Masturbate before asking her to date.” Ashton smiled.

“Dicks before tits,” Cain asserted.

“And we’re gonna make sure of it,” I professed, finally announcing what I thought was in our best interest, “We’re going to make a pact to stay single and never fall in love.”

Never once thinking that my girl Mila...

Would make me regret those words that felt so right at the time.

CHAPTER 2

Present time

“Can you please hurry up and finish unpacking?” I begged, laying on Mila’s bed in the house we rented with the guys.

It was a five-bedroom waterfront property right on the beach, with an infinity pool, hot tub, and a full staff to cook for us whenever we wanted. I wouldn’t even have to try to get laid. All I had to do was find a girl on the beach, point to where we were staying, and panties would be dropping in a second.

For the next week, we were living the good life in Cancun thanks to my parents. It was part of their graduation present for me. In a few short months, we’d be graduating from college and I’d start interning at my old man’s company.

Since the day I was born, my life was set out for me.

“Lala, I’m growing old here. Why must you unpack right when we get to places? I mean it’s not going anywhere. Your shit will still be right there in your suitcase in the morning. I promise.”

“I’m not a disgusting man-boy like you guys are. I need order in my life. Thank God there’s a maid here to help clean up after you and your herd of women.”

Cain walked into her bedroom, pointing toward her balcony. “There’s a herd of women tanning topless on the beach as you speak, Mila.” He grinned, only looking at her. “So, do we get to see your tits this trip too?”

“I hear when they are topless they are called a flock...” She cocked her head to the side. “Or maybe that’s geese? I always get them confused.”

“Or we could just call them pussy,” Ashton added, walking in, going straight to the balcony to see the tits on display.

Sawyer leaned against the doorframe, giving his two cents. "I prefer wet pussy, thank you."

Mila shook her head. With a smile on her face, she nodded to Cain. "I do appreciate you recognize I have tits, but not enough to share them with you and the rest of spring break crowd."

"You're such a downer, Mila. You need to let those puppies breathe, you know? Give them a spin around the dance floor, let them bring all the boys to your yard."

She shook her head at Cain again. "I do just fine without having to show my chest, but thanks for your concern. I'll take that into consideration ummmm... never."

I laughed, standing up. "All right, I'm dragging you out of this room, Mila. You can unpack later or tomorrow, or God forbid, not do it all."

"Leo—"

"I know, I know, the travesty."

"Hey!" Ashton clapped his hands. "I have an idea. Let's all take Viagra and rock out with our cocks out."

"What?" I replied, jerking back.

"Viagra. You know that pill that makes you stay hard for ___"

"I know what it is, dipshit."

"Well." He threw one in his mouth. "You got four hours to get white girl wasted and still fuck like a God."

Her eyes went wide, and Ashton shook his head.

"Don't judge me, selfish titties. I'm not here for a long time, I'm here for a good time, and I know how whiskey dick can really fuck up a vibe. I'm here to party and I'm just looking out for my boy. He needs to perform, and he needs to do a damn good job at it. I have a reputation to uphold."

"Oh. My. God," Mila exclaimed. "What did I sign up for?"

I grinned, winking at her. Speaking the truth, “The best time of your life, Lala.”

—Mila—

Later that night, we stood at the bar ordering drinks until I saw this girl walk by that I knew was Leo's type.

Batter up.

"Wow." I stood in front of her. "I seriously love your top. Where did you get it?"

"Oh, thanks." She smiled. "I've had it forever."

"It looks amazing on you. I'm Mila by the way and this is my friend, Leo."

They locked eyes.

Leo was sitting on the barstool with his elbows leaning against the bar, staring at her as if she was the only woman in the room. It was an expression I recognized all too often, and it was always mind-blowing how these chicks just ate it up like no man had ever gazed at them like he did in that very moment.

It was pitiful.

Truly, utterly, pitiful.

She never stood a chance.

"Hi." She extended out her hand. "I'm Mattie."

"I know who you are, baby."

She giggled, hearing the term of endearment.

Barf.

He called all his conquests baby. They thought he was being sweet when in reality he already forgot her name. Actually... I don't even think he paid attention to what she just said, he was too busy thinking about what she'd look like when she was riding his dick.

"Buy me a drink?"

"How about a dance?"

Her smile grew. Again, she thought he was genuinely interested in more than what was in between her legs because he was asking her to dance. All he wanted to do was make sure she could grind on his dick the way he liked.

Leo was picky.

He had standards for the women he bedded. In other words, he was a pig.

“I’d love to dance with you,” she practically panted.

He didn’t waver, standing and grabbing her hand, leading her to the dance floor. I watched for a few seconds before Cain threw his arm around my body, tugging me to his side.

“Mila, you’re the best wing woman ever,” he acknowledged. “Let me buy you a drink.”

“I’m not going to have sex with you, Cain.”

He put his hand on his chest. “I’m offended. Can’t a guy just buy a girl a drink?”

“Yes. A guy can, not a man whore like you.”

He peered around the room, eyeing Leo and then Ashton who was already making out with some random in the corner of the bar.

“Am I not standing here with you while your best friend seals the deal and Ashton—”

“Gets herpes.”

“Bite your tongue, Mila. That is not the gift that keeps on giving.”

I chuckled and rolled my eyes. “I’ll take a—”

“Margarita with Don Julio tequila and salt around the rim.”

I jerked back, surprised. “You know what I drink?”

“I’ve only heard you order it about a thousand times.”

“Huh, interesting. Considering most of the time your tongue is down someone’s throat while I’m ordering my drinks.”

“What can I say?” He shrugged. “I’m a great multitasker.”

I laughed.

“No really, it’s on my resume.”

“Is that next to your low IQ?”

“As a matter of fact it is, but the size and girth of my cock on the sentence below makes up for it.”

“I see.”

He smirked. “Mila, you haven’t seen anything yet.”

I wasn’t sure how much time went by, but I swear the night flew at rapid speed and before I knew it, I was drunkity, drunk, drunk, laughing my ass off at Cain’s antics as we walked to wherever we were going.

He opened the door for me. “Oh, what a gentleman.”

“I do what I can.”

I walked in right as Leo was walking down the stairs.

“Leo!” I threw my arms around his neck. “You’re here! We’re here! That’s so awesome! Let’s get a drink!”

“I think you’ve had plenty,” he stated in a serious tone.

“Nonsense!” I pulled back, staring into his eyes. “Leo, why do you have three heads?” I pointed at them. “One, two, three... can you please stop swaying? I’m trying to count here.”

“That’s definitely you that’s swaying, Mila.”

“Why are you being the party poopers of the poopers? You’re king poopy party!”

“Holy shit,” he scoffed out, looking at Cain. “How much did you let her drink?”

I stepped back. “Whoa.” Grabbing the wall for support because the floor was moving, I reminded, “He didn’t let me do anything, sir. I am an independent woman who does whatever she wants. Do you understand the words that are coming out of my mouth?”

“Do *you*?” Leo countered.

“Yes, I do. I just said...” I grabbed my stomach, suddenly feeling queasy. “Ugh, I think I’m going to be sick.” Hauling ass down the hallway, I called out, “Where’s the bathroom? I need the bathroom!”

Sawyer opened the door, and I was on my knees in front of the toilet hurling into the bowl before I could help it. I stayed there with my head on the seat for what felt like hours but was probably only a few minutes.

“You all right?” Leo questioned, walking into the bathroom, shutting the door behind him.

“I think I threw up my liver.”

He chuckled, slowly moving my head and body on his chest before gently laying me back down on what felt like a blanket and pillow.

“I think I’m dying.”

“You’re not dying but you’re definitely going to be hungover as fuck tomorrow.”

“Ugh... make the room stop spinning.”

He grabbed my foot and laid it on the tile. “That should help. It will make it seem like you’re on solid ground.”

“How do you know?”

“I’ve been where you are many times, Lala.”

“Thanks.” I peeked my eyes open. “You can go back to Katie or Maddy or whatever-ey her name was.”

“I thought her name was Meagan.”

“Well, you can go back to Meagan.”

“I’m good. I’d rather be here with you.”

“Did you already get laid?”

“Yeah, I’m over her now.”

“Was she good?”

“Eh. She was all right.”

“Didn’t rock your world?”

“No, but I rocked hers. She’s passed the fuck out right now.”

“Cocky pig.”

“What? I was a gentleman, I made her come first.”

“You’re just a regular Casanova, Leo Hawkins.”

“I aim to please. Hopefully, she’ll wake up and leave and then I can avoid the whole morning after situation.”

“You’re horrible.”

“But you love me anyway.”

“I don’t know why.”

“Because I’m awesome.”

“Ugh, I think I’m going to be sick again.” He helped me sit up and I blew more chunks into the toilet.

And this was how we spent our first night on spring break. Me getting up close and personal with the porcelain God while Leo held my hair and rubbed my back...

Staying with me the entire night.

CHAPTER 3

—Leo—

The next morning, I handed Mila three ibuprofen with a glass of water. “Here. Make sure to drink all of this.”

“Ugh... my head is pounding.” Her hand shifted from her head to the mattress around her. “Am I in my bed?”

“Yeah.”

“How did I get here?”

“I carried you.”

“Why don’t I remember this?”

“You were knocked unconscious.”

She sat up, grabbing the pills and glass out of my hands. “Why am I only in my bikini?”

“You threw up on yourself. Actually, you threw up on both of us.”

Her eyes widened as she swallowed the pain relievers. “Oh man, I’m so sorry, Leo.”

“You owe me.”

She didn’t really owe me. Mila had been there for me many times over the years, especially when we were younger and I didn’t know my limits.

“Thanks for taking care of me.”

“You’re the only female I’d do that for.”

“You really gotta get over that stupid pact or you’re going to end up a lonely old man.”

For the last few months, she kept bringing up our pact and I couldn’t figure out why she was concerned about it after all these years.

“It worked for Hugh Hefner.”

“He had playmates and I also think he ended up marrying at least one of them.”

“I have a roster of women, Mila. I’m not going to get lonely any time soon.”

She rolled her eyes, finishing the water, and then placed the glass on the nightstand. “This conversation is giving me more of a headache.”

I chuckled. “Come here.” Laying on the bed next to her, I pulled her head and chest onto my torso to rub her head. “Better?”

“Oh my God,” she moaned loudly. “That feels amazing. You’re too good to me.”

“Guys! It’s happening! It’s finally fucking happening!” Ashton burst through the door. “Leo has grown balls and is nailing Mila!”

“Are they finally fucking?” Sawyer questioned, rushing into her room with Cain right on his heels.

Cain took one look at us and shook his head. “Bro, what the ever loving fuck? You’re rubbing her head like a pussy with no outcome of a blowie?”

“He’s my best friend,” she replied. “It isn’t like that for us and you know it... You all know it.”

“Whatever.” Ashton walked over to the balcony, stayed there for a few seconds and when he turned back around, his cock was standing at attention.

“Dude,” Sawyer acknowledged what we were all thinking while Mila ducked her face into the crook of my arm. “Why are you hard right now?”

He gazed down at his dick and shrugged it off. “Fucking Viagra.”

“Care to elaborate,” I asked, confused by what was going on. Considering it was Ashton, what the fucks were nothing new.

“Well... what had happened was, I brought back the chick I was hanging out with last night and we were making out, all was good. Her tits were nice, her pussy wet—”

“Ashton!” Mila interrupted. “I don’t need the play by play.”

“Fine. I pulled out a condom about to make her see God and she proceeds to tell me she’s an escort and it’s going to be a thousand dollars.”

We all busted out laughing, including Mila. I laughed so hard my stomach hurt and my eyes got watery.

“Yo!” Ashton hollered. “You insensitive assholes!”

“You had sex with a hooker?” Cain exclaimed, holding his stomach from laughing as hard as we all were.

“No... I don’t have that kind of money. I offered her a hundred bucks and she slapped me and left.” He pointed to his cock. “And this is the result of no sex and a fifty milligram Viagra. I’m gonna be hard all day. But you know what? I’ve got a nice dick. I’m embracing it.”

Sawyer chuckled. “You’re going to get arrested for indecent exposure and I don’t have bail money.”

“I got Leo. His parents are loaded.”

“I’m not calling my parents to bail you and your cock out of jail, dickwad.”

“You know what? I don’t appreciate you guys’ tones. I’m going down to the beach to find a woman that’s not an escort and who would love to ride my dick. *For free.*”

Once the boys left, Mila announced, “And those are the best friends you’re going to live a lonely life for.”

“What’s your deal with the pact? It’s never bothered you before.”

“It doesn’t bother me now.”

“I beg to differ, you’re on my balls about it.”

She sat up. “I’m not on your balls about anything, Leo. I just think it’s kinda stupid, and a little selfish. What happens if Ashton goes out there and finds the love of his life? What happens if Sawyer and Cain find theirs? Everyone is just supposed to choose this pact you made on a whim, when we

were kids, over love? I just don't get it and I don't want to see my best friend die alone. Is that so bad?"

"I'm not gonna die alone. I have the boys and you're gonna be in the nursing home with me, annoying the shit outta me, kinda like you are right now."

I stood up and she grabbed my arm.

—Mila—

“Hey! I’m not trying to bust your balls. I just... I see all these great qualities in you, okay? I know you’d make someone really happy one day if you’d let that guard down and allow it.”

“What guard? I don’t have a guard.”

“Are you joking? You have it up right now and I’m your best friend.”

“Lala, you’re hungover and you’re confusing your emotions with mine. I don’t want a girlfriend, I don’t want to get married, and there is no part of me that wants to deal with that bullshit.”

“Right... Why would you when you have your parents running your life for you?” He jerked back, and I instantly regretted my choice of words.

“Wow. Tell me how you really feel.”

“I’m just saying—”

“I’m going to head down to the beach. Feel better, all right?”

“Leo...”

He backed away and left and I spent the rest of the morning in bed weaning off my hangover, trying to figure out what made me say those things to him. After I started feeling somewhat normal, I took a shower, ate a little a bit of food, and then I went in search of him. When I found Leo, he was laying on a lounge with his arms behind his head. Some girl was straddling his waist.

He looked happy.

Content.

Maybe I was wrong?

Maybe this was what he wanted, and I couldn’t fault him for that. Taking a deep breath, I walked away...

But there was still a tiny piece of me that knew Leo deserved more than what he was settling for.

CHAPTER 4

“Hey, you ready?” Leo asked, walking into the en-suite bathroom in my bedroom of our rental house in Cancun a couple of days later.

“Yeah, I will be in like five minutes. Just finishing up my makeup.”

“You don’t need makeup.”

“You’ve been saying that since I was thirteen.”

“And I will continue to say it until I no longer have to wait for you to do your makeup.”

I smiled, looking at him through the mirror. We had three days left on the island, and I was soaking up everything I could. Finals were just around the corner and they were going to kick my ass. I was excited to graduate with my bachelor’s degree in psychology and start the next chapter of my life though. I had yet to tell my parents or Leo I’d been applying to out of state schools for my graduate program. I wanted a change of scenery.

A drastic one.

I was born and raised in Tennessee and I was ready for a different vibe.

“Can you hurry your ass up? The guys are ready.”

“Where are we going again?”

“Not sure. Ashton said something about a local having a party at their house.”

“Huh, so we’re going to a stranger’s house in a foreign country?”

“Precisely, so hurry up.”

Through the mirror, I nodded to him. “Can you grab my necklace? It’s in the drawer by the bed.”

While I waited for him to help me put on my jewelry, I finished my eyeliner. Deciding at the last second to do a wing

so it would accentuate my dark brown eyes.

“Is this one of those lip plumper’s I see on Instagram ads?”

I didn’t pay his question any mind until I heard a loud buzzing sound coming from the bedroom.

Oh dear God no...

Dropping the liner onto the counter, I darted into the room, watching in horror as Leo had my Sona 2 Cruise vibrator clit suction on his lips.

I didn’t even clean it after I used it an hour ago!

“Not that drawer!” I shouted with wide eyes, my face already burning bright red.

“What?”

“It’s for a different set of lips, you idiot!”

He cocked his head to the side, eyeing me curiously. Not understanding what I meant.

“Oh my God, Leo! Get my vibrator off your mouth!”

It was his turn for his gaze to widen. He instantly pulled it off his lips with a loud pop and I swear I died a million deaths right then and there.

“What the fuck are you doing with a vibrator?”

“What does one do with a vibrator, Leo?”

“On spring break?”

“Unlike you, I don’t sleep around like it’s a sport. Hence, why I brought my vibrator.”

“The fuck?”

I covered my face, peeking at him through my fingers. I didn’t think it could get any worse, again, I was wrong.

He. Licked. His. Lips.

Leo just licked his lips.

My best friend just licked his lips.

“*Leo!* You just licked my vagina!”

—Leo—

What the hell do I reply to that?

I didn't even mean to lick my lips... it was unintentional, like my tongue just came out of my mouth on its own.

I had no control over it.

It just happened.

Right?

This was Mila.

My best friend!

I didn't want to lick her pussy, but shit... why did it taste so fucking good? With the flavor of her still lingering on my tongue, I peered down at the floor. I couldn't look at her, she could read me like a book, and I had no idea what I felt. It was all so conflicting and confusing, I wanted the ground to swallow me whole.

Fuck you Instagram ads!

I scratched the back of my neck in an awkward gesture.

"I have mouthwash somewhere in my bag," she offered, and I shook my head.

"I'm not looking through your stuff anymore, Lala. With my luck, I'll end up swishing around lube or some shit."

"Well... if it makes you feel any better, your lips do look plumper."

I busted out laughing and she followed suit before we locked eyes.

"I don't really know what to say about what just happened, other than we never speak about it again."

"Deal," she agreed.

With that, she walked back into the bathroom and then threw her mouthwash at me. I caught it in my hands.

“I’ll meet you downstairs in a few.”

I nodded, even though she couldn’t see me. Staring at the Listerine in my grasp for a few seconds, I set it down on her nightstand without using it.

I spent the rest of the night with the taste of Mila’s pussy in my mouth.

Why I didn’t use it? Why did I keep the taste of Mila’s pussy in my mouth?

I tried pretending like it wasn’t the first thing on my mind, the only thing on my mind, playing the role of her wingman.

“The guy coming up behind you is really cute,” Mila announced while we were standing by the bar in the house where the party was being held.

I snapped around, purposely knocking into him. “Ah shit, man. I’m sorry, I didn’t see you there.”

“No problem.”

Arching an eyebrow, I added, “You look familiar. You from Tennessee?”

“No, never been.”

“You should visit. We have some beautiful southern women, unlike my friend here, Mila. But her witty personality makes up for her looks.”

She chuckled, playfully slapping me on the arm.

Bringing our attention back to him, he remarked, “She looks beautiful to me.”

“Yeah, she’s all right.” I watched as he extended out his hand for her to shake.

“Hi, I’m John.”

She smiled, shaking his hand. “Nice to meet you, John.”

“Likewise, Mila.”

I recognized the expression on her face, it was the one she made every time she met a new guy. Mila had the worst taste in men, and she knew it too. The only two serious

relationships she was in didn't end well. Most of the men she dated had a problem with our friendship, they didn't understand we were just best friends and quickly made it known they had an issue with us being so close.

Insecure pussies.

“You know,” I interrupted, shifting his eyes to me. “She loves margaritas and her personality just gets wittier the more she drinks.”

“How about I buy you a drink then, Miss Mila?”

“I'd love one.”

“Let's go to the other bar, I prefer that bartender's drinks over there.” John grabbed her hand, leading the way as she mouthed, “Thank you,” to me and I winked at her.

The place was packed. There were more people than I expected, than any of us did. Women were barely dressed, wearing mostly bikinis and those see-through cover-ups that made for very easy access. I watched them disappear into the crowd before Cain was suddenly standing beside me.

“That guy looks like a fucking douche.”

“That's her type,” I reminded, sitting back down on the barstool, signaling for another beer.

“Does it ever bother you?”

“Does what ever bother me?”

“Helping Mila score dick.”

“She doesn't usually sleep with them.”

“Interesting answer.”

“Shut up, man. You know it's not like that between us.”

“Do I?”

“What are you trying to say?”

He shrugged. “I don't know. Mila's cool for a chick. She drinks like us, puts up with us, she's always there no matter what. Those are pretty cool traits for someone who's seen how small your cock is.”

“Dude, I’ll pull out my dick right now just to prove you wrong.”

“Nah, I’m good. But seriously? You never get jealous?”

“Of Mila?”

“No of fucking Big Bird, yes of the guys who are with Mila.”

“Are you drunk right now? Where the hell is this coming from?”

“Bro, we’re about to graduate from college and enter the real world where we have to go to work hungover and do our own laundry instead of bringing it home on the weekend for our moms to clean. You know, adulting and shit.”

“My mom will still do my laundry.”

“No shit, you still live at home.”

“I don’t live at home per se, I live in my cabin.”

“On their land.”

“Eh, semantics.”

“So what? You’re not moving out after graduation?”

“What for? I’m going to start working for my dad.”

“Do you even like engineering?”

“It’s what my degree will be in.”

“That’s not what I asked.”

“What’s with you and the fifty questions?”

“Can’t I ask my best friend where his head is at?”

I narrowed my eyes at him. “All right, I’m game. You know my old man wants me to take over his business so that’s what I’m doing.”

“Is it what you want?”

“Sure.”

“That doesn’t sound like a legitimate answer.”

“Well, it’s the only one I have for you.”

“Then maybe it’s something to think about. We still have a few more months for you to find your passion.”

“Dude, did you take some ecstasy? What’s up with the heart to heart?”

He shrugged. “You’ve done a lot for me, Leo. Just want to return the favor. Out of all the guys, you saw what my parents put me through the most with their divorce. I spent most of my junior and senior years of high school at your cabin just to get away from their bullshit.” He grabbed my shoulder. “You were there for me, man, and I won’t ever forget that.”

It was true. Cain was all sorts of fucked up with his parents constantly fighting about who got what in the settlement, how much alimony would be paid, who got the kids on holidays and weekends. It was a mess. He was a mess. There was nothing I could do for him but offer my support.

If it taught me anything...

There could be a very thin line between love and hate. One I never wanted to cross.

CHAPTER 5

—Mila—

“Cain!” I hollered over the music. “You’re blocking my sun!”

We were on a catamaran for the day. It was basically a booze cruise and I was laying on the bow net soaking up some sun.

“This seat taken?”

He sat down. “It is now.”

Cain chuckled, handing me a frozen margarita.

“Thanks.”

“No problem.”

“What are you doing over here? There’re topless girls everywhere, you should be motorboating hoes. Kinda like Ashton and Sawyer are right now.”

“Eh, child’s play.”

I laughed, “Since when?”

“Do you find it that hard to believe I like talking to you?”

“Hmm... I don’t know what I think but since you’re here.” I handed him tanning oil. “Make yourself useful.”

He grinned, putting his dimples prominently on display. His jaw was clenched and there was a gleam in his eyes like he was amused with my banter.

“You’re using me? So soon?”

I smirked, untying my top while I was still laying on my stomach. “Do your best.”

As soon as his hands were on my shoulders, I inadvertently moaned, “Damn, that feels good.”

“I aim to please.”

“So you’ve said.”

He smiled, his straight white teeth shining with the glare of the sun.

“What do you want, Cain?”

“Can’t a guy just say hello to his friend?”

“We’re friends now? When did that happen? I don’t even like you that much.”

“After all these years?” He held his hand over his heart in a dramatic gesture. “That really hurts, Mila.”

“You’re so full of it.” I couldn’t help but smile. “So this is how it works, huh? I don’t know if I should be offended or flattered that you’re hitting on me.”

“I’m not hitting on you. I just have this magnetic pull about me. Trust me, it’s a blessing and a curse.”

I rolled my eyes.

He chuckled, a throaty sound escaping his lips. “Where’s Leo?”

“He went snorkeling with some chick.”

“Do you uh... you know... ever get jealous?”

“Of what? Leo and his latest conquests?”

“Yeah.”

“No. I mean Leo’s been chasing pussy since we learned how to walk. It’s part of his personality.”

“So, you’re telling me if he walked up to you and confessed his undying love for you, you’d turn him down?”

“It’s not like that between us. We’re just best friends.”

“He’s seen you naked.”

“When we were three!” I shook my head. “What is it with you guys and the constant badgering lately about us being more than we are to each other?”

“You do realize that every girl he’s ever dated has had a problem with your friendship, right?”

“Dating is a term I’d use loosely with Leo.”

“He literally drops anyone and anything for you. Including us.”

“Bullshit.”

“Mila! You’re blind if you don’t see it.”

I rolled my eyes again.

“Fine. Let me elaborate... how many times has he left his date for you?”

“I needed him. I’ve had bad break-ups.”

“How many times has he gone straight to your house after those said dates?”

“We were neighbors.”

“What about the last four years of college?”

“I have my own place, he goes there for privacy from his parents.”

“His parents who live on the other side of their property because Leo is always in the cabin... you mean those parents?”

“You’re blowing things out of proportion.”

“How many times has he ditched us to hang out with you?”

“I can’t help that I’m more entertaining than you guys.”

“How many times have *you* crashed boy’s night because Leo wants you there?”

“I help him get laid, of course he wants me there.”

“He beat up your last boyfriend.”

“He cheated on me.”

“Wow. You really are in denial. Leo would do anything for you. If that’s not love, then I don’t know what is.”

“See, I know he loves me, I love him too but we’re not *in* love with each other, Cain. That’s the difference. I know you don’t understand that because you don’t know the meaning of the word.”

“Yeah? Then answer this one, Mila. Why are you the only girl he looks in the eyes?”

“What?”

“You heard me.”

“I did, but I don’t speak dumbass so...”

“Any other girl, it’s her ass or her tits. Never in the eyes. Ever. Even when they’re talking right to him. You’re the only chick he’s ever given his complete attention to when you’re speaking.”

“That’s because I’m not a bimbo and we both know that’s Leo’s type.”

“Yeah... the exact opposite of you,” he mocked. “I wonder why?”

“You’re supposed to be rubbing my back, not being a pain in my ass.”

“Well.” He glanced behind him. “You do have a nice ass.”

I nodded. “That I do.”

He smiled. “You have an answer for everything, don’t you, Miss Mila?”

“Yup.”

“That’s all right. Because one day, you’re gonna look at Leo, really look at him, and realize you’ve never been just best friends and I’m going to say I told you so.”

“Whatever. Since you’ve got everyone else all figured out, Sherlock, what is your life plan?”

“Yes. Unlike you oblivious idiots, I know exactly what I wanna do.”

“Oh yeah? What’s that?”

“You’re looking at it.”

“You mean you’re finally going to charge for sex? Considering how much sex you do have, that’s actually a smart life choice.”

“Cute.”

I smirked. “So what’s your big masterplan?”

“I told you, you’re looking at it. Laying on it.”

I gazed around. “You mean the boat? You want to own a catamaran?”

“Something like that. I want to open a business that caters to selling the dream.”

“Selling the dream? What do you mean? What dream?”

“Love.”

“Come again?”

“I mean take a look around, Mila. What do you see?”

“Ummm, people?”

“No. You see people hooking up, you see couples reconnecting, you see the dream of love. It’s been on this island the entire time we’ve been here. Why? Because everyone is on vacation and they’re here to escape from one thing or another.”

“Okay... so what does that have to do with you?”

“I want to sell the dream, have couples who need to reconnect on my catamaran. I can do this. I can cater to a couple for a week or two. Take them offshore to go fishing while the wives do exactly what you are right now, drinking like a fish and laying out in the sun as their big strong husbands catch their dinner. Then they can have moonlight dinners, they can dance under the stars. You know, sell the dream.”

“Wow, you’ve really given this a lot of thought.”

“I’m a psych major like you. I know a lot about the human mind.”

It was true, over the last four years Cain and I had a couple of classes together. He was smart, perceptive, involved in class discussions, and from what I could tell he received good grades.

Suddenly, he stared straight into my eyes and said, “I don’t believe in love, but I want to sell what my parents never had. A relationship, a connection, a desire to please one another. I’m going to sell the dream, even though I don’t believe in it.”

This whole conversation almost knocked me on my ass.

CHAPTER 6

—Leo—

We were sitting on the couch in my cabin. We'd been back in Tennessee for a couple of days now and reality was starting to kick in with finals right around the corner.

"Let's watch a movie." Mila grabbed the remote out of my hand.

"As long as it's not another chick flick."

"Oh, come on... how many man movies have you made me watch?"

"Not nearly as many as you've made me watch."

She smiled. "What can I say? I'm a sucker for a hot guy with abs."

"That explains your horrible taste in men."

"Seriously? Pot meet Kettle. You're the king of shitty women."

"Did you mean slutty women?"

"Yeah, that too."

"Listen." I shook my head. "I'm not the one that's looking for love in all the wrong places."

"Because you're such an expert on the subject?"

"I don't have to be an expert to know that you date fucking douchebags."

"At least I put myself out there."

I grinned. "I put parts of myself out there."

"Oh, that's big of you."

"Did you just call my dick big?"

"Of course your big head would think that."

"Again, with the big innuendos of my cock. I know it's been a long time for you, Mila, but if you need me to be a

good friend, I mean... I guess I could throw you a bone.” I winked at her. “A huge one.”

“How noble of you.”

“What can I say? You bring out the best in me.”

“You don’t want to have sex with me.”

“Yeah, you’re right. I’m good right now, thanks.”

“I did not mean that as a question and you know it. Besides, I just had sex in Cancun so I’m freshly fuc—”

“I didn’t know you had sex in Cancun.”

“What? You introduced us.”

I arched an eyebrow, confused.

“John...”

“John?” I scoffed out. “The fucking douche from the party?”

“He wasn’t a douche. He’s in medical school.”

“How many times do I have to tell you that men lie to get into chick’s panties?”

“He wasn’t lying.”

“And you know this how?”

“He knew a lot about the human body.”

“The female body is my specialty too, Mila, but Grey’s Anatomy can teach a motherfucker about that as well, not to mention porn.”

“Oh my God! I’m not even referring to *my* body. Although, he was good in bed.”

“He was so good in bed I’m just now hearing about it? And you woke up in your own bed the next morning?”

“So?”

“Trust me, Lala, if he were that good in bed, you would have stayed the night. I would know, I wake up with my dick

in chick's mouths more often than not, just because they want me to fuck them again."

"You know sleeping around doesn't have to be your only personality trait."

"But it's my best one."

She eyed me skeptically. "I know he was in medical school, you want to know how I know?"

"Please, enlighten me."

"He knew all the things, just like Sawyer."

"Huh, so your bar is set to what Sawyer sounds like? Interesting, considering he's in pre-med just to get laid. The whole 'I'm going to be a doctor' thing, is a really big turn on for women."

"Or maybe he actually wants to do something for himself. Like Cain does. Like maybe you should want too."

"Oh, so now you know what Cain wants out of life too?"

"You're missing the point, Leo. Women usually like men with ambition. It's hot."

"Women *always* like men who make them come. It's hotter."

"Fine." She put her hands up in the air. "I give up. You win."

"Now those are my favorite words."

"You're horrible. You know that, right?"

"It's why you love me."

"It's why I shouldn't."

"Lala, we both know you would be devastated if you didn't have me in your life."

Before the last word left my mouth, she knocked me in the face with a pillow.

Starting a war, she wouldn't win.

—Mila—

His eyes went wide.

“Oh, Lala, it’s on.”

I shrieked, about to jump off the couch, but I was too slow. He tackled me onto the cushion, going straight for my inner thigh.

“Leo, don’t you dare,” I warned as his finger dug into my skin. “You can’t do this! You can’t—”

“Try and stop me, Mila.”

I tried to shove his hand away. “You always do this. You always tickle me, it’s not fair!”

“What’s not fair? That you love it? Is that what’s not fair?”

“No!”

He grinned, squeezed, and I lost my shit. Kicking my legs, flailing everywhere, my body shook uncontrollably from his assault.

I would not laugh. I could not laugh.

This only made him squeeze harder, twitching his fingers right on the muscle to the point of pain. It was like when you hit your damn funny bone, it hurt like a son of a bitch, but it made you laugh from the sting. I couldn’t take it anymore and I squealed, laughing hysterically and screaming all at the same time. His body firmly locked on top of mine, giving him the advantage to torture me unmercifully and with no remorse.

“Leo! You’re going to make me pee my pants!”

He pressed harder, my throat burned, and my voice sounded hoarse.

“You have five seconds to apologize for hitting me in the face.”

“With a pillow!”

“Four seconds, or I’ll really have no mercy on you at all.
“Three... two...”

I fought harder and laughed louder.

“One...”

“I’m sorry!” I screamed out, trying to catch my breath, and he finally stopped.

I breathed heavily, in and out, my chest rising and falling with my heart pounding out of my skin. My body warm all over with sweat forming at my temples. I swallowed the saliva that had pooled in my mouth.

With the back of his fingers, he swept the hair away from my eyes.

“You’re still horrible.”

“And you still love me.”

“I don’t know why.”

“Because I still push you on the swings.”

I giggled, feeling the weight of him on me. “You’re squishing me.”

“But I’m so comfortable.”

“You’re such an asshole in so many languages.”

“Feisty words for someone who just lost our battle.”

“I always lose the battle.”

“And yet you still try me every chance you get.”

“I can’t help that you’re a bully in your heart and soul, Leo Hawkins.”

“Well, Mila Love Lawrence, I guess that makes you my prey.”

“You know... this is probably why Cain thinks there is something more than friendship going on between us.”

He lowered his eyebrows and sat up. “Cain?”

“Yeah.” I followed his lead, adjusting my top that he wrinkled. “He said something to me about it.”

“What? When?”

“On the catamaran in Cancun.”

“What did he say?”

“He asked me if I ever get jealous of you and your flavors of the week.”

“Huh.” He jerked back.

“What?”

“He asked me that too.”

“When?”

“When you were with your douchebag.”

I asked without thinking, “What did you say?”

“I said you don’t usually sleep with them and we’re just best friends.”

“Good.” I nodded, looking for the remote. “So, how about that movie?”

“Mila.”

Our eyes locked again, his demeanor quickly changed to someone I didn’t recognize.

“What did you say?”

“That we’re just best friends and that we love each other but we aren’t in love with each other.”

We stared at one another for a few seconds without saying a word. I bit my lower lip, suddenly feeling nervous.

“Why are you looking at me like that?”

He shook it off. “I guess I just find it odd he’s asking you such personal questions. You guys aren’t exactly friendly like that, he’s sticking his nose in shit that isn’t his business.”

“Whoa. What’s with the tone? He’s your friend. He cares about you.”

“Right. He’s my friend, like you’re *my* friend. Not his.”

“Leo—”

He abruptly stood up. “Throw on whatever you want to watch. I’m going to jump in the shower.”

I don’t know why but for some reason, I announced, “You’re still my best friend. No matter what, you’ll always be my best friend, Leo.”

He snapped back around, took one look at me, and declared, “Yeah, make sure to keep it that way.”

I sat there while he showered, staring aimlessly at the television. We didn’t watch a movie that night.

Both of us lost...

In our own thoughts.

CHAPTER 7

“As we discussed at the beginning of the semester. Your dual thesis will count as fifty percent of your final grade for this class,” Mr. Berry announced, standing in the front of the auditorium of my psychology class.

Cain raised his hand. He was sitting on the other end of the wide-open space that was filled with seats for students.

“Yes,” our professor called on him. “Mr. Roberts.”

“What do you mean by dual thesis?”

“I mean you and your partner will present a dual thesis on the laws of attraction. It will be good practice for those of you who will be going onto graduate school.”

“So, what you’re saying is my final grade will rely on someone else?”

“Yes, choose wisely.”

Great.

Our professor proceeded to hand out directions for our final assignment while I contemplated who would be my partner. I didn’t exactly make any friends or acquaintances in this class over the last semester. I kept to myself, I was there for one reason and one reason only.

To learn.

Not sure how long I sat there, thinking about it, when out of nowhere I heard Cain’s voice hovering above me, “What do you say?”

I peered up at him. “To what?”

He cocked his head to the side before sitting in the empty seat beside me. “Partners?”

“You’re joking, right?”

“Never been so serious in all my life.”

“You think I’m going to rely on you for passing or failing this class? Right before graduation?”

“So not only do you think I’m a man whore, you also think I’m stupid?”

“I don’t think.” I nodded. “I know.”

“Mila, I have a three point nine GPA. I’m graduating Summa Cum Laude.”

“You’re full of shit.”

He reached into his backpack. “Read ‘em and weep, darlin’.”

I grabbed his transcripts out of his hand. Right there in big, bold letters, **Cumulative GPA: 3.9**

“Wow,” I breathed out. Shocked was an understatement.

“I know, pretty impressive, right?”

“I mean yes but that’s not what I was thinking.”

“Care to elaborate?”

I lifted my eyes to him. “You actually carry around your transcripts?”

He shrugged. “Helps me get laid.”

“Ugh!” I smacked the papers on his chest.

“Ow. Rude.”

“At least I was right about my first assumption. I stand corrected. You’re smarter than you look.”

“I was kidding. I just left the dean’s office and he gave them to me.”

“Dean’s office?”

“Yeah, he wanted to congratulate me on making his list every year since we started college.”

I sat there, my mind blown. “How did I not know this?”

“There’s a lot that you don’t know about me, Mila. This is just one of them.”

“I guess so.”

“So what do you say? Partners?”

“I think I’d be the stupid one if I said no.”

“Damn. You sure know how to give a compliment.”

I chuckled. “I’d be honored to be your partner on this assignment. Will you please accept my profound apology for judging your dumbass face?”

“Better, we’ll keep working on your social skills though.”

“I can’t wait.” The sarcasm in my tone was evident.

“Let’s get started. Your place or mine?”

“Definitely mine. I don’t trust your place to not be crawling with women.”

“Dude, do you think I just hold them captive or something?”

I grabbed my backpack and stood. “At this point, it wouldn’t surprise me. You seem to be full of them.”

“Them or it?”

“You tell me.”

He stood, walking out of class next to me. “I’d much rather surprise you.”

Glancing up at him, I asked, “Where did you park?”

“Parking lot outside of the building. You?”

“I parked by the cafeteria.”

“All right, I’ll drive you over to your car.”

“Sounds like a plan. You can follow me home from there.”

“Mila, I know where you live.”

“Okay, stalker. That didn’t sound creepy or anything.”

“I’m a man of many talents. Wait until you taste my cooking.”

“You cook?”

“Yeah, I’m starving. You got food?”

“Shouldn’t I be asking you that question?”

“I have food. I like to eat and unless I cook for myself, I’d starve.”

Who was this guy?

“I have food.”

“Great. I’ll whip us up something.”

Once we arrived at his truck, Cain did something I never expected...

He opened my door for me.

“What?” he called me out on it. “You don’t think I know how to be a gentleman? You wound me,” he said with his hand on his heart.

“It’s like I don’t even know you.”

“Sad. We’ve been in each other’s lives because of Leo since we were kids.”

“I’ve never seen you open a door for a girl before.”

“You’re not just any girl.”

He reached his hand for me to take and helped me step into his lifted Chevy.

“I’m not?”

“Nope. You’re Leo’s best friend and what kind of friend would I be to my boy if I didn’t take care of his most prized possession?”

My eyes widened and before I could reply, he shut the door.

It didn’t take long to drive to my car. Twenty minutes later, he was following me inside my apartment, ready to plan out our assignment.

It was almost eleven at night by the time I drove passed Mila's apartment complex. Her place was visible from the road and I could see the light in her bedroom was still on. At the last second, I decided to stop by and see what she was up to. We never announced our random arrivals. After the day I had, I wanted to chill with my best friend.

I spent most of the afternoon at my old man's shop. He was showing me the ropes and what my responsibilities would entail once I graduated.

I was exhausted from hearing him say, "Leo, are you listening?"

I was, sort of.

The fact he thought it was normal to work until this late at night was an ongoing argument between him and my mom. She didn't understand it either.

I stopped at the gas station and picked up a bag of Skittles, they were Mila's favorite. Parking my car next to hers, I made my way up the stairs to the second floor and walked right in. Mentally chastising her for leaving her door unlocked, again.

"Mila, how many times do I have to tell you to lock your —" I stopped dead in my tracks, standing at the foot of her bedroom door. Knocked on my ass by what I was walking into.

Mila was sitting against the headrest of her bed, a notebook in her lap.

"Hey," she greeted.

My eyes shifted from her to the person I least expected to see.

In her bed.

Cain was laying down on the end of her mattress, looking up at the notebook in his hands. A bunch of textbooks and food in between them.

“The fuck?” I questioned, causing Cain’s gaze to focus on mine.

“Hey, man,” he greeted next. “Hungry? We got some leftover food. Mila eats like a mouse.”

“I do not! You just cook for an army.”

What. The. Fuck.

“What are you doing here?”

“What do you mean?” he replied, caught off guard by what I just asked.

“Here. What are you doing in Mila’s apartment? Let alone her bed?”

“Oh.” He sat up, hearing the sharp tone in my voice. “We’re partners.”

“Excuse me?”

Mila chimed in, “In our psych class, Leo. We’re partners in our dual thesis assignment. What’s your problem?”

“I don’t have a problem.”

“You look like you do,” Cain intervened, arching an eyebrow.

“I’m just surprised you’re here. I didn’t know you guys have class together this semester.”

Mila stood. “Are you supposed to know?”

“I thought we told each other everything.”

“Bro, it’s not a big deal.” Cain stood, grabbing his backpack. “I was just leaving anyway.” He looked at Mila. “Same time tomorrow?”

“Sure.”

On his way out, he picked up a plate of food and handed it to me. “Here, eat something. You look hangry. Talk later, Mi.”

Mi? He had a nickname for her now?

As soon as the door closed, I glanced down at the food in my grasp, recognizing it immediately. “Did Cain cook for

you?”

“Yeah, you never told me he was such a good cook.”

“Why would I?”

She stepped back. “Leo, what’s your deal? Why are you acting so...”

“So, what?”

“I don’t know... weird? We were just working on our assignment.”

“It’s almost midnight.”

“I guess we lost track of time.”

“Didn’t seem like you guys had any plans to stop working any time soon.”

“What? Cain just told you he was leaving.”

“You guys seemed awfully chummy for never saying more than a few words to each other.”

“That’s not true.”

“So what? You guys are friends now?”

“Ummm... I don’t know. I’ll answer that when you stop acting like a dick.”

“Oh, I’m a dick now? I was your best friend yesterday.”

“Leo! What the hell? Did you not get your dick wet this week or something?”

Why was I acting like an asshole?

“Here.” I handed her the Skittles. “I got you these.”

“Thanks. You should have opened with these.” She sat them on her nightstand. “I’m going to take a shower. You can eat, you can chill, I’ll be back in ten.”

I watched her leave, standing there until I started cleaning up the food. Taking it to the kitchen, I placed the dishes in the sink.

Mila and Cain.

Cain and Mila.

Mi.

It was not a duo I ever gave any thought about. Sure, he was around her, but it was always when I was there.

I wasn't jealous.

This wasn't jealously.

I was being protective.

I knew how Cain operated. He was charming without even trying. I didn't want Mila to get hurt, unintentionally by him. Mila was the only thing that had ever been truly mine.

I lived in my parents' cabin on their land.

I went to college and got the degree they wanted for me.

I was going to work for my dad's business and take it over one day.

My whole life was planned out for me, had been since the day I was born.

Mila had always been... just mine.

My person.

My best friend.

My girl.

At that moment, I knew what I had to do. I needed to protect her, even if it meant going against...

My other best friend.

CHAPTER 8

—Leo—

“Look at Leo, being the Eagle Scout and starting the fire while we handle the real man shit.” Ashton was holding one of the kegs, and Sawyer was carrying the other one behind him down the stairs to my back porch.

“Eagle Scout?” Sawyer set down the booze a few feet away from the pit I was building for tonight’s festivities. “Do you not remember the time he nearly blew us all up trying to light that thing?”

“I was ten, you pansy! You were all too big of pussies to do it yourselves.”

“Do you see this face?” Ashton gestured to himself. “This face is the face of—”

“A pile of shit, yeah,” I interrupted. “I agree.”

He flipped me the bird, grabbing his balls. “Eat my dick, dude.”

I laughed, throwing him and Sawyer a cold beer from the cooler.

This was my life.

This was how I lived. Beers with my boys and bonfires with the people of the town. Everyone knew everyone.

Why would I want it to change? How could my life be anything but perfect?

Ashton pulled my attention, he was sitting near the pit, tearing the label off his beer.

I nodded toward what he was doing. “Damn, bro, been that long? Sexually frustrated are you?”

He chuckled, “You dick. I have no complaints. I get laid frequently and since you offended my sex life, I’ll make sure to have a threesome tonight. You know who you should be concerned about?”

“Who?” I opened my beer.

“Cain.”

“Cain?” I took a few swigs. “What’s up with him?”

“Ummm... what planet are you living on? Because here on earth, Cain has lived in the crevice of Mila’s asshole for the last two weeks.”

“They’re just working on their paper.”

“Right...”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“There’s a reason why Cain likes to choose chicks to be his partners in his assignments for class. He gets his dick wet as a bonus.”

“Shut up, Ashton. Mila isn’t fucking Cain.”

“Not yet.”

The fuck?

“I mean Ashton does have a point, Leo. It’s had to cross your mind. Right?” Sawyer waited for my response and I honestly didn’t have one.

The assumption did cross my mind.

A fuck load.

More than I cared to admit to two idiots who had no idea what Mila meant to me. We were just friends.

“I mean it wouldn’t be a bad thing,” Ashton added while Sawyer sat next to him in the recliner chair. “Your best guy friend, your best girl *friend*... she could do worse. Cain is probably the most decent out of us all.”

“Fuck you very much.” Sawyer pointed to himself. “I’m going to be a doctor.”

“You’re going to be a gynecologist.”

“Your point? I’m still going to be helping people.”

“Women. You’re going to be helping women with your hand up their puss—”

“Do you guys ever talk about anything other than getting laid?”

Our eyes shifted over to Mila, who was coming down the stairs from the porch with Cain behind her.

“Speak of the devil,” Ashton addressed. “We were just talking about you two study buddies. How’s,” he winked, “the thesis coming along?”

“I don’t know what you’re implying, but if you must know, it’s going great. Your best friend Cain here is very intelligent, despite his pretty boy face.”

Cain smiled, bright-eyed and bushy fucking tailed.

Was that infatuation I just saw dart across his stare?

“Why, Mi, that was almost a compliment.”

“Who the fuck is Mi?” Ashton blurted, looking back and forth between them.

“It’s what Cain apparently calls Mila now.” I grinned, nodding to her. “You know, kind of like you’re a pet.”

“I’m no one’s—”

Cain grabbed her by the nook of her neck and they locked eyes. “Mi, that would make you my bitch.”

She hit him in the stomach and he groaned. I beamed. Never been prouder of her than I was at that moment.

“What is it with men and owning shit? Are you two done having this pissing contest?”

Sawyer chuckled, “They’re having a pissing contest over you, *Mi*. Are you breaking our boys’ hearts now?”

“Hardly. You can’t break something they don’t have.”

I narrowed my eyes at her, about to ask what she meant by that, but Ashton clapped his hands together and abruptly stood up. “Boys.”

Mila cleared her throat.

“And Selfish Titties,” Ashton added. “Let’s see who gets laid tonight, because I can guarantee it’s going to be me. Can’t

say the same for you bitches.”

I shook my head, contemplating why these guys were my best friends.

Sawyer lifted a bottle of Don Julio Tequila, pouring five shots into red solo cups and handing them to us.

“Why does mine look like three shots versus one?” Mila questioned, looking in her cup.

Sawyer stated the truth, “Because you can drink like a man.”

Mila could drink like one of the boys, especially when it came to tequila. She’d grown a tolerance to the fiery liquor over the last couple of years.

“Thank you,” she replied. “I think.”

Ashton raised his cup. “Here’s to what’s hard and stiff and comes out soft and wet.”

“Ugh. Gross,” Mila scoffed out. “I’m not toasting to that.”

“I was talking about bubblegum. But I can’t say I don’t like where your mind is at.”

She shook her head at Ashton. “Were you dropped on your head as a child?”

He gasped. “Who told you?”

She laughed, throwing her head back.

“There she is. Now let’s drink!”

We did, and Mila took hers down like the champ she was.

“Oh, by the way.” Ashton poured himself another. “I was talking about my cock. Not bubblegum.”

Of course he was.

—Mila—

The cabin was packed with people. It always was when Leo would throw these parties. He was infamous around these parts for that reason alone. The night went off without any trouble or issues, they always did. It didn't matter how many people showed up, we were out in the middle of nowhere. This was what made Tennessee the place to live, everyone knew everyone and we were always there for each other. It was that southern soul you felt deep in your bones.

The comradery.

The family.

The support.

I'd miss it.

I'd miss *this*.

Trying to not let the sad feeling take hold, I finished my fifth margarita at the same time my favorite song, "Lovefool" by The Cardigans, came on through the speakers. This was the second I realized I was way drunker than I thought. My telltale sign was always dancing and singing.

I was that girl.

You know the one...

The cute girl in the movie who ends up with her soulmate and they lived happily ever after. She'd start to dance, and the guys would swarm to her like bees to honey. They'd fall in love with her based on her sexy, spunky confidence. I swear that shit actually happened in real life, I had to beat them off with a stick after I tore up any dance floor. There was something about the way I moved that turned on their Just-in Beavers.

I couldn't control my body. I didn't care who was around, I had to sing and dance. Instantly, I was swaying my hips back and forth to the hard, short bangs of the blaring guitar, and the

sound of the drum beat vibrantly against my core. Slowly, my hands worked their way up my waist to my head, inch by inch they glided until I was running my fingers seductively through my hair.

I let the music take over, singing the lyrics like I was the artist performing the song in front of my fans. Rocking my hips, I pointed to the first guy I saw which just so happened to be Cain.

Singing, "Love me, love me."

He immediately started laughing, his charm radiating off of him like the bright full moon above. I didn't stop my performance, the liquor flowing through my veins wouldn't allow it.

Shimmying my shoulders, I signaled with my index fingers in a come hither gesture, and he didn't have to be told twice, except...

Cain started dancing.

And not like white boy dance moves, like he started breaking it down like I was. Singing right along with me. The crowd parted for him and it didn't take long for everyone to gather around to watch us put on a blatant display of chemistry.

Once the singer belted out the chorus again, I jumped around in a circle before Cain grabbed my hand and spun me into his arms then pulled me to his chest. Both of us dancing together, in sync with our hip and body movements. It was easy and comfortable, our effortless dynamic played well off one another.

With my arms at my sides, I danced my way around to look into his eyes. They were dilated, happy, beaming. It was an amazing sight and I think this was the moment I felt a new, strange connection to him.

I didn't think he could get any cuter until he put his hands on his waist and began thrusting in a funny dance sequence. I clapped my hands together loving his enthusiasm and together

we sang the last chorus. Both of us now with our hands over our hearts, profoundly uttering the lyrics to each other.

I couldn't remember the last time I had this much fun with someone who wasn't Leo.

Quickly, the artist's singing started fading, the song was coming to an end and at the last moment Cain grabbed my hand, spun me into him again, and dipped me. My leg naturally angled to the side of his body, and he left me there until the song was over.

"Why Mr. Roberts!" I exclaimed. "The man can dance."

He smiled wide, his dimples promptly showed on his cheeks.

Tugging me higher to his face, he whispered in my ear, "I told you I'm full of surprises."

Making me realize...

I liked Cain's surprises.

CHAPTER 9

I hurried up the stairs of the cabin to use the bathroom. I was ready to break the almighty seal. I think I peed for like five minutes straight and it was the best feeling in the world. Once I was done, I washed my hands and walked back into the open floorplan. Leo was pouring himself a drink on the metal island in the kitchen.

We were the only two people inside. Usually everyone hung out around the bonfire, shooting the shit about nothing in particular. As we got older we realized it was easier to have the cabin be off-limits.

“Have fun dancing?”

“Yeah.” I nodded, smirking. “I didn’t know Cain was such a good dancer.”

“Does that mean I’m replaced as your honorary dance partner?”

“Do you want to be replaced?”

“Do you want to replace me?”

“Hmmm... I don’t know. Cain can dance, unlike you and your two left feet.”

“I can dance.”

“Having a chick twerk on your dick while you grind behind her is not exactly dancing.”

“My grinding has never bothered you before.”

“It doesn’t bother me now.”

“Yet here I am being replaced.”

“Oh, well, you know... I have men lining out the door for me.”

“That you do.”

I smiled. “Make me one.”

“I think you’ve had enough.”

“Have I? Since when are you the authority on how much I drink?”

“Since you threw up on me.”

“Touché.”

The song “You Don’t know Her Like I Do” by Brantley Gilbert started playing from the speakers, and Leo put his drink down on the island. He grinned in that Leo Hawkins sort of way, his stunning good looks burned a hole into my chest with each precise, calculated step that brought him closer to me.

My best friend was handsome to say the least, he always had been. The older we got, the better looking he became.

Bastard.

“What’s with the determined look in your eyes?”

He didn’t answer my question, instead he grabbed my hand and twirled me toward him. An unexpected gasp escaped my lips when he held me firm against his solid, muscular chest.

Slowly, he began slow dancing with me.

“What girl are we putting on a show for right now?”

“No show.”

“What?”

“I’m just dancing with my best friend.”

His eyes never wavered from mine when I asked, “Meet any hot girls tonight?”

“Yeah. I’m dancing with her.”

“You didn’t just meet me, so my hotness doesn’t count.”

“You’re the hottest girl here.”

“Just what every girl wants to hear,” I sarcastically replied. “She’s hot.”

There was no hesitation in his response, “You’re beautiful, Lala.”

I could feel my cheeks getting flushed. “Thanks.”

“I’m only speaking the truth.”

My eyes widened, surprised where this conversation had turned. “Are you drunk?”

“A little bit.”

“Okay,” I chuckled as he twirled me in a slow circle. “Buzzed Leo is wasting all his great pick-up lines on the wrong girl.”

He settled me back into his arms, holding me closer to his torso. “What if you’re the right girl?”

“Leo, what do you—”

“There you two are!” Ashton barged through the double glass doors from the porch and we pulled away from one another.

What just happened?

It was obvious Ashton was drunk as shit. “What are you guys doing up here all by your lonesome?”

“None of your business, jackass.”

“None of my business?” he scoffed out at Leo, pointing at me. “Wanna have a threesome with us or go play truth or dare?”

“I mean when you put it that way.” Putting on my best allure, I seductively strode over to him and gripped onto the front of his shirt. “How about you get naked first? And I’ll follow your lead.”

“I feel like you’re playing with my emotions and I’m very torn on what to do.”

I leaned in close to his mouth, rasping, “You are too...”

“Handsome, attractive, everything you ever wanted?”

“Nope. You’re too—”

“Sexy, mouthwatering, hot as shi—”

“Gullible.”

“And there goes my hard on.” Ashton gestured toward the door. “Let’s go play my game, you dirty, dirty cock tease.”

Leo hid back a smile, shaking his head while we followed Ashton back down to the party.

“I found them!” he announced to a couple of people that were sitting around the fire, waiting for us. “We can start now! Mila’s first!”

“Me?”

“Yes,” he adamantly responded. “Truth or dare, Mila.”

Before I answered, I made my way toward the swing Leo made for me and sat down with a new drink Sawyer gave me in my hand, anticipating what was to come. Who knew when Ashton was involved. He was definitely the prankster of the group. The one that was the most amusing to watch and listen to. Ashton had no filter, said and did what he wanted without thinking of the consequences. He was a goofball, but it worked for him.

Case and point, a random blonde with huge tits was hanging off his neck, ready to play his game.

Lifting my drink in the air, I chose, “Dare.”

I don’t know if it was the booze or the dare he was about to hand me, but his eyes glistened, big and bright, sparkling under the stars. For a second, I saw nothing but mischief run through his stare.

“Leo! Leo Hawkins!” Ashton signaled toward him, making me realize he was standing behind me. “My best and dearest friend!”

“Hey!” I declared. “It’s my turn. Why are you talking to Leo?”

“Because my lovely, lovely Lala...” Ashton never called me by Leo’s nickname, and my heart started to hammer against my chest. Something was up, it was as if I knew what he was about to request.

“I dare you...”

Although, I was still almost knocked on my ass when Ashton challenged, “To make out with Leo.”

I laughed, I couldn’t help it. “What are we twelve? I was expecting you to dare me to streak or flash you my tits, not to kiss my best friend.”

“I think I speak for everyone here who wants to finally see you guys do something. I mean Jesus... give the people what they have been waiting for! Your friendship makes no sense. You claim to be just best friends, then prove it! Kiss him.”

“I’m—”

Leo chimed in, “Fuck off! We’re just best friends. It’d be like kissing my sister, and nobody wants to see that.”

His sister? Really?

“Mila, what do you say to that?”

Despite Ashton talking to me, my gaze never left Leo’s. “I say he’s right. It’d be like kissing my brother and nobody wants to see that.”

“Fine, then I’m double-dog dare you to kiss someone who isn’t like your brother.”

I arched an eyebrow, curious of where he was going with this.

“Cain Roberts,” Ashton called out. “Batter up, buddy!”

My eyes went wide.

“Mila, I now double-dog dare you to make out with Cain.”

I nervously chuckled, “Oh my God, we’re suddenly back in middle school.”

Cain and I locked eyes. “It’s just a kiss, I don’t see the big deal.”

“You’re actually gonna take this dare? You’re gonna kiss Cain?”

My eyes shot to Leo’s, question in his inquisitive stare went from me, to Cain, back to me again before Cain started walking toward me.

So this was going to happen?

Right here, right now, Cain and I were going to kiss.

Did I want to kiss Cain? Yes. No. Maybe?

With each step that brought him closer to my mouth, the more I felt Leo tense from behind me.

I guess this was it. This was the moment I'd make out with one of Leo's best friends. It was bound to happen, I just never thought it'd be quite like this.

Why did I feel like I was suddenly committing a crime?

It was just a stupid game.

Stop analyzing everything, Mila.

I blinked, and it was three, two, one...

Cain was hovering above my body.

I licked my lips, anxious, confused, willing?

Cain grinned. "Getting them ready for me?"

I nervously chuckled again.

I felt like I was going to throw up.

Why did I feel sick? Why did this feel so wrong? What the hell was going on?

He squatted down to the grass, sitting on the balls of his feet in front of me. We were paralleled now, face to face, and in one quick movement, Cain gripped onto the back of my neck and tugged me toward him.

I closed my eyes. I had to.

The scent of him assaulted my senses, his breath blew against my lips and the second I almost felt his mouth on mine, I heard a voice I didn't recognize scream, "Oh fuck!"

My eyes snapped open at the exact moment that Leo tumbled into Cain, accidentally knocking him into the fire pit.

"Oh my God!" I yelled, watching in horror as Cain's arm lit up with flames.

The guys dashed into action as Cain threw off his leather jacket, hurling it onto the ground to stomp out the flames.

“Fuck, man! I’m so sorry!” the stranger apologized. “I slipped and fell into Leo. Shit! Are you okay?”

With wide eyes, Cain nodded. “Yeah, I’m fine.”

“Let me see.” Sawyer grabbed his arm, thankfully the leather jacket had saved his skin from instantly catching on fire. His arm was red but unharmed.

“Bro, I’m so sorry,” Leo apologized too. “I didn’t see him until it was too late.”

Cain stepped back, nodding again. “Yeah, man, I know. I’m all right.”

No one said anything until Ashton broke the awkward silence. Placing his arm around Cain’s neck, he yanked him to the side of his body. “Dude, you’re like Iron Man. Ladies! Who wants to tend to my boy’s wounds? I nominate you, and you, and you.” He pointed to three different chicks who didn’t hesitate, grabbing ahold of Cain and taking him back inside like a wounded soldier.

“Make sure to play with his balls!” Ashton shouted behind them. “Girls always forget about the balls! They’re just as important!”

Leo’s gaze connected with mine as I lifted my red solo cup in the air between us. “I guess I’ll just make out with this margarita.”

Ashton shrugged. “We can still play the game.”

“I think that’s enough truth or dare for tonight.” I took a sip of my margarita. “We don’t need anyone else catching on fire.”

Once I was done drinking, Leo grabbed the cup out of my hand and took a long swig. “It kind of saved you.”

“How so?”

“I know when you want to kiss someone, Mila, and you did not want to kiss Cain.” Leo backed away and left.

I spent the rest of the night thinking about what he said, and I wasn't referring to Cain.

“What if you're the right girl?”

What did he mean by that?

CHAPTER 10

I drove my four-wheeler over to Mila's house. It'd been two weeks since my party and I couldn't remember the last time I drove this over to her place. Since she moved out four years ago, it became a yearly tradition that she stayed with her parents the night before her birthday. Her family had always been close, and she enjoyed time with them whenever she could. She'd often crash at my cabin just to have breakfast with her parents the next morning.

Mila's old man was a rancher. He owned most of the meat and dairy farms in Monteagle, while her mom ran things behind the scenes of their businesses. She was the face of the company and most of Mila's uncles and aunts were employed by them as well. People loved their family-operated establishment, it was what kept them coming back.

Driving next door to Mila's childhood home was always a scenic experience but today, God was showing off. The colors in the early morning sky blended together perfectly, enough to catch my eyes the further I drove down into their property. From the oranges, to the reds, to the bright greens that flowed together in the warm brisk air, it all radiated beauty. The weather would be perfect for what I had in store for her today.

Let's just say I was finally going to show her what she'd been on my balls about since we started driving.

As soon as I pulled up to her front door, she opened it with a huge smile on her face.

"Happy birthday, Lala."

"You're up early."

"It's my best friend's birthday and that calls for celebration."

"Oh yeah?"

I nodded.

"Where are we going?"

“Go get dressed and you’ll find out.”

She eyed me skeptically.

“What? You don’t trust me?”

“I trust you.”

“Then why are you still standing there?”

She stepped back with her hand still on the door. “I’ll be back in ten minutes.”

“I’ll be here.”

Thirty minutes later we were on the road because ten minutes never actually meant ten minutes when it came to Mila and getting ready.

“Are you going to tell me where we’re going?”

“Nope.”

“Oh, come on! You know I hate surprises.”

“All the more reason to torture you.”

“But it’s my birthday, you’re supposed to do everything I say today.”

“Is that right?”

“Yep. Those are the rules.”

“Whose rules?”

“Mine.”

“Can’t I just surprise you?” I reached for her thigh, but she intercepted my hand at the last second.

“Ohhh! Did you see that, Leo? You have to be quicker than that. I have cat-like reflexes. I’m secretly a ninja.”

I grinned, nodding in front of me and her eyes followed the movement. Using the distraction to my advantage, I squeezed her inner thigh. “What was that?” I mocked, squeezing tighter. “I’m sorry I didn’t catch that? Cat-like what?”

She thrashed, squealing and laughing at the same time until I let go.

“Now what were you saying?”

“You mean before I was rudely interrupted?”

“Yes, before that.”

She shook her head, smirking. “I don’t make the rules, I just follow them.”

“And what other rules are you following, Lala?”

“Oh, you know... a little of this, a little of that. If I told you, I’d have to kill you.”

I scoffed out a chuckle. “You could get rid of me so easily?”

“I mean I’d be sad, but I’d move on.”

Before thinking, I blurted, “With Cain?”

“I don’t know. It depends on where you’re taking me for my birthday.”

“So, you’re wheeling and dealing now?”

“I learned from the best.”

“Would that be me?”

“The one and only.”

“I’m happy to hear that I taught you well then.”

“I’ll let you live if you tell me where we’re going.”

“I’ll make you a deal.”

“We’re back to that?”

“We never left.”

“All right, I’m game. State your terms.”

“If you stop asking me where I’m taking you then I may give you two surprises instead of just one.”

“Hmmm... tempting. Does that mean I get two happy endings?”

“I could give you multiples, but if you only want two, I guess I’ll have to comply, it is your birthday after all,” I

replied with a smirk.

“Multiples? Interesting... I guess I will remain silent. Who am I to take away your happiness?”

“You’re my best friend.”

She smiled.

“But you’re also a huge pain in my ass.”

She stopped smiling and turned up the radio, pretending like she was upset when in reality I knew how excited she felt.

I knew it because I felt it too.

—Mila—

Once we got off on the exit for Tullahoma, I smiled again.

He wouldn't.

No way.

Not after all these years...

"Why are we in Tullahoma?" I questioned, looking at him like he was crazy.

"For a little piece of paradise, Mila."

I let him have this and didn't press for more. Ten minutes later, he parked his truck on the side of the road by the woods and I couldn't hold back any longer.

"Leo, are you taking me hiking? I don't have boots for th
—"

He placed a wrapped gift on my lap. "Your first happy ending."

"Did you wrap this?"

He nodded.

"Wow. You did a good job."

"I watched a YouTube video."

"For me?"

"Always for you."

I could see Leo grinning like a fool from the corner of my eyes. "It's so pretty I don't want to open it."

"I knew you'd say that."

"Then you shouldn't have made it so nice. Did you make the bow too?"

"I did."

I peeked up at him through my long, dark lashes. "This is really sweet, Leo. Thank you."

“You haven’t even seen what it is yet.”

“If the wrapping job is any indication then I know it’s going to be amazing.”

“Open up the gift, Lala.”

“So bossy.”

Slowly and carefully, I unwrapped the box that read Merrell on the lid and loudly shrieked, fully aware of what it was. Quickly, I opened the shoebox and there in front of my eyes were my very own pair of black hiking boots with light pink laces. I’d been begging Leo to take me hiking with him since it became his hobby when he started driving. He always said he’d take me when the time was right.

“You even got my size correct.”

He raised his eyebrows with a challenging yet amused expression before opening the door and stepping out of his truck. I laced up my new hiking boots and followed his lead, only to be met with a hiking stick and a water bottle in his hands.

“Once we get to the side of the mountain, you grab and step where I do, understood?”

I nodded, eager to get this journey on the road. I’d never been hiking before, at least not like this.

By the time we began climbing down the side of the mountain, my legs started to shake. “Don’t go so fast.”

“Mila, I’m going as slow as I can.”

“I know, but shit! Why didn’t you ever say how dangerous this was? You do this by yourself? Why?”

“To get away from all the crazy women.”

“Me included?”

“You’re the first one on the roster.”

I giggled, “Leo, don’t make me laugh or I’ll fall.”

“Just make sure you keep grabbing and stepping where I am, and you won’t fall.”

“How reassuring of you.”

“I’d never let you fall.”

“If I do fall,” I smiled, “I’ll make sure to fall on you.”

He peered up at me from the rigged spot he was standing on. “Why do you think I’m below you?”

“To catch me if I fall?”

“To move out of the way if you do.”

My mouth dropped open.

“I’m kidding. Of course, to catch you if you fall.”

“Well, now I’m questioning your motives.”

“I promise once you see where I’m taking you you’ll be on my balls to bring you back.”

“How much further?”

“Not much.”

“You keep saying that.”

“You keep asking.”

“Are we close?”

“We’re getting closer.”

He glided down with precision, as if he remembered every step he needed to take by memory. Where to grab, where to hold, it was effortless for him. I knew he loved hiking, however seeing him actually do it was a completely different experience.

“And we have to climb back up to leave, right?”

“Yes, that’s the way it works.”

“What if I don’t make it? My legs already feel like they’re going to give out on me.”

“We’ll take a long break when we get down there.”

“How are you carrying that heavy ass backpack and still not breaking a sweat?”

“I’m used to it.”

“Are you even tired?”

“Compared to all my hikes, this one is one of the easiest to get to, but lucky for you, it’s my favorite.”

“I thought the Smokies was your favorite? Why this one?”

“You’ll see.”

“The only thing I see is me plummeting to my death.”

“Has anyone ever told you that you talk too much?”

“Yes. *You.*”

“Now you understand why I’ve never brought you here with me.”

“Hey! It’s my birthday!”

“So you’ve said for the fifth time in the last hour.”

“You’ve been counting?”

“I needed the distraction from your constant badgering.”

“Leo!”

“Mila!”

The pitch in my tone had me losing my footing. “Oh shit!” I stepped in the wrong patch, and almost slid several feet below.

Leo grabbed my leg. “I got you.”

“Damn,” I exclaimed, my heart beating a mile a minute. “I guess you’re the one with the cat-like reflexes.”

“Love.”

“Yes...”

“I’m going to need you to stop talking now.”

“Fine, but only because you just saved my life.”

“So dramatic.”

After what felt like an eternity later, we finally made it to the bottom of the mountain, and I immediately understood

why this was Leo's happy place.

After this, I knew one thing for sure...

It'd be mine too.

CHAPTER 11

—Leo—

Watching the way Mila's eyes widened as she took in the beauty of this place was a sight I'd never forget. I was doing this for her, but I was also doing it for myself. The look on Mila's face was worth making her wait all these years to finally come with me.

I watched as she walked over the wooden bridge in the center of the river to get a better view of the waterfall cascading down the rocks into a lagoon. Her enticing dark brown eyes glanced back at me over her shoulder, and I couldn't gather a fucking thought. I'd never seen her look more beautiful than I did in that moment. The light of the shining sun heightened her features, emphasizing the freckles across her button nose and sculpted cheeks.

She was stunning.

All these emotions I wasn't expecting crept into the forefront of my mind and I couldn't control any of them. After all these years, all this time, Mila didn't just look like my best friend, but like a woman who I was seeing for the first time.

Right there.

In that second, I wanted more.

Her.

What the fuck?

She was stunning, with her hair flowing loosely around her face. Although her beauty captured my attention, it was the expression on her face that enthralled me the most. I'd seen Mila in all forms.

Happy.

Sad.

Devastated.

Excited.

There wasn't an emotion, a time, a memory that didn't involve her in it in one way or another. However, I'd never seen her quite like this...

She stood against the railing with her lips slightly parted, and I wanted to know what she was thinking.

"This is simply incredible, Leo. The rocks, the waterfall, the stream, wow. I have no words for this."

"That's a first."

We locked eyes.

"Will you tell me why this is your favorite spot now?"

My feet moved on their own accord until I was suddenly standing behind her. Her breathing hitched as soon as she felt my chest against her back.

She didn't turn around.

She didn't move.

I wasn't sure if she was even breathing.

For a minute, I breathed her in. Feeling the heat of her body burning into me more and more with each second that passed between us. Leaning in, just inches away from the back of her neck, I let my breath brush against her ear.

My head spun in a whirlwind of feelings and I allowed myself to get lost in them.

In her.

I could sense that her eyes followed the movement of my strong arms as they came around her body. Skimming the sides of her ribs, I placed my hands on the railing out in front of her, caging her in against my torso.

My scent.

"This was the first spot I ever found after I made the Playboy Pact with the guys. I didn't even know where I was going, I just wanted to get out of my own head."

"I thought you wanted the pact?"

"I did."

“Did?”

“*Do.*”

She spun around, staring deep into my eyes. “Why?”

“Why not?”

“No way. Nope.” She adamantly shook her head. “It’s my birthday and you have to answer my question. Why did you want the pact so bad?”

Ignoring her question, I asked, “What are you doing after graduation, Mila?”

She jerked back, not expecting me to ask her that. “You answer my question first.”

“I will once you answer mine.”

“I’m going to grad school.”

“Where?”

“Leo, that’s not fair.”

“Life’s not fair or you wouldn’t be looking to move away from me for grad school.” With that I pushed off the railing, the moment now ruined between us.

“How do you know that?”

“I didn’t. You just told me.”

She profoundly sighed, bowing her head.

“Lala, it’s your birthday. I don’t want to do this today.”

Her eyes once again connected with mine. “Too late. I’m not looking to move away from you, Leo.”

“Then why are you looking at all?”

She shrugged. “I just need a change of pace.”

“From me?”

“No. Yes. I don’t know. I’m twenty-two years old today and I’ve only ever lived in Monteagle, Tennessee.”

“And why is that so bad?”

“It’s not.”

“Then you wouldn’t be looking to move, so try again.”

“You’re being unfair.”

“Really? Because I think I’m being pretty damn reasonable, considering I’m your best friend and you didn’t even ask me how I felt about this.”

“I was.”

“When? After you moved?”

“Leo, this isn’t about you. It’s about me. I want to experience something different before I settle down and get married and have my own kids. Unlike you, I want to live my own life, not step into someone else’s.”

“And you think I am?”

“You’re literally taking over your father’s life. You’re stuck in this place like we’re still in high school. You’re an adult who still lives at home, your mom still does your laundry, your parents still pay your bills, and you’re perfectly content living on their property until you die because you made a pact when you were sixteen with your three best friends to stay single and never fall in love. I can’t stay here for you in order for your world to stay the same, when all I want is to move on from here.”

“From here or me?”

“What are you saying? I’m kind of confused here. We’ll always be best friends, no matter where I live.”

“Things change, people change.”

“And why is that so bad? Change is a good thing. It’s what keeps life interesting and exciting and I wish you would see that.”

My thoughts.

My words.

My emotions.

They all seemed to fucking intertwine with one another.
Pushing and pulling like a game of tug of war.

“What do you want from me?”

I didn't hesitate in replying, “Everything.”

—Mila—

“What does that even mean?”

This was not how I expected to spend my birthday, arguing with Leo.

“It means I love my life. I don’t want things to change and it’s why I made the pact with the boys in the first place. I don’t need a wife, kids, love... it doesn’t matter to me. I have everything I want in my life and I’ve had since I was born. *You.*”

“That’s not enough for me, Leo. I love you, you’re my best friend and you always will be. But I deserve more than weekend bonfires at your cabin. I need more. I want to meet new people, I want to fall in love, there are things I want that I can’t do here.”

“Mila—”

“No! You can’t have your cake and eat it too.”

“That’s the whole point of cake, Lala.”

“No. You have me, the best friend who will do anything for you. I’m your wingman, your support system, I’m at your beck and call. I can’t do that for the rest of my life, Leo, and it’s bullshit you expect me to.”

He reached into his backpack and pulled out another gift. “Here.”

“Leo.” I shook my head no. “Not now.”

“Please.”

I sighed, giving in to his request, and unwrapped the small box.

“You’ve always had wings, Mila, and I’m not stupid enough to think this town could keep you from using them. So, here.”

I pulled out the gold necklace with coordinates on the charm. “What is it?”

“It’s the location of your swing in your parent’s backyard.”

My lips parted, unable to speak.

For a minute, neither one of us said a word. We just stood there, staring sincerely into each other’s eyes.

Except, he was the first to break the silence, speaking with conviction...

“It’s so you can always find your way back home.”

Adding, “*To me.*”

CHAPTER 12

“I think a celebratory shot is in order for us nailing that dual thesis,” Cain stated, nodding toward the waitress at the bar and grill we were having dinner at.

He was right. We did knock it out of the park with our paper. I couldn’t say I was surprised though, Cain was smart, like super smart. I’d always been a good student, but as much as I hated to admit it, he was brighter than I was.

Huh, who would have thought? Definitely not me.

“You’re welcome for picking you as my partner.”

“Wow. That only took twenty minutes of us being here for you to take all the credit.”

“Really? That long?”

I choked on my frozen margarita as the waitress came back to our table.

She smiled. “What can I help you with?”

“What are you offering, darlin’?”

I rolled my eyes while hers darted over to mine.

“Oh!” I answered the question in her gaze. “We’re not together.”

“What she means to say is, we have an open relationship. So, you’re more than welcome to join the party.”

The waitress blushed, and I exclaimed, “Cain!”

“I know, honey. Our last threesome wasn’t what you expected it to be, but I told you I’m perfectly okay with you going down on her too.”

I smacked his arm from across the table.

“Ow!” He looked at the waitress. “She likes it rough. My safe word is wolfie.”

“Oh my God. He’s joking.”

At least I think he was joking... wolfie?

She giggled in that flirty way, eyes ogling him.

“We’ll take four shots of 1942 and your phone number. Thanks.”

The waitress beamed, now eye fucking the shit out of him. “I’ll be right back with your order.”

Once she was gone, I stated the obvious, “Is it always this easy for you?”

“It’s usually easier. I had to talk that time, usually I just smile.”

“And look pretty.”

“It’s my boyband looks, I know.”

“You just think you’re so slick, don’t you?”

“I don’t think, Mi, I know I am. When she comes back she’s going to slip me her phone number on a napkin.”

“You’re almost worse than Leo.”

“Mi, I am much worse than your butt buddy. Now—” he held his hands out in front of him “—don’t get me wrong. Leo pulls in some fine ass tail, but we both know his head is usually up your ass so...”

I shook my head. “That’s not true.”

“Which part?”

“Leo’s head is not up my ass.”

He glanced under the table. “Yup. His head is still there.”

“We’re just best fri—”

“Yes, yes, I know. ‘We’re just best friends,’” he mocked in a high pitched tone.

“Was that supposed to sound like me?”

“Yeah, do I need to sound whinier?”

“Whinier? Is that even a word, Mr. 3.9 GPA?”

“Actually, it’s Mr. 4.0 now, but I’ll let that slide. Where is your boy anyway?”

“Not sure.”

“Not sure because you haven’t talked to him today or…”

“Because I haven’t talked to him since my birthday.”

“That was almost a week ago.”

“Yeah…”

“Care to elaborate for the people just tuning in to the soap opera that is your relationship?”

“We kind of had an argument.”

He gasped, placing his hand on his chest in a dramatic gesture. “Mom and Dad are fighting?”

“Shut up.”

“So what happened?”

“I’m not really sure where to start.”

“The beginning usually works.”

“Well, it started with him—”

“Hold that thought.”

The waitress came back with our shots, but first, she put a napkin with her phone number down on the table. “I’m off at midnight.”

“I can get you off by one.” He winked.

Ugh. Gross.

She pushed her tits into his arm and whispered something I couldn’t hear in his ear. Although, if the abrupt expression on Cain’s face was any indication, whatever she said pleased him.

I grabbed my phone while they continued on, checking if Leo had texted me, but nope.

He was as stubborn as a bull.

“Carry on, Mi, you were saying?”

I gazed up at him, setting my phone back onto the table. The waitress was gone.

“What was that about?”

“Her name is Veronica and she wants me to spank her puss —”

I put my hand up in the air. “Never mind.”

“You asked.”

“I can now see the error of my ways.”

“Stop stalling. What happened between you and Leo?”

Taking a deep breath, I grabbed one of the shots and took it down in one swig. At the last second, I decided to drink the other one as well.

“Damn. That bad? You didn’t even do the salt and lime.”

“I’m a professional. I don’t need the salt and lime.”

“But I thought you could lick salt off my hand and suck the lime out of my mouth.”

I laughed, throwing my head back. “You’re horrible.”

“I’ve been called worse. How much longer are you going to keep me in suspense? I’m losing wood here.”

“Fine. He took me hiking on my birthday and we ended up getting into a fight on the bridge.”

“About what?”

“The future.”

“What about it?”

“I told him that I was applying to out of state grad schools.”

His eyes widened, and he leaned back into his chair. “That must have gone over as about as smooth as sandpaper.”

“Yeah, something like that.”

“And you haven’t spoken since?”

“And we haven’t spoken since.”

“I can only imagine how upset Leo must have been about the unexpected news.”

“He wasn’t happy.”

“Can’t blame the guy. He loves it here. He loves it so much he should be the honorary mascot for Monteagle. That’s how much he loves this town.”

“And what about you?”

“What about me?”

“Are you planning on moving and starting your catamaran business?”

“I am.”

“Really?”

“I already put my down payment on my boat. It needs a little bit of TLC, but nothing I can’t handle. I’m going to live on it while I rub her down to get her nice and ready for the adventures we’re going to take.”

“You can get your hands dirty too?”

“Have you seen some of the women I’ve fucked?”

“And we’re back to that. We didn’t talk about your sex life for at least a whole minute. I think that might be our new record.”

He nodded at me. “What states are you applying to grad school?”

“All over. No particular location has a preference over another. How about you? Where are you planning on moving?”

“Virgin Islands, baby. St. Thomas to be exact.”

I beamed. “Some of my best memories come from that island.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Yep. We used to go every summer. My dad is a rancher through and through, but my mom’s heart is with the ocean. She grew up in Florida. Met my dad on spring break during

her junior year of college. He was visiting St. Petersburg Beach with his fraternity brothers and they fell in love at first sight.”

“Is that the story she told you?”

“You make it sound like it’s a lie.”

“More like a fairytale, but I know how you ladies are about the white carriages and happily ever after’s. Did she tell you your old man was her first too?”

“Dude, are you always this cynical?”

“I like to think of myself as a realist. Love is an illusion. It’s propaganda. Especially the Disney movies you girls grow up watching. The prince charming bullshit. It’s thrown into your faces before you even know how to think for yourself.”

“Wow. Who did a number on you, Cain?”

He didn’t hesitate in replying, “My parents.”

CHAPTER 13

—Mila—

I swallowed hard, not knowing how to respond to him. Although, I didn't have to wonder for very long.

He swiftly changed the subject as if this conversation didn't faze him like it did me. "You should come with me."

"Excuse me? What?"

"Hear me out. You don't know what state you want to attend grad school, and quite frankly the expression on your face when you were talking about schools didn't make my cock twitch by any means. But when I mention St. Thomas, you lit up like a fucking Christmas tree."

"Cain, I don't think—"

"The University of the Virgin Islands is accredited and from what I hear a great grad program for psych majors."

"How do you know?"

"I'm thinking about getting my master's in couples counseling."

"Really?"

"It would only help me run my business even better. Knowledge is always power."

"I see..."

"No, I don't think you do, Mi. What are you so afraid of?"

"I didn't say I was."

"It's written all over your face."

"You're an interpreter of my emotions now?"

"Women are easy to read."

"Enlighten me."

With an amused expression on his face, he countered, "I'm fine means you're losing your shit. Don't worry about it means I'm fucked. When you sigh, it means the world is coming to

an end. When it's that time of the month, you eat chocolate as if it's your last meal. Also, you turn into raging emotional wrecks where all reasoning goes out the fucking window. It's one of those things where you just have to cry it out."

"Wow."

"Oh, I'm not done." He chugged down his shot, slamming it back down on the table. "Go ahead means you better stay your ass home if you know what's good for you. Do I look fat in this? Means you better lie if you value your balls. I don't want to talk about it means you want to talk about *everything*."

"And you've never had a girlfriend?"

"And now you understand why."

He signaled the waitress for another two rounds. "Plus, if you come with me, you could be my wingman and help me find a fake wife."

"A fake wife?"

"Yes. I need a fake wife. Unless you would you like to apply for the position?"

"Being your fake wife isn't exactly a life goal of mine."

"Your loss."

"You think you can actually pull off being happily in love with a stranger? Happily married none the less?"

"Yep. I'm a good actor. It's how I get laid so much. I can do anything I set my mind to. If I'm going to sell the dream of love, than I'm going to have to sell my perfect marriage too."

"You're awfully confident in your acting skills."

"Women are easy. They'll believe anything you tell them as long as you look into their eyes."

After hearing him say all this, and still thinking about leaving with him, I questioned my sanity and how much I had to drink.

"But I am being serious about one thing."

"What's that?"

“Your face did light up like a fucking Christmas tree when you were talking about St. Thomas. You should consider it and at least you would have a friend in the area.”

“A friend? Is that what you are?”

He smiled, leaned into the table, and set his arms down in front of him. “Do we have to put a label on it?” He raised his eyebrows with a cocky smile.

“I’m not going to lie. Your suggestion does sound awfully tempting and appealing.”

“I’m full of—”

“It? Yes.” I nodded. “I agree.” Thinking about it for a second, I asked what we were probably both thinking, “What do you think Leo would say?”

“To have someone look after you? I think he’d appreciate it or...” He paused, leaning back into his chair. “He’s going to murder me for suggesting it. Honestly, it could go either way.”

I grabbed another shot while handing him his. “I’ll think about it. When does the summer session start?”

In another huge gulp, he drank his shot. “Right after graduation.”

“Yeah...” I lifted my empty glass in between us. Breathing out the liquor, I rasped, “I’m going to need more of these.”

He clapped his hands together and stood. “That’s the spirit. I’ll be right back.”

My mind drifted the entire time he was gone, thinking about St. Thomas, about Leo, about my future, about his. Thought after thought assaulted my brain in a matter of a couple of minutes. I never considered an island for grad school, but now that the thought was put into my brain, I couldn’t stop thinking about it.

Could I do this?

Just pick up and move to an island?

“All right, Mi, we’re not here to contemplate our futures and wallow in our own self-pity. We’re here to celebrate our

paper and get fucking shitfaced. Comprende?”

“You speak Spanish now?”

“I get by.”

“Is there anything you can’t do?”

“I can’t spend the night. I hate cuddling. It makes me hot, you know, hotter than I already am.”

“So humble.”

“I can also kick your ass in a game of darts.”

“I don’t know how to play darts, so that’s probably true.”

“Well then, Miss Mila, step into my office and let me show you the way.”

“How noble of you.”

He extended out his arm, leading the way to the dartboard that was in the back of the bar. Cain got everything ready before handing me three darts. “Here you go. You need to stand here.” Grabbing my shoulders, he placed me maybe eight or nine feet away from the wooden board that was hanging on the wall.

“Now what?”

“Now we practice. Take the dart and chuck it at the board. The closer you get to the bullseye which is the middle red circle, the better score you’ll have.”

“Okay.” Holding the dart like a pencil, I raised my hand and threw it in the direction of the board. It wasn’t even close to hitting a number, my dart bounced off the rim and fell to the floor.

“That was pathetic. Were you even trying?”

“Hey! That’s not very encouraging.”

“You’re right. Where are my manners? Let me help.” He quickly stepped behind me and molded his body to mine.

“That better be your cellphone that is digging into my ass, Cain.”

“Mi, you can call it whatever you want.”

“Cain!”

“All right, all right, I’m joking. Don’t get your panties in a bunch.” With his right hand, he grabbed mine that was now holding the second dart while the other hand gripped onto my hip. “You need to be one with the dart, Mila. Do you feel that?”

“I don’t know, I thought it was your cellphone but now I’m not so sure.”

He chuckled, “You need to loosen up. You’re too stiff. You’re playing a game of darts, not about to be fucked in the ass. Relax.”

“I’m relaxed.”

“This is your relaxed?”

I shook it out, wiggling my body.

“Do that again, except this time squirm a little to the left.”

“Cain!”

“I love it when you scream my name.”

I giggled.

This idiot!

“We’re going to do this together. You ready?”

“As ready as I’ll ever be.”

In one fluid motion, he rocked his hips into my ass and shot the dart straight into the bullseye.

“Ahhh!” I shrieked in excitement.

“We make a good team.”

“We did it!” I instantly turned around and jumped into his arms. Cain didn’t hesitate, lifting me up off the ground.

“That’s my girl.”

“Your girl?”

I froze, recognizing that voice.

“Last time I checked, she was *mine*.”

My heart dropped to the floor.

Leo. Was. Here.

And I was in Cain’s arms.

CHAPTER 14

She slid down Cain's chest.

What the fuck?

“Bro,” Ashton chimed in, trying to cut the sudden tension in the room with a joke. We'd all just walked in. “Why are you so selfish? If *Mi* is handing out hugs, then I would like to take one too.” He extended out his arms. “Come to daddy, baby.”

“Is this why you texted me?” I asked, ignoring Ashton and looking at Cain.

“Of course. We're fucking celebrating, man! We aced our paper.”

“Congrats.”

Everyone's attention drifted from me and Cain to Ashton and Mila.

Ashton pulled her into his chest. “I'm so proud.”

I scoffed out a chuckle. This dumbass always had a way of making me laugh. If there was one thing Ashton was good for, it was his comedic relief in moments we needed them the most. Women loved how he made them laugh with all his stupid antics.

Bringing my gaze back to him, Cain handed me a shot. “Take a load off, Leo. I was just teaching Mila how to play darts. I can't believe you've never taught her.”

“She's more of a ping pong kind of girl.”

“Hence, why I'm teaching her.”

Ashton let go of Mila and she walked right over to me. “You're up,” she announced, handing me a dart.

“I kick Cain's ass at this game all the time. I highly doubt he taught you anything useful.”

“Fuck you, needle dick.” Cain rolled his eyes.

Mila smiled, only staring at me. Trying to lighten the mood between us.

I grinned, giving in. I could never stay mad at her. Shit, I couldn't stay mad at Cain either. There was a reason they were both my best friends.

Ashton called the waitress over and for the next two hours, we all hung out like old times. As if nothing was changing, when soon, everything would.

Drinking my sixth shot of the night, I came up behind Mila, who was next on the game of pool we were playing. "How many times have I told you that you need to lean into the table like this?"

"You just want my ass against your body."

"It is a nice ass."

"I know."

"You guys do realize that this might be one of the last times we're together for a while, right?"

Our eyes shifted to Sawyer, he was sitting on a barstool waiting for his turn.

"I'm going to medical school, Ashton is... who the fuck knows what he's doing, least of all him."

"I know what I'm doing with my life, jackass."

"And what is that?"

"Real estate. I want to be an agent."

"Where did that come from?"

"I'm a finance major and I'm a people person, I could sell sex to a nun."

"On that note, I'll continue on. We all know Leo is going to become a workaholic like his old man, and then we have Cain here." Sawyer put his arm around Cain's shoulders. "He's moving to St. Thomas and leaving us."

"Bro, don't be such a downer. You guys can come visit anytime you want. I'll even try not to fuck all the girls on the

island before you visit.” He smiled at Mila. “Not to mention, you’ll have two people to visit when you come down.”

“Oh, you’re taking your mom?” Ashton remarked as a joke, hitting the four striped ball into the corner pocket.

“Nope.” Cain moved away from Sawyer and tugged Mila out of my hold, pulling her toward him with his arm around the swell of her back. “I mean, if she actually decides to go to grad school with me over there.”

“Wait. What?” I blurted, completely lost with what just happened. I was aware that Mila wanted to move outside of Tennessee, but there was no way in hell I thought it was going to be clear across the fucking Atlantic. Our eyes locked. “The fuck?”

“What Cain has so unrightfully just announced isn’t entirely true.”

“What part? The one where you’re moving to an island or the one where you’re moving with Cain to an island?”

“That’s not the case, Leo.”

“She’s not moving with me, man. She just might be moving to the same island as I am. Besides.” Cain shrugged, only looking at me. “I’ll be there to watch over your girl. I thought you’d be happy about that.”

“Can we talk in private outside?”

She nodded.

With that, I snapped around. Desperately trying not to lose my shit.

—Mila—

This wasn’t going to end well. That much I knew. Leo didn’t wait for me to answer him, instead he quickly made his way toward the back of the building and I glared at Cain.

“Why would you bring that up right now?” I hissed at him as I walked by, trailing behind Leo.

“Ummm...” He rubbed that back of his neck in an awkward gesture. “I didn’t think it would be that big of a deal. You want me to go talk to him?”

“No. You’ve done enough.”

“Mila—”

I turned, following Leo outside.

Why? Why would Cain put me on the spot like that? Was he deliberately trying to start a war between Leo and me?

Once I made it outside, I let out a deep breath. Unsure of where this would go, but ready for the battle that awaited me in the form of my best friend.

“Leo, stop. Please let me explain.”

Explain what? I barely had any answers for myself, let alone him... And it is my life after all.

“I’m waiting.”

“Listen, you already knew I was thinking about moving.”

“Yes, moving to Ohio or maybe Florida where your mom is from, but never did I imagine it would be the Virgin Islands. What the fuck is that? You have to move away to the furthest place possible from me and your family?”

“That’s not true.”

“You’re a country girl, Lala. What the hell are you going to do on an island?”

“You know how much I love it there. Remember? Our families used to vacation there together every summer.”

“Vacation, babe. We weren’t living there.”

“I know that, but you have to admit... it was pretty awesome.”

“It was awesome because your family and I were there with you. You really think you’re going to be happy so far away from everyone and everything you know?”

“I’m not sure.”

“Don’t you think you should be sure before you make a decision like that?”

“I guess.”

“You guess? You’re not exactly reassuring me here, Mila.”

“I don’t know what you want me to say.”

“The truth would be nice.”

“I did tell you the truth on my birthday. I want to try new things.”

“We’ve been best friends since we were kids. I’ve watched you grow up. I taught you how to ride a dirt bike because you were adamant that you’d ride what I did. I’ve been there for you throughout your horrible taste in men. It’s always been us. Why isn’t that good enough for you?”

“Why is Tennessee good enough for you?”

“Because my family is here. My future.”

“The future that your father wants for you is here.”

“What difference does it make?”

“Is it your choice? If you didn’t have your father’s business to take over, would you still want to stay here?”

He opened his mouth. However, nothing came out.

“Maybe you should be asking yourself that question, Leo. You can move with me, you know?”

“You mean with you and Cain?”

“Stop saying it like that. There is nothing going on between us and it’s crazy you think there might be. Do you really think I’d be interested in your best friend?”

“You have horrible taste in men and Cain is right up that alley for you, Mila.”

“That’s not fair! You’re blowing this out of proportion.”

“I’m going off of what you’re giving me, which isn’t much.”

“You think this is easy for me?”

“It’s not a walk in the park for me either, sweetheart. I thought we’d grow old here. Dicking around in the nursing home together. I’d be banging every nurse and you’d be stealing extra chocolate pudding for me. We’d be having wheelchair races down the hall and I’d let you win because I’ve been letting you win everything since we were five years old.”

I smiled, I couldn’t help it. “You don’t let me win every time.”

“I know.” He nodded. “I have to keep you on your toes or you’ll get a big head and I’d never hear the end of it.”

“You’re acting like I’m moving away forever.”

“Aren’t you?”

“I know this isn’t what you want to hear, but I’m not sure yet. I haven’t left. I don’t know how I’ll feel when I leave. Maybe I’m wrong, maybe I’ll hate it and I’ll move back after the first semester, but I won’t know unless I try.”

“I understand that. I don’t agree with it, but I understand it.”

In a matter of seconds, I witnessed so much emotion pass through his gaze. It was one right after the other until it landed somewhere in between sadness and uncertainty.

“If Cain hurts you, Lala, I don’t know what I would do to him.”

“I already told you. It’s not like that between us. He just makes me laugh.”

“I make you laugh.”

“I know. That’s probably why I enjoy being around him. He reminds me a lot of you.”

“Why do you need reminding when I’m standing right in front of you?”

“I just meant he’s not what I expected him to be. Cain, Ashton, Sawyer, they’re all *your* best friends, Leo. They’re

your family, your brothers. Despite knowing them for as long as I have, we aren't exactly close, more like acquaintances. You've managed to keep us all separate in our own lanes without ever truly knowing anything about each other. Up until these last few months, the only thing we've all had in common is *you*. It's been nice to have another friend. You guys didn't exactly make it easy on me growing up. Girls didn't trust me, your reputations ruined that for me."

"I see."

"Do you?"

"It doesn't really matter what I see or don't. As much as I would love for you to stay here, I can't make you and I wouldn't if I could."

"We're best friends, Leo. That's not going to change because I move, or possibly live on an island Cain also happens to live on. You'll always be my best friend. No matter what. It's you and me."

He pulled me into his arms. "No matter what I think or want, I don't want to lose you. I won't lose you, Mila."

"You're not losing me. I promise."

"I don't know a life without you in it and I don't want to know one either. I'll always be here for you. Please tell me you know that?"

"Of course I do."

Once again, we fell silent. With his arms around me under the moonlight, we comforted one another in the only way we knew how.

"I love you, Lala."

I smiled into the side of his neck. "I love you too."

For the first time in my life, my new beginnings didn't include Leo. I was still unsure of how I'd feel about that, but not enough...

To not try.

CHAPTER 15

“Welcome graduates, colleagues, family, and friends. Congratulations to everyone moving forward with their lives today,” the dean of our university announced through his microphone, standing front and center on the stage before all of us. “I’d like to begin by thanking all of the families and friends in the audience this morning. I know how proud you must be of your kids stepping into the next chapter of their lives. I, myself, have a son who will be graduating next year, and the sense of pride I feel for him, words can’t describe.”

I couldn’t believe the day was finally here. After four years of studying, graduating with a 3.7 GPA made it all worthwhile. I got accepted into every grad school I applied to and I filled out more than fifteen different applications. So many “Congratulations, you’ve been accepted” letters but I’d only committed to one.

After much consideration over the last three weeks, I decided to take the plunge and move to St. Thomas. Cain was renting a boat slip at the marina near the University and he’d be living on it while he repaired *his girl*.

Cain’s words, not mine.

When I told him I’d be taking the leap and moving there as well, he told me the marina was hiring with room and board and I jumped at the chance of working and living there too. I did my interview through a Zoom call with the manager of the property. His name was Miles and he’d been working at the marina for the last twenty years, the man was older looking, very distinguished, and super friendly.

The interview didn’t take long, and I couldn’t hold back my excitement when he went into detail about what my job would entail. My job duties depended on what they needed for the day. My number one priority was to cater to the members which now included Cain. Whatever they wanted, whether that be food, drinks, gas, or random conversation, I was their girl. In return, I got paid eighteen dollars an hour and that didn’t

include tips. From what my new boss informed me, the captains loved to tip.

Especially, the ladies.

I'd live on the property rent-free in a studio bungalow type of set up, which was located on the second floor of the bait shop. Miles said it was completely private and I'd be the only one with a key to enter and exit through a door in the back of the building. My hours would be full-time, and my schedule would fluctuate anywhere from five a.m. until midnight when they closed. The only days I had off were Tuesday and Thursday when I'd be in classes all day. On the weekends, they closed at three a.m.

There was an indoor/outdoor bar, a full restaurant with a band, and amenities galore.

Gym.

Two pools.

Small grocery store.

I wouldn't have to leave the marina, everything was at my disposal right there. He suggested I bring my bike. A car wouldn't be needed since the university was within biking distance. I'd have very little bills other than my food and activities. Nightlife was also within walking distance. Between a full-time job and being a full-time student, I doubted I'd have much time for a social life.

Cain took all the credit for my new employment, saying I owed him big time. The only downfall was that I had to leave in a few days. My job was waiting on me and the summer session started soon. I had no choice but to start packing up my entire life that afternoon. Leo was going to help me pack. When I told him my decision to move to the island two weeks before, he was surprisingly more supportive than I thought he would be. My family was the same, and extremely excited for my new adventure.

"Today is the first day of the rest of your life."

I listened to the dean end his speech before he started to announce our names to receive our diplomas. I swear I blinked

and I was driving back to my parents' house. After graduation, my whole family had a celebratory lunch for me at one of my favorite restaurants in town. I think my mom cried at least four times while my dad repeated how proud of me he was.

Since I had plans with Leo to pack up my room at their house and my apartment, I drove back alone. I didn't take much with me when I moved into my apartment after high school and I hadn't gone through my stuff in who knows how long.

My parents and family stayed behind to handle some business for the ranch.

Leo was already waiting for me in my driveway, sitting on his four-wheeler in front of the door.

"Hey," I greeted, stepping out of my Jeep.

"Hey yourself. How was lunch with your family?"

"It was good. Bittersweet. I think I'm still blind from all the pictures our families made us take after graduation. It was like prom all over again. Except Ashton didn't throw up all over my shoes this time."

"Ah, memories. But your shoes were ugly as fuck so he did you a favor."

"You said I looked good!"

"You did. Your feet, not so much."

"Leo! Those were designer shoes."

"That explains why they were so hideous. And you kept complaining all night how much they pinched your toes."

"Ugh, they did make my pinky's bleed."

"I remember. I had to drive to three different gas stations for you, trying to find the flesh-colored Band-Aids that you had to have."

I smirked. "You're the one who wanted to rent a sportscar instead of letting your parents get us a limo."

"Because that makes a difference."

“It does in my head.”

“And we both know how crazy it is up there.”

“Did you come here to help me pack or pick on me?”

“Can’t I do both?”

I smiled while unlocking the front door. For the next hour, Leo helped me pack up my bedroom. He kept finding all the sentimental stuff I forgot I saved through the years of our friendship.

“Mila, are you going to cry this entire time?”

My eyes widened, sniffing.

“What? I’m just wondering what I’m in for.”

“Oh my God! Doesn’t this make you sad? Look at this picture! We were ten and you dressed up as the blue Power Ranger for me because I was the pink one.”

“You didn’t leave me much choice, Lala. You showed up at my house on Halloween with the costume and threatened if I didn’t wear it, you wouldn’t give me your chocolate brownies at lunch anymore.”

“It’s not my fault you’ll do anything for chocolate.”

“It’s the Hawkins’s sweet tooth curse.”

“You know I still would have given you my brownies, right?”

He grinned. “I know I would have taken the brownies out of your Lisa Frank lunchbox if you didn’t.”

“Awe...” I frowned. “You remember my lunchbox?”

“How could I not? You dragged me with our moms to find the right one with the puppy on it.”

“Hey! The puppy was the best one. Besides, how many places did you drag me with our moms to find the right toys?”

“How many times do I have to tell you that superheroes are not toys? They’re collectibles. Huge difference.”

“Whatever.” I gazed around my room. “Aren’t you sad I won’t be your neighbor anymore?”

“You haven’t been my neighbor for four years.”

“I know but I still stay here all the time.”

“Most of the time, you crash at my cabin in your—” he used air quotes with his fingers “—nook.”

“Awe...” My eyes blurred with fresh tears. “My nook.”

“Mila, quit crying. You’re being such a girl.”

“I am a girl.”

He chuckled, nodding toward my nightstand. “Can I go through those drawers or are their vibrating things that are going to attack me in there too?”

“For your information,” I laughed. “I didn’t use a vibrator until I was in college.”

“Why use one at all?”

“I think that question is self-explanatory, don’t you think?”

“Not entirely. How often do you use it?”

“How often do you...” I cocked my head to the side. “You know...”

“Fuck my hand?”

“I guess that’s one way of putting it.”

“I’m not answering that question until you woman up and say the words.”

“Leo.”

“Mila, you’ve had sex. You’ve seen a cock, you can say the word.”

“Fine! How often do you masturbate!”

“Damn,” he teased. “You don’t need to get all riled up over how often I beat my meat. But if you must know—”

I threw a pillow at him. However, he caught it before it hit his face.

“At least once or twice a week. Depends on how many times I got my dick wet that week.”

“How romantic.”

“I try. Your turn.”

“I’m not telling.”

“Damn, that often, huh?”

“Wouldn’t you like to know?”

“Oh, come on! I told you.” He leaned against my dresser, folding his arms over his chest. With an arched eyebrow, he asked, “How often do you use your vibrator to make yourself come, Lala?”

“It depends.”

“On?”

“The situation.”

“Now you’ve really piqued my curiosity. What kind of situations do you find yourself in that your buzzer is needed?”

I could feel my face blushing.

“Lala, it’s me. Why are you all of a sudden being so shy?”

“We don’t usually talk about my sex life.”

“Or lack of, but we talk about everything so I’m very curious about how many times a week you beat around your bush.”

“I don’t have a bush, thank you very much.”

“So, no fanning the fur for you?”

“Leo!”

“How often do you butter your muffin? Visit the bat cave? Auditioning the finger puppets? You know, dialing the rotary phone? Getting lost in the deep end? Finger painting? Paddling the pink canoe?”

I laughed so hard my head fell back.

“I could go all day.”

“Funny, I’ve heard different.”

With an amused expression, he questioned, “Seriously, how many times a week are you petting your pussy, Mila?”

I thought about it for a second. “Sometimes I don’t use it by myself. Sometimes I use it during.”

“During what?”

“Sex.”

—Leo—

“Interesting.”

“How so?”

“I’ve never had an issue with my cock not doing its job.”

“So, what? You’ve never had a girl use one with you before?”

“Absolutely not.”

“You say that like it’s a bad thing.”

“It’s a catastrophic thing. My dick only has one job, to make you come. If I can’t do that, then I have much bigger problems than a girl bringing in her teammate to finish the fucking job I was supposed to do in the first place.”

“Ugh! Why do guys get like this? My ex was the same way, he hated when I used it. He also hated when I played with myself during sex too. It’s not a hit to your ego, Leo.” She gestured to her core. “There’s a lot going on in here. Trust me, it took me forever to figure out how to do it myself.”

“It’s not that hard to find the rigged g-spot. Spoiler alert, it gets tighter and wetter the closer you get to it.”

“I’ll make sure to pass that on to the next guy I’m with.”

I narrowed my eyes at her. “If you need to pass it on to him, then you shouldn’t be fucking him.”

“How am I supposed to know if he knows what he’s doing before I actually sleep with him?”

“The fact you don’t know, tells me all I need to know about your shit taste in men.”

“Well I guess not every man can be as skilled as you are.”

“Clearly.”

She smiled. “How am I ever gonna navigate men without you?”

I didn't want to think about her moving away in three days. This was hard enough as it was. I had to give myself a pep talk before driving over to her place to begin with. I was about to lose my shit just thinking about the fact that she wouldn't be a drive away.

Within distance.

Close to me.

Gone.

Instead of throwing a temper tantrum like a child, I replied, "Your shitty taste in men hasn't changed since you started dating, I can't imagine that's going to change because I'm not there to guide you."

"Will you visit me?"

I nodded, unable to form the words without feeling like I got kicked in the balls.

"When?"

I shrugged, unable to answer that too.

"Soon?"

I couldn't answer that either, so I responded with the only thing I could...

"On your last day here, Lala. *You're mine.*"

CHAPTER 16

I had no idea what he had planned for the day, but it didn't stop my excitement for what was to come. For the last two days, Leo helped me pack up my bedroom and my apartment. Not once did he make me feel bad for my choice to move away.

He smiled.

He joked.

We laughed. A lot.

It was as if nothing was changing between us when we both knew that was the furthest thing from the truth. I think a part of him was excited for me or maybe that was my wishful thinking.

I got up extra early that morning since Leo said he'd be picking me up at nine. After I showered and washed my hair, I blow-dried it straight and went about my regular routine. Applying my usual make-up, I dressed in a pair of black leggings, a white tank, and a cream and pink checked flannel to finish off my outfit. Throwing on a pair of combat boots, I grabbed my backpack purse and was on my way downstairs when I heard Leo at the front door talking to my mom.

"There you are, honey," she announced, opening the door a little wider to see Leo standing there with a bright smile on his face.

"Don't you look dapper this morning," I stated, referring to his pearly white teeth on full display.

"Oh, Mila," Mom whimpered. "This will be the last time you're going to be walking down those stairs."

"Mom... please don't start crying again."

Leo chuckled, "Like mother, like daughter. You've been crying for the last three days."

"And this will be the last time Leo will be picking you up," she added, wiping away more tears.

“Mom, it’s not the last time. I will come home to visit.”

“Yes, but it won’t be the same.”

“Jeanie,” Dad spoke, walking into the foyer from his office. “Are you crying again?”

“Oh, you! Our baby is leaving, and you haven’t cried once.”

“Honey, she will be back before you know it. Do you remember when she was a kid and she couldn’t stay away from us or Leo for more than a day?” He pulled her into his arms. “She’ll be back sooner than you think. I know my girl.”

“Daddy, you don’t know that.”

He smiled at me. “You’ll see. I know everything.”

“Not that I want to break up this family moment, but we need to get going if we’re going to make our reservations.”

“Reservations? Where are you taking me?”

Leo ignored my question, kissing my mother on the cheek before we left. I couldn’t control my excitement in his truck, my knee was bouncing up and down until Leo placed his hand on my thigh. Grinning like a fool, he knew I hated surprises but secretly loved them at the same time.

It didn’t take long for us to pull into the parking lot I instantly recognized.

“I thought you said we had reservations?”

“I lied.” He jumped out of his Chevy and I followed suit. Opening the bed of his truck, I came to a complete stop when I realized what he’d done.

“Please don’t cry again.”

“Leo...”

He set up a whole spread for us, blankets, pillows, a cooler, and a picnic basket all stationed perfectly on the bed of his truck.

“I can’t believe you did this.”

I couldn't, but it shouldn't have shocked me. This was Leo to a T. Anytime he did anything for anyone there was a lot of thought behind his actions. This was one of the reasons I never understood why he didn't want a girlfriend or someone in his life, he'd make the best boyfriend. He was already the best, best friend a girl could ask for.

I was constantly swooning over his sweet gestures.

And this was no different.

—Leo—

I shrugged. I didn't want to make a big deal about it. I wanted to do something nice for her, so I did. Gripping onto her waist, I lifted her up onto the bed of my Chevy. Ever since I could remember, she could never get up on her own.

“This is where I taught you to drive, Mila. It was your first taste of independence and I thought it'd be a great place to start your last day here.”

“This is really sweet, Leo. You're such a good friend.”

“You make it easy.”

I laid out the food I made for us while she got comfortable on the pillows. Handing her orange juice with no pulp, she smirked at me.

“You even used the right jelly on my sandwich. Your mom doesn't even buy this kind.”

I grinned.

We ate our food in silence but every so often I heard her take a deep breath. I knew she was content. In the grand scheme of things, this was a very simple gesture, but to Mila this meant everything. It was one of the traits I loved the most about her, she wasn't like other girls. It was the simple stuff that truly made her happy and smile.

I wanted today to be all about her first independent moments she experienced with me. For me, the hardest part of Mila moving was I wasn't going to be there to experience another monumental independent moment in her life. It was the hardest pill to swallow, but I couldn't hold her back from what she felt like she needed to do.

My role in her life was to be there for her when she needed me, and this situation wasn't any different.

Looking around the parking lot, I remember the day as if it were yesterday and not six years ago. I brought her here to

show her how to drive my truck and to this day, I still recalled the expression on her face when I handed her my keys.

Shaking my head, I declared, “I can’t believe I still fear for my life when you’re in the driver’s seat.”

“Leo.” She smacked my chest. “I’m just a cautious driver.”

“No, you’re a scary one.”

“How would you know? You never let me drive your truck.”

I pointed to the curb at the end of the lot. “The first time I tried to show you how to drive my girl you hit that spot right over there.”

She scoffed out, placing her hand on her chest. “That curb came out of nowhere.”

“No... you can barely see over the steering wheel and when I told you to lift your seat, you didn’t listen to me because Britney Spears was playing on the radio and singing and dancing in the driver’s seat was much more important to you than paying attention to what I was saying.”

“When ‘Baby One More Time’ is playing through the speakers, Leo, one must sing and dance.”

“Your performance bent and scratched my rim.”

“It was a small price to pay, and you remember my performance, so it must have been a good one.”

“I remember a lot of things.”

“Is this what we’re doing today? Taking a walk down memory lane?”

“I couldn’t let you leave town without reminding you of all the memories you’re leaving behind.”

She bowed her head and I lifted her eyes.

“Does that mean you’re not mad at me anymore?”

“I could never be mad at you.”

“You were on my birthday.”

“Initial gut reaction, you basically kicked me in the balls with your decision to move out of Tennessee.”

“Well, how are your balls now?”

I smiled. “Smart enough to know that you still can’t drive worth a shit. Your parents didn’t even buy you a vehicle until you were eighteen, in hopes that you would somehow develop some sort of awareness for driving.”

“They didn’t buy me one because you drove me everywhere, so I didn’t need one.”

“Keep telling yourself that.”

“Just for that.” She reached for the pocket of my jeans. “Give me your keys. I’m driving for the rest of the day just to prove you wrong.”

I stopped her hand. “Not a chance.”

“But it’s my last day here.” She kept trying to dig into my pocket. “And you’re offending my proficient driving skills.”

“The only thing you’re proficient at when it comes to driving is stop and go.”

She gasped, climbing on top of me. “Give me your keys.”

“Hmmm... let me think about it for a second.”

She straddled my thighs.

“No, I don’t think so.”

“Leo Brody Hawkins!”

“Why are you saying my full name like it’s going to make a difference? That only works for my mom. Stop digging into my pocket, Lala, or you’re going to find something that’s just as hard as my keys.”

“Leo!”

“What? You’re sitting on top of me, what else did you think would happen? My cock has a mind of its own and your ass is swaying all over the place so he’s very confused right now. He thinks he’s doing his job standing at attention for you.”

“Funny, because I can’t feel a thing.”

“That’s it!” She was testing my manhood. I flipped her over and before I gave any thought to what I was about to do, I rocked my dick into her pussy.

Rasping, “And now my balls are blue.”

CHAPTER 17

—Mila—

NO TRESPASSING!

There in bright, bold capital letters were two words that suddenly put a monkey wrench in Leo's next stop for me.

"When did they board up the lake?"

"Not sure." Leo didn't think twice about it. Without another word, he grabbed onto the fence and started climbing.

"Leo, you gotta be kidding me!"

"Does it look like I'm kidding?"

"You're breaking and entering!"

"No, *we're* breaking and entering."

"I don't think—"

"I'm doing the thinking for the both of us, Mila. Come on, you know how to climb a fence."

"Yeah, but I don't know how to survive in jail."

"Relax, Nancy Drew, we won't get arrested for sitting by a lake, at the most we'll get fined."

"Leo—"

"I'll pay for your fine."

"You're going to be paying a lot more than my fine if we get in trouble."

"Come on, Lala, live a little. Come to the dark side with me."

I gave in, unable to say no to him. Putting my foot into one of the holes of the fence, I gripped onto the metal and pulled myself up, watching as Leo climbed to the top and then just catapulted himself over, he jumped to the ground.

Out of the both of us, Leo was always the fearless one. I didn't have his daring attitude, but I went with it despite

feeling like this was a bad idea.

Throwing my leg over the rail, I slowly made my way down. Careful not to slip or cut my skin on the steel of the fence.

“See?” Leo acknowledged, grabbing onto my hips. He helped me step onto the grass. “That wasn’t so bad.”

As soon as my feet hit the ground, my stomach was in knots. I’d never broken the law before and it was doing a number on my belly.

“Do you remember where the bathroom is?”

He gazed behind him before gesturing toward the back of the open field. “I think it’s in the cabin over there.”

I nodded, trying to pretend like my stomach wasn’t doing somersaults and who knows what.

“You okay?”

“Mmm hmm, let’s go over there.”

I didn’t give him a chance to reply, moving one foot in front of the other at a faster pace than he expected.

“Why are you walking so fast?”

“I have to go to the bathroom.”

“You know you can always go in the lake.”

I ignored his suggestion, practically biting my bottom lip to keep from whimpering in pain. Although, my belly was making all the noise for the both of us and I silently hoped he couldn’t hear it.

“Mila, you sure you’re okay?”

“I’m fine.”

Just walk, Mila. All you have to do is walk. Don’t stop. Just. Keep. Walking.

Five steps.

Sixteen steps.

Thirty-four steps.

I'm going to shit myself.

“Mila, slow down!”

“I can't! I have to go!”

“Just go in the lake. It's right there.”

Once again, I ignored his statement, puckering my butt cheeks together.

Please God don't let me poop in my leggings in front of my best friend.

“Lala, what's going on?”

“I told you, I have to go to the bathroom.”

“And I told you, just pee in the lake. It's not a big deal.”

If I had to pee then I would go in the lake, Leo!

I resisted the urge to say exactly that. Our friendship was close, but not that close. I didn't go number two in his presence.

Ever.

Even when I stayed the night in his cabin, I always went home in the morning to use the bathroom. Even when he crashed at my apartment, I'd walk over to the clubhouse while he was still sleeping to use the restroom. I wasn't raised that way. We did those things in private. This was uncharted territory for me and I hated that the most.

However, my stomach didn't care about my humiliation.

Please don't poop! Please don't poop! Please don't poop!

Sixty-five steps.

Eighty steps.

One hundred and ten steps.

Finally!

I gripped onto the handle of the bathroom door and pulled back.

Oh, God, please no...

I cried out, "It's locked."

"Relax, it's not a big deal. Just pee—"

I snapped around and glared right into his eyes. "*I don't have to pee, Leo!*"

His stare went wide for a second before a hint of a smile crept on his face.

"Don't you dare," I warned with an edge in my tone.

"Are you ground hogging right now?"

"Oh, god..."

Could this get any worse?

"I'm just anxious and nervous from breaking the law and it's all your fault!"

"My fault? How is it my fault that you're ready to shit yourself?"

I scowled at him and he lifted his hands in a surrendering gesture as he started laughing his ass off.

"You're not helping!"

"Mila, oh fuck..." he cackled, holding onto his stomach like I was but for a whole different reason.

"Leo, stop laughing!"

"I can't..." He was hyperventilating from laughing so damn hard. "This is just fucking hilarious. You're so polite when it comes to things like this and now you're holding in a turd."

I'm going to die. This is what dying feels like.

"Leo... please..."

"Okay, okay." He governed his bearings, trying to look at me with a straight face when it was obvious all he wanted to do was continue to laugh at my current state. "I'm sorry. You're right. I'm being an asshole. Let me see if I can unlock the door for you."

I stepped aside, desperately clenching my butt cheeks. I could feel my skin getting clammy, I was beginning to lose my shit.

Literally.

He roughly yanked and rammed into the door with his shoulder a couple of times.

No luck.

I was screwed. It wasn't even budging.

Taking a deep breath, he turned to face me. Quickly, he nodded his head toward the huge oak tree about thirty feet from us.

“Go drop your bomb behind that tree over there. I'll stand guard here.”

“A tree!”

“Yeah.” He nodded to it again. “That one over there.”

“But—” I frantically shook my head no “—I've never pooped in the woods before.”

“I'll find you a good leaf.”

“A leaf!”

“Yeah, it's to wipe your dirty butt.”

“Oh my God, I can't do this.”

“You can always drop the kids off at the lake, Mila.”

“Leo, you're not helping.”

“Dude, it's just a poo. Shit happens.”

“Yeah, but not in front of you.”

“Would you like me to let a fart fly to make you feel better?”

“No!”

He shrugged. “Hey, I offered.”

“You know what? Fuck this.”

“Let’s try—”

I instantly spun around, kicking in the door as hard as I possibly could. To both our surprise, it jolted open. Crashing into the wall.

“Add destruction of private property to the fines you’ll be paying.”

With that, I walked into the bathroom and slammed the door shut behind me. Praying, I’d make it to the toilet.

—Leo—

“I can hear you dropping a deuce, Mila!”

“Get away from the door!”

“I’m kidding. Geez, who would have thought taking a shit would make you so moody.”

“Leo, I swear to God if you don’t get away from the door I’m going to—”

“Okay! Okay! I’ll be sitting by the lake. Make sure to courtesy flush, I can smell your ass from here!”

“Leo!”

I laughed, I couldn’t help it. This didn’t bother me one bit, if anything, I thought this was hilarious. Mila had always been reserved when it came to stuff like this.

She was such a girl.

I walked down to the lake and kicked off my sandals before sitting down on the grass. Getting close enough to the edge, I slid my feet into the water. Appreciating mother nature while I waited for Mila, I took in my surroundings. There wasn’t a cloud in the sky, it was the perfect afternoon to spend here.

The last time we were at this lake, we had our college acceptance letters in our hands. Opening them at the same time, we sat in this exact spot. Our excitement flooding out of

us, we were ready for our first taste of independence from our parents. Except, I didn't move out. Mila did. And now, she was moving across the world with my *other* best friend.

Cain and Mila.

Mila and Cain.

She swore there wasn't anything going on between them, so did he.

They were just friends.

I'd be lying if I said I wasn't relieved he'd at least be there for her when she needed someone. As much as I hated she was leaving, I had peace of mind that Cain would be there to look out for her. Mila could take care of herself though, I made sure of it.

I thought about the future of my life without her in it, until I heard footsteps fast approaching.

"I hope you washed your hands, stinky butt."

"I swear to God, Leo." She sat down beside me. "If you ever bring this up again or tell anyone what just happened, I will never talk to you again."

Our eyes connected. "Do you feel lighter?"

"Leo..."

I laughed, laying back onto the grass to look up at her face and the sky.

"I'm being serious."

"So am I. You feel better? You look better. Not so shitty."

She glared at me.

Chuckling, I taunted, "Your love for me is like taking a poo. You can't hold it in."

"Oh my God."

"Did you sink your battleship?"

She covered her face and bowed her head. "You're never going to let me live this down."

I pulled her hands away from her bright red cheeks. “Not a chance.”

“Just promise me you’ll never tell anyone about this.”

“Oh man, I don’t know, Lala. That’s a lot to ask. I think I might tell Cain just to keep him away from your panties.”

“Cain does not want in my panties.”

“He wouldn’t if I told him you kicked in a locked door to take a dookie.”

“Leo!”

“All right, all right, I’ll stop. *For now.*”

“Gee,” she mocked. “How kind of you.”

“I have to admit, this might be my new favorite memory of you. Don’t take it away from me so soon, Mila.”

“I’m so glad to see that my total humiliation pleases you so much.”

“You’ve always been so uptight about normal bodily functions. You really think I didn’t catch on to you sneaking a poo in the mornings? It was only a matter of time before you let it rip in front of me.”

“Not by choice! That never should have happened!”

“What?” I shrugged, speaking the truth, “I think it’s cute. You’re so fucking adorable.”

She hid back a smile. “You’re just saying that because you know I’m dying of embarrassment right now.”

“It could have been worse. You could have shit your pants and been washing them in the lake right now. Count your blessings you know how to kick in a door. Which was really fucking cool by the way. You’re like a superhero of Poop Patrol. It’s good to know that when you’re about to shit yourself, you’ll do what it takes to get in that bathroom.”

“I was kind of a badass back there.”

I nodded, grinning.

“Thanks for offering to find me a leaf.”

“What are best friends for?”

She giggled, laying back onto the grass with me. We both stared up at the sky for a few minutes.

“I can’t believe it’s been four years since we’ve been here. I remember how excited we were to be entering the next stage in our lives.”

Hearing her say that, I reached for her hand, holding it in mine.

We stayed like that for the next hour, neither one of us brought up the fact that we were only there because...

She was leaving tomorrow.

CHAPTER 18

—Leo—

I parked my truck in the parking lot of our next destination and Mila's face lit up when she realized where we were.

“Jack Daniel's distillery, huh?”

I smiled, opening the door. “I couldn't let you leave without recreating your twenty-first birthday from last year.”

“I can still taste the whiskey burning down my throat, Leo.”

“Well, it's a good thing you already unloaded your cargo, so your stomach should be good to go.”

“Oh my God.”

“What? That was like two hours without me mentioning it. I should get a medal.”

“Okay, so new deal. You're not allowed to talk about what happened to me for the rest of the day.”

“Or what?”

We jumped out of my truck and made our way toward the front of the building.

“Or I'll tell the boys about you dancing to ‘Girls Just Wanna Have Fun’ with me last summer, and how you secretly enjoyed it.”

“I was shitfaced.”

“Then I guess we're both in shitty situations.”

Grinning like a fool, I gripped onto the back of her neck. “And you made your first joke about opening the gates.”

She swatted my hand away. “How many number two puns can you possibly have?”

“I have balls and a dick. It comes with the territory.”

“Whatever. No more talking about this or I'm texting them the video.”

“You have a video?”

“Only one way to find out.”

“You’re lucky I’m feeling generous.”

“You’re lucky I haven’t uploaded it to TikTok yet.”

“I fucking hate TikTok.”

“Leo, you hate all social media. You only have a Facebook because I opened you one.”

“And look how well that turned out. I never use it.”

“You’ll be using it soon.”

“Is that right?”

“How else will you keep up with what I’m doing?”

“Oh...” I glanced at her. “So, I’ll be using it to stalk you like most of your *friends*?”

“Nobody stalks me.” She smiled at me. “You’ll be the first one.”

“Lala, have you seen what you look like in a bikini? And now you’re going to be on a fucking island, wearing one on a daily basis. You’re going to get spammed with *friend* requests. Trust me on that one.”

“Maybe I should open an Only Fans account?”

“And maybe I should go ahead and start collecting bail money.”

She giggled, “Plus, you can talk to me on messenger. For free.”

“Look at you, already budgeting your money like a big girl.”

“Look at you, still going to be living at home like a little boy.”

“There’s nothing little about me, Mila.”

She rolled her eyes. “Maybe not little, but definitely something huge. Have you checked your ego lately? Phew,

I'm surprised you can get through the doors of this building it's so huge."

"See, now you understand. Everything about me is just so huge. Especially." I winked at her. "*My ego.*"

After the attendant checked us off the reservation list, she introduced us to our older tour guide, Bill.

"Hey, I never forget a pretty face," he greeted, shaking her hand. "You two been here before, right?"

She nodded. "We have."

"I knew it! You were here for your birthday?"

"Wow, you have a good memory."

"It's all the whiskey I drink, darlin'. Now, are you two ready to have a good time? I'm the best tour guide of this distillery so you're in good hands."

"Let's do it."

I nodded. "You heard the lady."

He signaled to the first stop on the tour which was Jack Daniel's office. The property had five different locations that you walked through, beginning with his life, to how they made the whiskey in the barrels, and it ended with a taste testing of ten different brews of the liquor.

"What brings ya two back?"

Our eyes connected, it was obvious that neither one of us wanted to answer his question.

"Ummm... I'm actually moving tomorrow."

"Movin'? Where to?"

I stared out in front of me, but out of the corner of my gaze, I could still see the cautious expression on Mila's face.

"Virgin Islands."

"Virgin Islands?! What part?"

"St. Thomas."

"Damn. Talk about a whole different life!"

You could say that again, Bill.

“Is your boyfriend goin’ wit’ you?”

“We’re best friends.”

“You two are *just* best friends?”

“Yes.” Her hesitant expression didn’t change.

“You know what? You guys remind me a lot of me and my wife. We were best friends too. Did everythin’ together. Until she decided she needed to spread her wings and move away from everythin’ and everyone she knew. My girl didn’t last longer than four months. Our time apart made us realize that we’ve always loved each other. She came runnin’ back to me and we got married a year later.”

“Awe! That’s a beautiful story, Bill.”

It was, and I couldn’t help but wonder what our time apart would help Mila and I realize.

An hour later, we were sitting at the bar, doing our taste testing.

“I still can’t believe Jack Daniel’s died because he kicked his safe and his infected foot went untreated.”

“I can, Lala. I hate going to the doctor. Nothing that duct tape can’t fix.”

When she started giggling uncontrollably over nothing, I knew the shots were starting to get to her.

She was such a lightweight if she drank anything other than tequila. I, on the other hand, could down whiskey like water. It took a lot to get me drunk in the first place, but with whiskey, I could go for hours.

Both in and out of the bedroom.

I downed the Sinatra Select shot and she stole my Tennessee Apple off my shot tray. We’d almost reached the end of our tour which was the best part.

The booze tasting.

“That one is my favorite.”

“I’ll buy you a bottle to take with you.”

She smiled, with her eyes a little hazy and her cheeks a bit flushed.

Damn. She really is breathtaking.

Reaching over with the same expression on her face, she grabbed my Tennessee Honey shot off my tray.

“Are you planning on stealing all my whiskey, Lala?”

“Only the fruity ones. Look.” She scooted over the hard liquor to my tray. “I’ll switch with you. You drink these and I’ll drink those. Bam! Fair trade!”

“Bam, huh?”

“Yep!” She shot it back like a champ, slamming the empty glass down on the table. “Bam!”

“I think you might need to slow down.”

“Nah. I’m just getting started.” She handed me the Tennessee Fire shot. “This one burns.”

“How would you know? You’re making me drink it.”

“I know because I can read.” She narrowed her eyes at the label. “At least I think I can. What time is it?”

I looked down at my watch. “Five.”

“Mmmm kay.” Leaning into me, she rubbed her nose against my neck. “You smell nice... do you always smell this nice?”

“I think so.”

“Why haven’t I ever noticed how nice you smell?”

“You’re not usually making out with my neck.”

She inhaled deeply, against the nook of my neck. Right under my ear, making my dick twitch. It was my sensitive spot.

“I’m bottling your smell to take with me, so when I miss you, all I have to do is sniff and you’re there.”

“I think we need to get you some food.”

“Mmmm kay, but I want a pizza.”

“You always want pizza.”

She didn't let up on rubbing her nose along my neck, her lips started gliding against my skin as well. Doing all sorts of things to my cock.

“Mila—”

“Do you like me touching you?”

“I can think of worse things.”

“I'm going to miss you, Leo. A lot. A lot. Thinking about missing you makes me not want to go.”

What the fuck do I say to that?

Instead of screaming out, “*Don't go!*” I swallowed the Tennessee Fire in one big gulp and she just so happened to kiss my sweet spot at the same time, causing the burning liquid go down the wrong tube in my chest. Out of nowhere, I began choking and coughing, trying to catch my next breath.

“Dude, it's whiskey, not a dick. Don't choke so hard.”

That made me chuckle, so now I was coughing, choking, and laughing all at the same time. Quickly standing, I banged on my chest in an attempt of getting it to go down faster.

“Me Tarzan, you Jane,” Mila taunted in a rough tone, mimicking Tarzan's voice.

My eyes started watering as did my nose.

“I can't tell if you're crying or dying or both? Here.” She handed me the Winter Jack shot. “Drink this one. It tastes like cider.”

I didn't have to be told twice, I downed it in hopes it would help. It did. Winded still, I slowly found my breathing and she smiled standing beside me, rubbing my back.

“You're okay,” she teased. “Did the big bad shot hurt your tummy?”

“Not as much as jumping a fence hurt yours.”

She glared at me before mischief took over her eyes. Looking at the crowd of people who'd gathered to see what the commotion was about, Mila put her hands up in the air, announcing, "I'm sorry everyone. I told him he couldn't keep up with my pace, but you know how men are. They gotta learn on their own."

It was my turn to glare at her.

"Ladies and gentleman, I present to you the man who can't handle his liquor quite like his best friend."

She was such a brat, that I would miss with all my heart.

CHAPTER 19

Leo ordered us a large pizza to go and we took it back to our lookout rock that literally appeared out of nowhere on a back road toward our homes. The first time we found this place we added our names and the date to the rock that more than likely had thousands of carvings already on it. It was a bright colorful pillar where people wrote whatever they wanted on it with paint, marker, or chalk.

I loved it.

We'd come here often to just talk and hang out.

The sun was setting, and it was a beautiful summer evening. There wasn't a cloud in sight. The sky was calm with soft colors of orange and red for miles and miles, with no end in sight. The gentle lull of the air and the smell of wilderness from the forests below were all around us, seeping into our senses.

We couldn't have asked for a more picturesque day.

Once we were done eating and I sobered up, I leaned my head on Leo's shoulder, trying not to think about the fact that this would be the last time we'd be sitting here for who knows how long.

A sudden sadness crept over me.

Can I do this? Really leave my family and him behind?

I thought about Bill's story with his wife, how she only lasted four months and came running back to everything and everyone she knew.

Especially, her best friend.

And we got married a year later...

Leo nudged my head with his shoulder. "What are you thinking about over there?"

"Tomorrow."

He stayed silent for longer than I would have liked before he said, “Yeah, I’ve been thinking about tomorrow a lot today too.”

I swallowed hard, hearing him admit what I already knew. Leo and I had a connection I couldn’t explain or understand. It had always been that way between us. This unspoken bond, where words weren’t needed to know how we were feeling.

He was my person.

I was his.

Why do I suddenly want him to ask me to stay? Would I? If he asked me to not leave him... would I stay for him?

My mind ran rampant with question after question I never started thinking about until this very second.

As if he knew what I needed at that moment, Leo placed his arm around my body, pulling me into the nook of his arm. I felt him inhale a deep, steady breath as he hugged me closer to him, kissing the top of my head.

We stayed like that for the rest of the time we were there, in complete silence, watching the world revolve around us like we were the only two people in it. The bright colors of the sky started giving way to nightfall, blending brilliantly in deep oranges to fire reds.

Sunsets in Tennessee were always a sight to behold.

“You ready?”

Giving in to the emotions I couldn’t seem to control, I snapped, “What a loaded question, Leo. If you’re asking me if I’m ready to go to your next stop, then I’d reply that I’m ready when you are. If you’re asking me if I’m ready to leave tomorrow, to move away from you and my parents, my home here... then my response would be, I’m not so sure anymore. Was this your plan today?” I pulled away to look into his eyes. “Make me doubt my decision?”

“You sound upset.”

“I’m not. I’m just wondering.”

He thought about it for a second. “My plan wasn’t to make you doubt, it was to remind you.”

“Of what?”

“Of all the things we’ve accomplished together, and all of the future things we will do again someday. Today was supposed to be a day to remember our past, our memories, the years of friendship we’ve had, but—” he grinned “—your ass still found a way to make it a first one for us despite what I wanted.”

Smirking, I shook my head. Only Leo could turn this serious conversation between us into a lighter one.

Sweeping the hair away from my face, he placed it behind my ear. “It doesn’t matter if you’re here or there, Mila, you’re still going to be my best friend.”

“Promise?”

“What are you so worried about? I’m not the one that’s leaving.”

I opened my mouth to answer him, however God had other plans for us that evening. The sound that no one ever wanted to hear hastily invaded our peaceful atmosphere.

Whoop. Whoop.

“Oh shit!” I instantly stood, watching with a horrified expression as a cop car approached. “They’ve come for us!”

And not just any police vehicle, it was a sheriff’s SUV.

“Oh no, Leo! We’re going to jail!” I scowled at him, fisting my hands at my sides. “I told you! I told you it was a bad idea to break into the lake and now we’re going to get locked up! I’ll tell you right now, I’m way too pretty for prison! Do you see how cute I am?”

“Oh, I see how cute you are. Especially, right now.”

I ignored his compliment, too concerned with what was about to happen to us.

“Leo! I’ll be someone’s fiddle! Me! Mila Love Lawrence will be someone’s property as soon as I step into the yard.”

He laughed so hard his head fell back.

“Why are you laughing at me?” I argued, stomping my foot. “Have you taken a good look at yourself in the mirror recently? Do you see how handsome you are? You’ll—” I stabbed my finger into his chest to get my point across “—be someone’s bitch too. You’ll be fresh meat for the ring leader, he will have you shanking people in the big yard and doing all his care packages in no time. Yelling at you to make his mud and suck his... oh man.” I grabbed onto my stomach. “My belly cannot handle this again.”

Leo stood up, still laughing. “Relax, Lala, no need to shit yourself again.”

“What if my job finds out? What if I get fired? What if the school finds out? And they kick me out?”

He raised his eyebrows with an amused expression. “We don’t even know why he’s here.”

“Why else would he be here, genius? Oh my God!” I grabbed my face. My skin was getting clammy, and my body was slightly shaking. “They’re going to ask me to bend over and cough and no one has ever seen my asshole, Leo!”

“Really?” He jerked back. “Never? Not even to lick—”

“That’s where your mind goes at a time like this?”

“I mean it’s a fair question.”

“Not right now!”

The sound of the officer shutting his door echoed through the wind.

“Lala.” He grabbed my arms. “Take a deep breath. I promise you’re going to look back on this moment and laugh.”

I didn’t pay him any attention, the officer’s footsteps were fast approaching, and right when he came into my line of sight, I turned away from Leo and sang like a fucking canary, “I swear on my momma’s life, officer! I didn’t do anything wrong!” I sternly pointed at Leo. “It was his idea to break into the lake!”

His eyes widened. “You snitch! Like I could drag you over the fence!”

“I told him, officer, I swear to God I warned him that we were going to get in trouble, but he never listens to me. Even when we were kids, nope, never! He always did what he wanted. You can even ask his mom and dad! He’s as stubborn as a bull that man. I didn’t want to do it.” I was nervous which meant I couldn’t control my mouth, it was a severe case of word vomit.

“He made me! *And* he almost made me poop my pants! Do you know how embarrassing that is? I think I might have PTSD! But you know what? I didn’t do it! I held it in even though my stomach was on fire, even though it was cramping to the point of pain, kind of like it is right now.”

“Yeah, Shitty McGee, why don’t you tell him what you did to the door?”

I gasped. My appalled stare went from Leo, back to the officer who was standing there just intently listening to me. There was no indication of how he felt. I couldn’t tell if he was going to let us go or arrest us. So I kept going, in hopes that he would change his mind and take mercy on me.

Praying, I wouldn’t number two myself this time.

CHAPTER 20

“I’ve never broken the law before,” I went on. “I swear it! My cousin once stole lipstick from the Piggly Wiggly Mart and I went back and paid for it. In fifth grade, my teacher accidentally gave me an A on the spelling test but when I looked through my answers, I saw that one was marked right when it was wrong, and I went right to her desk to tell her. I have a ton of situations where I have done the right thing, I’m as honest as they come, I promise.”

“Hey, Poopy Pants, why don’t you quit while you’re ahead?”

I couldn’t control my nervousness and my belly grumbled, aching.

At least I think it was...

“Since we’re not entirely sure what end that came out of,” Leo countered, standing in front of me. Shielding my body with his. “Allow me to take over.” He looked at the officer. “What my turd burglar best friend is trying to say is she’s leaving Tennessee tomorrow to move to the Virgin Islands. My plan was to show her all our exciting firsts together. Four years ago, we went to that lake to open our college acceptance letters. We didn’t know the lake was now boarded up, but since it was already part of my plan, I told her to break and enter with me.”

I didn’t know whether to smile or cry. He was actually taking the fall for me.

“I didn’t know it would lead to her losing control of her bowels, kind of like she is right now with her mouth. The bathroom door was locked, and despite me telling her to just go in the lake, she refused and turned into a karate kid, busting open the door.”

I bowed my head. I was so ashamed.

Damn you stomach, damn you.

“I will pay for the fines, it wasn’t her fault. It was all my idea. I take full responsibility.”

I profoundly sighed, I couldn’t allow him to take all the fall. Stepping to the side of him, I grabbed his hand in mine.

“Officer, I’m a grown adult and I chose to break the law with him. I stand by my decision and I will go peacefully to jail. But first, can I please use the restroom?”

The officer gazed back and forth between us until he finally stated why he was there, “You’re illegally parked.”

My mouth dropped open. “You mean we’re not going to jail? I just told you all that for nothing?”

“Not for nothing. Now I know if I ever pull you over or arrest you, I should probably make sure there is a bathroom nearby.”

“Oh, so the officer has jokes too?”

“Would you rather I arrest you then?”

“Ummm, no thank you, sir. I’ll take your jokes.”

He nodded toward Leo. “Make sure to move your truck and find her a bathroom.”

Leo chuckled, “Will do.”

The officer excused himself and off he went. As soon as he drove away, we started laughing hysterically.

“You won’t be experiencing anything like this in the Virgin Islands.”

“You’re right about that.”

Still giggling, I threw my arms around his neck.

“What’s this for?”

“I’m going to miss you so much.”

He hugged me back. “I’m going to miss you so much too.”

“Thank you.”

“For?”

“For making it hard to leave home but giving me something to come back to. For being the best, and willing to take full responsibility for me, even if it meant you going to jail. You’re the best friend a girl could ever ask for.”

He chuckled, “Sappy ass.”

“You love me.”

“That I do, Lala, that I do.”

While Leo disposed of our garbage, I found the spot that had our names carved into the rock and snapped a picture of it with my phone. Picking up my backpack purse off the stone, I grabbed my black marker from the inside pocket and wrote today’s date below our names. Before taking another photo.

I found Leo back at his truck, getting into the driver’s seat. Moments later, I watched as we drove away from our rock, knowing this was the last time I’d see it for a while.

It didn’t take long for Leo to pull into the nearest Dollar Tree, they were basically on every corner of Tennessee. The store was packed. This was one of my favorite things about the south. The Dollar Trees and the Family Dollars were always the place to be.

I went to the bathroom while Leo grabbed a couple of groceries, showing me in the truck that he picked up snacks to make s’mores. It was another one of my favorite things to do. Make s’mores in his backyard while sitting in my swing he made for me.

You could see Leo’s cabin from down the road, he had white LED lights set up to find the treehouse in the dead of night. There were no streetlights on the road to his house, so he put them up years ago. His cabin looked like it was Christmas all year long. It was a magical experience, cozy and comforting when I’d see them. Always bringing a huge smile to my face.

However tonight, the lights only brought on nostalgia, and I was right there, I could still see them.

Am I making the right choice? Could I do this? Do I still want to? What am I trying to prove? What am I trying to find

that isn't already in my hometown?

The more I thought about it, the less confident I felt I could truly do this...

Move away from everything and everyone I knew.

Leo parked his truck in his usual spot, and we both jumped out. Walking onto the bridge that had lights on the rails and above our head in the trees, we made our way into his cabin.

He punched in the code, my birthday, into the lock on the door. He opened the door for me and I stepped in first. Going straight into his bedroom, I grabbed a clean pair of leggings and a tank from his drawer, along with a fresh pair of panties and fuzzy socks. I'd been keeping clothes in his room since he first got this cabin.

At the last second, I grabbed one of his hoodies from his closet, deciding I was going to take this one to St. Thomas with me.

When I walked back out, Leo was standing in the kitchen, fixing himself a drink.

"Make me a margarita."

"Already planned on it."

I smiled. "I'm going to take a shower. I'll be right back."

"Good idea." He nodded. "There's been a lot of traffic through there today."

"Hey! We made a deal not to talk about that for the rest of the day."

"Oh." He lifted his arms in the air. "I didn't know we were back to that, considering you told the officer your whole life story."

"Yes, we're back to that. No more talking about the worst thing that has ever happened to me for the rest of the night. Deal?"

"Go take a shower, swamp ass."

"Leo!"

“I’m sorry, it just slipped out.”

“Yeah, I’m sure it did.”

He grinned at me while I backed into the bathroom, closing the door behind me. I got undressed and stepped into the shower, instantly realizing...

It was the last time I’d be doing this as well.

CHAPTER 21

—Leo—

Why is she leaving?

The question repeated itself in my mind for pretty much the entire day. Anytime she smiled, laughed, looked at me for more than a few seconds, I could see it in her eyes. She didn't want to leave.

What do I do?

We had been friends our whole lives. There wasn't anything I couldn't talk to her about. Come to her for. We respected each other's opinions, yet she still hadn't asked me what I thought about her moving. Maybe she didn't have to, maybe she knew deep down all I wanted was for her to be happy. Even if it meant she had to move across the world to make it happen.

Mila loved Tennessee. Her heart was in the south. She was a country girl, and I'd be lying if I said I didn't think she'd come running home. Or maybe that was just wishful thinking. Something I told myself to help me let her go.

When did things change? When did they become so confusing?

By the time she was walking down the stairs, I drank about a quarter of the whiskey bottle. Feeling...

Not a fucking clue.

Too much.

Too little.

I'd never been this torn in two. My emotions were getting the best of me as I watched her walk down the stairs, the soft warmth of the lights illuminating her face. She was glowing, wearing one of my hoodies which looked more like a dress on her. Anytime she'd wear something of mine, whether it be clothes, a hat, socks, it didn't matter; a sense of home washed over me.

I never told her the lights I put up around the cabin were for her. Mila loved Christmas. Ever since she was a kid, she always looked forward to everything about the holiday. Spending time with family, friends, loved ones...

Especially, the lights.

Having it look like Christmas year-round at my cabin was just one of the things I found myself doing only for her over the years. It came naturally, wanting to see her smile.

But that's what friends are for, right? Keep decorations up to see the people they love happy?

I couldn't count the things Mila had done for me over the years we'd been friends. Covering for me with my parents, tagging along to parties she didn't want to go to because I wanted her there, getting me out of trouble when girls got a little too clingy.

She was there, *always* there.

I think that was why her leaving was such a hard thing for me. Not that I didn't trust the boys, but it was different with Mila. I knew she had my back and I had hers. I had never trusted myself with anyone the way I did with her. She got to see not only the best but also the worst parts of me. Not having her around was going to take some adjusting and quite frankly, I didn't know if I'd lose my shit without her.

If the way I was feeling right now was any indication.

I. Was. Fucked.

Once she reached the bottom of the stairs, I told her, "Your drink is on your swing."

She smiled. "You know you're going to have to guard my swing now that I won't be around to keep all the girls off it at your bonfires, right?"

"You think I should paint reserved only for Mila Lawrence on it in big, bold lettering?"

She grabbed her drink and sat down on the swing. "I'm hurt you haven't already."

“I’ll get right on that.”

“It should be the first thing you do as project manager at Mountainside Building. When do you start by the way?”

“Next week.”

“You nervous? Excited?”

“You know me, Mila, it’s hard to get me excited about much.”

“Facts. You’re a pain in the ass like that.”

“It comes with the mentality of being a realist.”

“Or a pessimist, but whatever.”

“You’re enough of an optimist for the both of us, Lala.”

“Some people call me a magical unicorn.”

“You’re something all right.”

“You know what magical unicorns like?”

“I’m sure you’re gonna tell me.”

“S’mores.”

“Is that your way of telling me you want a s’more?”

“Whoa, you catch on mighty fast. You’re going to work your way up the company ladder really quick with skills like those, Leo.”

“Mila, are you trying to be a smart ass right now? Because I hate to be the one to say this, but you’re only one of those things.”

“I’m never going to live today down, am I?”

“It’s too soon to tell. It just happened this afternoon.”

“On that note, it’s time for you to make me a s’more.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

I threw a few more logs into the fire pit, making sure it was good to go.

“You make a good fire, Leo.”

I winked at her. “Me, Caveman, make good fire.”

After I grabbed two wooden sticks that I used to make s’mores with from the side of the cabin, I placed four marshmallows, two on each stick, and held them near the bottom of the pit where the flames weren’t as intense so they wouldn’t burn. I perfected the art of the s’more a long time ago and Mila always burnt hers. It didn’t matter how many times I told her to place her marshmallow under the flames. She got impatient and put it in the fire anyway.

“Who’s going to make my s’more in St. Thomas?”

“I highly doubt you’ll see very many bonfires on an island, Lala.”

Bringing the stick back to my face, I blew on the marshmallows for a couple of seconds while she slowly squished the chocolate and graham crackers around it.

I handed her s’more over to her. “All set.”

She smiled wide, taking a big bite from my fingers. I laughed when it got all over her lips instead of in her mouth.

“You’re the sloppiest s’more eater ever.”

“Hey! I have a small mouth and that’s a huge—”

“That’s what she said.”

She rolled her eyes, kicking up her feet to start swinging.

I finished my s’more and made two others before making my way behind her on the swing. Softly, I began pushing her as she ate contently in the seat. Hearing her moans of pleasure every few seconds wasn’t exactly helping my disposition and by that...

I meant my cock.

“Do you know you make sex noises when you eat s’mores on this swing?”

“I don’t make sex noises.” She took another bite and loudly moaned. “Okay, maybe I do, but can you blame me? S’mores are life.”

“I thought I was the one with the sweet tooth.”

“You’re rubbing off on me.”

“I guess so.”

“What am I going to do without you?”

Something came over me, and I stopped the swing.

“Leo.” She looked up at me. “What are you doing?”

Her mouth was covered in marshmallow and chocolate residue.

“You have a little bit right there.” I gestured to it on my mouth.

“Where?” She licked her lips. “Did I get it?”

I shook my head.

“What about now?”

I shook my head again.

“Can you help me?”

I nodded, squatting down to the ground in front of her, perched on the balls of my feet. Shocking the shit out of both of us, I leaned forward, and before I realized what I was doing, I gently licked it off her lips.

She slightly gasped, our mouths were now an inch apart.

“What are you doing?”

“Cleaning you off.”

I licked the corner of her lip, letting my mouth linger while staring deep into her eyes. Her gaze set me on fire, and my heart kicked into overdrive. I loved having her look at me the way she was, and I never wanted it to stop.

The way it made me feel.

The way *she* made me feel.

Does she want me to kiss her? Does she want to kiss me?

Mila licked her lips and softly pressed her mouth against mine.

Giving me all the answers I needed.

CHAPTER 22

—Leo—

Ever so lightly, she pecked my lips and I followed her lead. Never had I kissed someone quite like this. Our tongues weren't touching but it still felt like the most intimate kiss of my entire life.

The second her tongue touched mine, I felt my cock stir.

When did my dick suddenly have such a fascination with Mila? Has it always been this way?

Just as quickly as it started, it was over. Her body fell back as she pressed her hand against my chest, halting my descent.

“What are we doing?”

I opened my mouth to reply, but she abruptly stood and ran up the stairs.

“Lala—”

“I need a minute.”

Fuck...

I rubbed my forehead, feeling conflicted on what to do.

What did you do, Leo? What the hell did you do? She's your best friend.

Your. Best. Friend.

I resisted the urge to follow her, allowing the space she requested. I put the fire out and cleaned up around the pit. It didn't take longer than five minutes, however, it felt like a lifetime flew by, thinking about what I'd just done.

You kissed her.

You kissed Mila.

Another first for us today.

Unable to control my emotions, my feet moved on their own accord, walking up the steps toward the screen door, I stepped inside. The lights of the cabin were dimmed, and I didn't have to wonder where she was. I knew.

That fucking nook.

The only space on the second floor, if you could even call it that, was so small, I never went up there. Not to mention, the wooden ladder to get up there was a solid ninety-degree angle. Making it much harder to climb and get into the tiny crevice.

It was her space though. Most of the time, it was where she slept when she spent the night. She loved it.

Grabbing onto the side rails before I changed my mind, I began climbing the damn thing. “I’m gonna break something,” I muttered under my mouth, causing her to giggle from above me.

When she saw my face come into view, she announced, “You made it! Welcome to my fort.”

I stepped inside, maneuvering to fit. “Ow!” But I still managed to hit my head on the frame.

“You’re too big for my fort.”

“Well, you ran away from me, so you didn’t leave me much of a choice.”

“I didn’t run away from you, Leo.”

I needed to get comfortable before I went down this road with her. The round mattress took up most of the tiny space. I threw a few pillows up against the wall and sat down beside her, leaning my back into them.

Once I was situated, I declared, “No? It sure as shit felt that way to me.”

Her gaze remained forward, staring out through the rectangular window that overlooked the forest. “You kissed me.”

“Technically, I licked you. *You* kissed me.”

She narrowed her eyes, focusing on mine. “Did you not want me to kiss you?”

“I wouldn’t have kissed you back if I didn’t want you to kiss me, Mila.”

She paused for a second. “What are we doing?”

“Right now.” I smiled. “We’re talking about us kissing.”

“You know what I mean. We’re best friends, Leo. Best friends don’t kiss.”

“It wasn’t even a real kiss.”

“What do you mean? Your lips were on mine.”

Driven by pure impulse, I gripped onto the back of her neck and dragged her toward me. Making her legs straddle my lap. She gasped at our sudden change of position, and I didn’t hold back, I pulled her closer to my mouth. Her eyes never left mine and the moment our lips touched again, I took control.

Pecking her lips softly at first, I teased her with the tip of my tongue, gliding it all along the outline of her pouty mouth. The feel of her silky tongue was like nothing I’d ever felt before. Our movements were in sync with one another, almost like we’d been kissing our entire lives.

It was easy.

Natural.

Home.

I pecked her one last time until I rested my forehead against hers.

She was breathing heavily. “Wow.”

I grinned. Her stare was dark and dilated, luring me in to want to kiss her again. With her long, messy hair draped all around her face, it cascaded around us.

Our eyes stayed connected, as if she was trying to ingrain this moment into her memory. Sweeping her hair away from her face, I brushed my lips against hers, side to side. “Now that was a kiss, Lala.” I hesitated for an instant, repeating her question, “What are we doing?”

“I don’t know.”

“Do you want me to stop?”

“No.”

“Do you want me to keep going?”

“Yes.”

“How far do you want me to take this?” My heart was pounding, mirroring hers. I could feel it against my chest.

Boom.

Boom.

Boom.

“I’m leaving tomorrow.”

“I’m aware, but that doesn’t answer my question.”

She kissed me again, moaning into my mouth. “I don’t want you to say goodbye to me, Leo.”

Before, I could assure her how much she meant to me, how much she’d always meant to me. To tell her what I felt so deeply in my heart...

My best friend.

My family.

My girl.

I responded the only way I knew how, with the truth, “I wasn’t going to, Mila. Today was supposed to be about remembering and we’ve still managed to make it another round of firsts for us. How far is this first going, Lala?”

She leaned in again, kissing me softly. “Just keep going and we’ll find out together.”

I slowly moved my rough, callused hands up her body under my hoodie. Feeling the softness of her skin.

Her breath hitched when my body fell forward, pushing her back onto the mattress to lay in between her thighs. Placing all my weight on my arms, I cradled her face and we made out like we were two teenagers who couldn’t get enough of each other. I usually hated kissing, it was pointless in my opinion. Although with Mila, I didn’t want to stop kissing her.

Holding her.

Being on top of her.

My eyes followed the movement of her hands when she reached for the bottom of my hoodie, pulling it up over her head and discarding it on the floor.

She was now topless, lying beneath me.

“You’re beautiful, Mila.”

She beamed, licking her lips. Beckoning me to continue down this uncharted territory between us. I groaned in satisfaction into the side of her neck, placing soft kisses on her pulse.

Inch-by-inch, I deliberately took it slow. Confidently crawling my way down her body, I lightly skimmed my lips across her bare breasts, igniting tingles all over her skin against my mouth. Sucking in her nipple, I watched as her back arched off the bed and she fisted the sheets. Her body was begging, pleading with me to keep going and I happily obliged.

Giving her what she wanted.

Working my way down her stomach, my predatory glare never left her eyes as I continued my tour of her petite frame.

“Do I keep going?”

Through the slits of her heated gaze, she nodded.

“Just so we’re clear... you want me to kiss—” I grinned “—down here?”

She blushed.

“You’re going to get all shy on me now? I’m barely hanging on by a thread here, Mila.”

“My shyness is turning you on?”

“Among other things.”

“Take my pants off, Leo.”

“Oh, so now you’re giving me orders?”

“I’m a take-charge kind of woman.”

I didn't have to be told twice but tugging her pants down her legs was much harder than I anticipated. "What the fuck? Are these glued on?"

She giggled, "They're leggings."

"Well, they're in the way."

"Here, let me help you."

She stuck her thumbs into the waistband of her panties, wiggling both of them off much faster than I was tugging. She threw her pants on the floor.

"Wiggle like that again."

She did, smiling.

Watching Mila's tits bounce was a sight I'd definitely be masturbating to later, making a mental note of how delicious she fucking looked. Ravenously, my eyes scanned her sexy body, greedily devouring every last inch of her skin. Starting from her rosy cheeks, down to her perfectly flushed, perky tits, to her round hips and slender thighs. Right down to where my mouth wanted to taste the most.

Her pussy.

"And look at that, you weren't lying about the hairless kitty."

She purred, "Meow," winking.

And I couldn't help it, I laughed from deep within my chest. "Only you would make me laugh while I have a fucking hard-on."

She wiggled, all proud of herself.

"You going to spread your legs for me, Lala?"

Almost like she was opening a gift for me, she did as she was told, and through hooded eyes, I glanced up at her, making sure to give her shit while I made my way down on her. Silently laughing because she rocked her hips against the bed.

“Impatient, are we? While I’m down here should I lick your but—”

She shot up. “Don’t you dare!”

“Oh, come on, we can add it to all our firsts of the day.”

“Just stay in the front.”

“But I like the back.”

“Leo...”

“I’ll stay in my lane.”

There was no hesitation whatsoever when I licked from her opening to her clit.

“Oh, God.” With her eyes rolling to the back of her head, she fell onto the bed.

“Open your eyes, Mila, I want you to watch me eat your pussy.”

She moaned in response, fluttering her heated gaze on me. Our stares locked, and she watched as I licked from the bottom to the top of her slit. She just about came undone when my tongue flicked her clit.

In that second, I knew Mila’s pussy would be my favorite thing to eat.

CHAPTER 23

—Leo—

“Since I’m new down here, I’m going to need directions on how to make you squirm. Do you like this?” I taunted, sucking her nub into my mouth.

She didn’t say a word, I could barely hear her breathing.

“Or...” I sucked her clit, moving my head side-to-side. “Like this.”

She loudly moaned that time, which earned her a smile. I didn’t even try to hide it.

“Feels good, yeah?”

“Yes...”

With my index and middle finger, I pushed through her pussy.

“Oh, God...”

Feeling like the king of the fucking world, I continued my sweet torture with my tongue on her clit. “Lala is slippery when wet.”

She ground her hips against what I was doing.

“I’m going to taste you now, Mila.”

A whimper escaped her lips as I dove my tongue as far as it would go into her core, loving the taste of her. She melted against my tongue, into my touch, coming apart from everything I was doing. Sucking her clit harder and faster, I was relentless in my pursuit to have her come over and over again on my fingers and in my mouth.

“Oh, God, right there.”

Pushing in and out with a steady rhythm, I worked her over. “Right there?” I mocked, pushing harder against that rigid spot inside of her.

Her back arched off the bed again, fisting the sheets. Her impending orgasm completely consuming her.

“Stop talking and... right there...”

“Here?”

“Oh god, yes—there...”

“You feel that?” I huskily groaned, appreciating the sight and feel of her getting off.

She was close, almost there. I could tell by her frenzied movements and erratic breathing. Her pussy pulsed, aching, throbbing against my fingers and I didn't let up until she couldn't take it anymore. She couldn't wait any longer.

Within seconds, her legs started to shake, and she couldn't keep her eyes open. Her hands immediately gripped onto my hair, and I grunted in pleasure.

“Hmm ... ah ... mmm...” she exhaled, coming hard.

Fast.

All the way down my face and neck.

“And she's a squirter. That's a nice unexpected surprise. I'm just learning all these new things about my girl.”

“That's never happened before.”

I smiled, feeling damn proud of myself. Tugging off my shirt over my head, I wiped my face and neck and tossed it on the floor next to her clothes. Unbuckling my belt and jeans next, I slid them off, along with my boxer briefs.

She opened her eyes and glanced down my body. “Huh, imagine that.”

I crawled my way back up to her face. “Imagine what?”

“You weren't lying about your big main man.”

“My cock?”

“You just want to hear me say it.”

I scoffed out a chuckle, now hovering above her. “Fuck.”

“What?”

“I need to get a condom and I'm honestly terrified what will happen if I go down that ladder with how hard I am right

now.”

She kissed my lips. “I’m on the pill.”

“I’ve never gone bareback before.”

“Me either.”

For the first time in my life, I turned into a wild animal. Growling like I was a fucking lion and king of the jungle, I claimed her mouth, aggressively kissing her. Positioning my cock at her entrance, I held it there.

In between kissing her, I muttered, “If I thrust balls deep inside of you, Mila, everything will change, and I don’t want to fuck up our friendship. It’s too important to me.”

“Are you saying that you don’t want to do this with me?”

“No.” I shook my head while kissing her. “I totally want to do this. I want to do this more than I’ve ever wanted to do anything.”

She smiled against my mouth, kissing me.

“I’m just saying that I don’t want to fuck up our friendship.”

“I know. Me either. Maybe we’re friends that just have sex every once in a while?”

I chuckled, pecking her lips. “Like friends with benefits?”

“Yeah,” she panted, sliding her tongue in my mouth.

“I don’t think that’s going to work.”

“Why?”

I slid my tongue past her lips. “Because it’s you.”

She giggled, and my cock twitched.

“All right, my dick is getting impatient and my balls are about to turn blue, so we need to get this train moving.”

“I’m not the one stalling your caboose. Are you running out of stamina, Leo?”

“Oh, I’ll show you stamina.” In one hard thrust, I was in fact, balls deep inside of her.

From the force of my movement, her back slid across the mattress and her head hit one of the pillows that were pressed up against the wall. Nothing compared or even came close to the feeling of this girl, to the sensations that she stirred within me. This was more than just sex, more than just two bodies coming together, more than anything I'd ever experienced before.

This was her.

My best friend.

“There’s no coming back from this.”

She panted, “I know.”

I positioned my knee a little higher, causing her leg to incline with mine. Her breathing spiked, and I knew I was hitting her g-spot better from the angle.

My face hovered above hers as we caught our breath, trying to find a rhythm. It was effortless, the two of us coming together. My thrusts became harder and rougher, her body responded perfectly with mine. Our hips moved like we were made for each other. I lapped at her breasts, unable to get enough of her.

“Leo,” she breathed out, and I swear my cock got harder.

I moved back up to her face, and our mouths parted, we both panted profusely. I felt myself starting to come unhinged which was very unusual for me.

Fuck me.

Don't come so fast, Leo.

Think about baseball, about football, about anything other than how incredible she felt throbbing on the head of your cock.

“Fuck, you feel good. How do you feel this good?”

“I’m almost there,” she breathlessly gasped.

“Mmm...” I groaned, her pussy gripping onto my dick. “If you do that again, I’m going to come.”

“What happened to ladies first?”

“No one feels like you, Lala. Jesus, it’s like your pussy was made for me.”

Mila apparently liked dirty talk, in less than a second, she exploded around my shaft.

Long.

Hard.

Utterly mind-blowing.

Climaxing all the way down to my balls and taking me right over with her. I shook with my release and passionately kissed her.

From her neck.

To her breasts.

Back up to her lips.

“I don’t usually go that fast, I promise.”

“I mean, I can still see why girls spend the night. Your oral skills are an A-plus. Watching all that porn with your boys really turned out well for you.”

“I’m so glad you enjoyed that so much because I already want to suck on your clit again. There’s no coming back from you, is there?”

“Damn,” she breathed out, making me hard again. “I guess things took a really sharp turn, huh?”

“You could say that.”

“So, what now?”

“Now.” I cunningly grinned, kissing down her chest. “I’m going to have to fuck you with my mouth again.”

I ate her out two more times, and I lost count of how many times I made her scream my fucking name. Begging me to stop.

I didn’t.

After our third time having sex, I pulled her into my arms and she fell fast asleep in a matter of seconds.

Softly, I played with her hair, staying up all night. Not wanting tomorrow to arrive so soon. I counted down the hours she was wrapped in my arms. Blissfully sleeping. Looking fucking gorgeous.

I didn't want her to go.

I was ready to beg her to stay.

Though I wouldn't.

I couldn't.

Could I?

I didn't know where we went from here, what I would say to her in the morning, what she would say to me. There was no going back after this, we crossed the line, we were so far over the line, it was now gone.

Deleted.

Vanished.

Maybe the line was never there? Maybe it was...

All I knew was that I didn't want her to leave in a few hours. It felt wrong.

I needed her.

I had always needed her.

She was always there for me.

Where would I be without her? Where would she be without me?

I didn't have the answers, I barely knew the questions.

She was my best friend. I loved her. I'd always loved her.

Was I in love with her?

No.

Maybe.

Yes?

Was she in love with me?

No.

Maybe.

Yes?

Who knows? *Did she?*

And now we were naked in this small ass bed, and she was sleeping on my chest. Except, she'd slept like this before on me, several times actually. It was never weird, like having sex with her, it felt normal.

The longer I stayed there, the more I realized, we didn't fuck.

We didn't have sex.

We made love.

For the first time in my life, I made love, and I craved to do it again and whenever I wanted to.

I. Was. Fucked.

Because she was still leaving tomorrow.

Could I beg her to stay?

Would she?

Over the horizon, the sun was waking up. Through the trees, I watched my life flash before my eyes.

Our memories.

Our childhood.

Our firsts.

Was this our last?

The past was her.

The present was her.

The future... I didn't know.

I hugged her closer to my body, wrapping my arms completely around her. She stirred a little but didn't open her

eyes.

Mila wanted to experience new things, I couldn't stand in her way. It wouldn't be fair. I thought about the Playboy Pact, about the promise I made to stay single and never fall in love. Until this very moment, I thought I created the pact with the boys to stay close and in each other's lives. I thought I was doing it for them.

I wasn't.

I didn't want to fall in love and be with anyone because this whole time, the person I was meant to be with...

The one I wanted.

Couldn't live without.

Had been by my side this whole time.

The woman I was in love with...

Was Mila Lawrence.

Lala.

My best friend.

CHAPTER 24

—Mila—

The next thing I knew, my eyes fluttered open. “Mmm...” I hummed, trying to fully wake up, but the first thing I noticed, I was alone. “Leo!” I called out, sitting up in the bed.

No answer.

I wiped the sleep away from my eyes. “Leo!”

Still, no answer.

Scooting off the bed toward the ladder, I climbed down until my feet hit the wooden floor at the bottom. Taking a look around the open space, he was nowhere to be found.

“Where did he go?” I walked onto the porch and he wasn’t outside either. “Hmm...”

Confused, I went back inside and shut the double doors behind me. I grabbed clothes to change into, making my way into his bedroom, my mind thinking of every possible scenario of where Leo could be.

Out of nowhere, a memory attacked my mind when we were in Cancun.

“You’re just a regular Casanova, Leo Hawkins.”

“I aim to please. Hopefully, she’ll wake up and leave, and then I can avoid the whole morning after situation.”

I blinked, and I was standing in the shower. The warm water was cascading down my head and body.

Did he leave to avoid me too?

My heart was racing.

Boom.

Boom.

Boom.

I tried not to think about last night, but there was no way I could avoid it.

We had sex!

I had sex with my best friend!

I saw his dick!

He made me squirt for the first time ever!

Image after image played through my mind as I finished my shower. In my pursuit to wash away my worry, I forgot to grab a towel from the linen closet.

“Shit.”

I squeezed out my hair and shook my body like I was a dog with fur and it would actually do something before stepping out onto the shower rug. Tiptoeing toward the closed bathroom door, I opened it, coming face to face with Leo standing right there in front of me. Holding a coffee and donut in his hands.

I was wet and butt ass naked.

His eyes instantly raked me over. “You’re making it really hard to say goodbye to you, Mila.”

“Did you say I’m making you hard?”

He gestured to his dick. “You tell me.”

Yep. My main man was standing at attention. Why did I want to touch it again and relieve his ache?

Shaking away the thought, I stated, “I need a towel.”

“That’s pretty obvious.” Handing over the coffee and donut, he tugged the shirt he was wearing over his head. “Here. It’s laundry day.”

I raised my hands in the air, showing him, they were already full. So, he simply placed the shirt over my head and put it on for me. I was about to thank him, but his phone rang.

“This is Leo,” he answered. “I’m good, just helping a friend in need. How are you?”

I couldn't hear the person on the other end, but Leo's face briefly turned serious.

"Yes, of course, I know what I have to do. Right, I'll get on it. It's not a problem at all."

I frowned and mouthed, "Everything okay?"

He nodded, the expression on his face not changing. This was a Leo I didn't recognize, beyond serious.

"I'll have my secretary send over all that information, and as soon as I have things worked out here, we can figure it out together."

Together?

"I'll get in touch with the building inspector and send those specs over to them. Yes, you too. Bye." He hit end and placed his cell phone on the metal kitchen island, it clunked loudly.

I waited for a few minutes, hoping he would share what that was all about, however he didn't. I even gave him the stare down, thinking he would get the hint to spill it. His silence tore into my insecurities about the man he'd turn into when I wasn't around to remind him to slow down.

I walked back into the bathroom, more annoyed than anything, and once I was dressed, I went to the kitchen. I didn't want to ask him what was going on, I just wanted him to tell me. To include me. Like he always did.

It was simple as that.

Did we fuck up our friendship last night?

I started to wash the dishes when I felt him come up behind me and wrap his arms around my waist, turning me to face him. He grabbed my chin, making me look at him. Placing his arms on my shoulders, he caged me in the only way he could.

"Say it," he demanded with a shit-eating grin on his face.

I shrugged, not wanting to give him an inch. I knew I was being a child, but I didn't care. After all we had been through,

he should just know. It was a given. I narrowed my eyes at him and he laughed again, shaking his head and kissing my forehead.

“What was that about on the phone?”

“Why are you worried about things that don’t concern you?”

I couldn’t bite my tongue, I snapped, “Why weren’t you in bed this morning when I woke up? Were you hoping I’d leave so you could avoid the whole morning situation?”

He jerked back from my abrupt outburst. “Are you trying to have an argument right now? Before you leave?”

“No. I’m trying to understand what’s going on.”

“Between us?”

I nodded.

“Your flight is in four hours. Do you really want to spend the little time we have left fighting?”

“Why would we fight? Unless you regret it? Do you? Regret it?”

He scoffed out, backing away from me. “I left to get you coffee because I know you’re not a morning person. I picked up your favorite donuts too, thinking you could have something from home on the flight.”

“Oh.”

“Oh? Is that all you have to say for yourself? Do you honestly think I’d dick you over like that?”

“I’m not sure.”

“Wow.” His eyes widened.

“What do you expect, Leo? I’ve seen this song and dance with you before. You don’t do mornings, remember? It’s easier to just dip out?”

“I also don’t cuddle, but I spent the entire night awake, holding you in my arms.”

“Ugh! I’m sorry. I’m... shit...” I threw my hands up in the air in frustration. “I just panicked. I didn’t see you anywhere. We had sex and I freaked out waking up naked and alone. Thinking of all the times girls would wake up naked and alone and stumble out here in only your bedsheet looking for you. By that point, you’d already dipped out, and I was there to cover for you. Pretending like you didn’t just fuck them over.” I shrugged, feeling overwhelmed. “I’m your wing woman, remember? It’s what I do. I just never thought I’d be at the receiving end of what so many girls have already been through.”

“I see.”

“Do you?”

“I can’t change the past, Mila.”

“I know, but what about the future?”

“What about it? You’re leaving.”

“And what if I didn’t?”

He narrowed his eyes at me. “But you are.”

“What if I didn’t? What if I stayed?”

He rubbed his fingers back and forth over his mouth, clearly conflicted with my banter. “Why are you talking about what if’s?”

I didn’t allow fear to take over, I spoke with my heart, blurting, “If you ask me to stay for you, I will.”

—Leo—

Talk about putting a man on the spot.

What the fuck do I say to that?

If I told her to stay, she'd end up resenting me. I couldn't do that to her, to us. Despite wanting to get on my knees and beg her to stay for me.

"Mila, you don't know what you're saying."

"No, I do. I do know what I'm saying."

I shook my head, utterly blindsided by this. "I mean, I know I'm good in bed, Lala, but shit, it doesn't mean you need to change your entire future for me."

"Don't. Please don't do that."

"Do what?"

"Try to joke your way out of this. It's happening. No matter what you answer right now, this is happening. We slept together. I've seen you naked, your face has been in between my legs more than my gynecologist, you've been inside of me. A lot. So many times last night that I can barely walk today."

I hid back a smile and she rolled her eyes.

"Yes, Leo. Your dick is huge, okay? You have such a big cock that I had to take a hot shower to try and relieve my soreness down there. I can't believe how big you are, you're probably the biggest guy I've ever been with."

Now, I definitely couldn't hold back a smile.

"Great, now that we got that out of the way. Just say it. Tell me what you want. I need to hear it."

"You're throwing a million things at me right now, Lala. It's hard to follow."

She stepped toward me until we were face-to-face, inches apart. "Then I'll make it simple for you. Just ask me to stay. That's all you have to do. Do you want me to stay or am I shipping off to an island with Cain?"

“What the fuck does Cain have to do with us? I thought there was nothing going on between you two.”

“There isn’t.”

“Then why bring him up?”

“He’s beside the point.”

“Then why mention him at all?”

“Ugh! You’re not answering my question!”

“That’s because I don’t know the right answer!”

“You either want me or you don’t, Leo. It’s that simple.”

“Not to me. This is the hardest request you’ve ever asked of me. I can’t answer you when I can still taste you on my tongue, when I can still feel your pussy gripping onto my cock, when I can still hear you screaming my fucking name!” I argued, trying to gather my thoughts. “This isn’t simple. Nothing about what happened between us last night is simple, Mila. And the fact that you think it’s so easy for me to just change what we are together when your flight leaves in four hours, is so fucking mind-blowing to me! All I’ve done for the last month is try to get used to the idea of you not being here every single moment of my day. To try and get used to not relying on you, hanging out with you, waiting for you. You’ve been my best friend for as long as I can remember and I’m just trying to return the favor. I can’t ask you to stay and I won’t. Especially, for *me*.”

“If it isn’t simple, then that’s all I have to know, Leo. That’s all we’ve ever been... simple. Mila and Leo. Leo and Mila. If what you feel for me isn’t easy to answer, well, then I guess that’s the end of this conversation.”

“How do you want me to feel? What do you want me to feel?”

“I can’t answer that for you.”

“Then why would you expect me to ask you to stay, for me? I can’t choose your life for you. It would only ruin what we have.”

“You don’t think last night already did that?”

“For fuck sake, Lala. I made you come! Why is it that all girls have to read into it?”

“So, I’m all girls now?”

“No! Shit! I don’t know what I’m saying. I didn’t mean that. I’m just... fuck!”

She backed away, looking every bit as disappointed as I felt. “All right, I understand. Loud and clear, Leo. Loud and fucking clear.”

With that, she turned and left.

I wanted to rip my hair out and I resisted the urge to do exactly that. Instead, I paced around the cabin, not knowing what to do.

Chase after her?

Tell her what she wanted to hear?

What I wanted so desperately to say.

How?

Things would be good for a while until she realized she gave up her dreams for me. I wouldn’t lose her, just to have her stay, only to end up losing her in the end. I’d rather she stay in my life as my best friend than risk losing what we have.

Even though...

It killed me inside.

CHAPTER 25

—Mila—

One month later

Beep.

Beep.

Beep.

Every morning my day started at six a.m. I shoved the covers off my body and made myself get up. This was the trick in making sure you didn't hit the snooze button on your alarm, place your phone on the opposite end of your room. Since I lived in a studio apartment in the marina, mine was my kitchen.

The biggest obstacle was to not crawl back into my bed. On most days, I accomplished this task very easily. It was better to keep my mind occupied rather than let it wander. The moments it went on its own, I thought about you-know-who.

Yep, I reverted to referring to my best friend as you-know-who. In my head, it made it much easier to not picture his handsome, stupid smiling face when I thought about him at all.

The last month, my day started with drinking a full glass of warm lemon water while I leaned over the island. I went through my emails, noticing there was one from you-know-who. There was always one from you know who. It wasn't that I was trying to ignore him, it was more like I honestly didn't have time for him.

My day was packed already as it was and adding you-know-who to the equation would only slow me down and probably put me in a shit mood. I decided what was best for me was to try and live my own life.

It was what I was here for, right?

This was our first huge fight and living in two different worlds made it easier to push him away. Don't get me wrong, when I did let my mind wander to him, I felt this huge empty

space in my heart. I guess I just didn't know where we stood, and I wasn't ready to figure it out.

I was pissed at him.

Mostly, I was hurt.

I wanted and needed space to figure out my own emotions and where we went from here. Living in paradise and making more money than I knew what to do with helped. My boss wasn't lying when he said the captains loved to tip the pretty girls. I was getting fifty bucks to fill up gas tanks that took me a couple of minutes to ring up. I loved my job, there was never a dull moment.

And don't get me started on the eye candy...

Shirtless, tanned, good looking men were everywhere, and let me tell you, they loved to tip too.

If I wasn't working, I was in class or studying. I didn't have much of a social life. I'd yet to make it out to any of the clubs or nightlife. I didn't want to go alone. Sure, some of the guys asked me to hang out, go to dinner, watch a movie, however, I always said I was busy.

I was, right?

Cain decided to stay a little longer in Tennessee, saying he'd make it over here in a couple of days.

A ding on my Facebook messenger brought my attention to the tab opened on my computer I was checking my emails on. I skimmed the cursor to the tab.

Are you blowing me off?

I took a deep breath, seeing Leo's question so blatantly on the screen in front of my eyes. Before I changed my mind, I typed back. **Top of the morning to you too, stranger.**

The blue bubble appeared, he was typing away. **So I'm a stranger now?**

Narrowing my eyes, I replied, **No.**

No? That's all you have to say to me?

You're up early. How's work?

Are you going to ignore the fact that this is the first time I'm talking to you after a month? I've called you, emailed, sent letters... I have to hear from Cain that you're doing just fine. Happy. What the fuck?

I don't really have time for this right now.

How about you make time then? Can we talk later?

I work late.

Mila.

There's nothing to talk about.

Are you fucking kidding me?

Damn, he was pissed.

Weighing my response, I typed, **I have to go.**

MILA.

Fine. Meet me back here at ten tonight.

I watched as the blue bubble appeared and on pure impulse, I shut my computer, not reading his retort. I grabbed my yoga mat against the door and walked over to the gym in the marina. No one was ever in there that early and I loved having the space to myself. It had every machine I could possibly need and then some, not that I used those. The only machine I did use was the treadmill, but first I stretched and did yoga. Trying to find my Zen and happy place.

I slipped in my Bluetooth headphones and shook out my head and the stress I was suddenly feeling. Getting into position on my mat, I faced the foam and went into downward dog, my butt in the air, pushing it out to get a good stretch. Taking another deep breath, I didn't let my mind wander to you-know-who.

It was easier to pretend like we weren't in this weird place where I didn't know how to act around him anymore.

Lifting my leg in the air, I pressed my shoulder blades into the mat, deeply breathing out at the same time. Already feeling like the elephant on my chest was lightening up. Swiftly, I changed into a standing straddle, forward bend. Grabbing onto the back of my ankles, I pulled my chest as close as it would go under my legs. I'd been doing yoga since I began college, the four years of training made me very flexible and limber.

Never once did I open my eyes, knowing the mat by my memory alone. Slowly, I slid to the ground and laid on my back. Raising my hips to the air, I stretched my lower back, once again releasing another solid breath. Pumping my hips up and down a few times, I inhaled in and out. Making sure to feel the strain the movement was triggering in my muscles.

Gripping onto the inner sides of my feet, I got into the ananda balasana pose which basically looked like an upside-

down frog. Letting my breathing go long and deep, I was about to change positions.

Except when I opened my eyes for the first time, I loudly gasped, causing my butt to wiggle in this extremely sexual position.

“How long have you been sitting there?”

Cain smiled, bright and bold. “Long enough to feel like I should be throwing money at you, but instead I’m just enjoying the free fucking show.”

I let go of my feet and shot up. “You shameless pig!”

“Nice to you see you too, Mi. This was a great welcome home greeting, next time you should do this in only a bikini.”

“Ugh! You wish.”

“I don’t have to wish anymore, all I have to do is close my eyes and look back on this moment. That little number you’re wearing doesn’t leave much to the imagination.

I was wearing a sports bra and spandex booty shorts.

“I’m usually alone.”

“Not anymore.”

“Oh, so you work out in the mornings now too?”

“Best way to start the day.”

“We’re going to have to set up a schedule where I can use this gym privately.”

“Why? I can help you stretch those tight muscles. You know, get you nice and wet.”

My mouth dropped open. “Cain!”

“What?” He innocently shrugged. “Don’t you want to break a sweat? It’s good for you.”

I glared at him.

“Do you know that you make sex noises when you’re doing what you call yoga, right?”

“I do not.”

“Mmm...” he loudly moaned, trying to mimic me.

“Running around all day at this marina is making my lower back sore. I was trying to stretch my coccyx.”

He grinned, eyeing me up and down. “If you keep making noises like that, I’m going to give you a coccyx.”

I couldn’t help it, I busted out laughing.

“There’s my Mi.” He beamed. “I missed you.”

I smirked. “I guess I kind of missed you.”

Cain laughed, throwing his head back. His laughter was contagious. “Are you going to be my boat babe today?”

“Oh yeah, now that you’re here. I’m at your service, only while I’m on the clock though.”

“Great. You can start by making me my protein shake.”

“I don’t start for another hour.”

“Perfect timing, I’ll be finished in here in about an hour.”

I picked up my mat from the floor. “I’m going to go shower.”

“Do you need any help in there?”

“Oh, look at you, you’re just so helpful this morning.”

“What can I say? I was raised a southern gentleman.”

“Gentleman isn’t exactly the word I’d use to describe you.” I thought about it for a second. “More like cocky bastard.”

“I’ve been called worse.”

“I bet. I’ll have your shake ready for you when you’re done.”

“Wow, I’m really going to love living here.”

Cocking my head to the side, I spoke with conviction...

“Especially when you have to tip me.”

CHAPTER 26

—Leo—

“The subcontractor didn’t show up this morning, Leo.” The sound of my father’s stern voice rumbled through my office walls. “It was your responsibility to schedule him to finish up the electrical and make sure it passed the proper code in order for us to move forward with the build. This is going to set us back another month on a project that is already over budget. Do you have something to say for yourself?”

I leaned back into my leather chair. “I’ve been on the phone all morning trying to fix this.”

“And?”

“I’m still working on it.”

“Work on it faster.”

“I can’t work on it any faster than I already am. I was here until two this morning making sure the architect’s schematic aligned up with the city building code. I barely got more than two hours of sleep last night, I was here by five—”

“It’s your job and if you aren’t going to do it right then you have no business doing it at all.”

“I can’t control the subcontractor not showing up.”

“We have a whole address book filled with subcontractors we have worked with through the years. As a project manager, and *my son*, you should have had a backup lined up to avoid our company losing more money. I’m extremely disappointed with how you’ve handled this sit—”

“I’m working my ass off for you and all you do is remind me of everything I’m doing wrong.”

“I have high hopes for you, Leo. I’m not going to pat you on the back when you do things wrong. How else are you going to learn? I have made this company what it is today, and I want to ensure when I hand it over to you, you’re not going to run it into the ground.”

My lip curled upward but not in a smile or comforting way. If anything, it only added to the tightening sensation I felt deep within my bones that I swear radiated all around us.

“I’m handling it, all right? That’s all I can do.”

He grumbled shaking his head and walked out of my office.

This was my father to a T, and Mila wondered where I got my stubbornness from.

Mila.

I spent the last month working my life away while only thinking about her. If I would have known she was going to blow me off after she left, I would have begged her to stay like she wanted me to.

What the fuck? How do I fix this? How do I fix us?

As soon as those relentless questions plagued my mind again, the last conversation I had with Cain a couple of days ago played out too.

“Don’t worry, bro. I know you miss her. You’ve spent the last month like a lost fucking puppy with your dick tucked between your legs. You didn’t bang the broad from the bar last week when we met up for late drinks. Did something happen between you and Mila before she left?”

“Yeah.”

“Yeah? What do you mean ‘yeah?’”

“We slept together.”

He didn’t catch on. “You sleep together all the time, you’re like two fucking school girls at a slumber party.”

I chuckled, he was right. “We made love, Cain.”

His eyes widened. “You made love? I’ve never heard you say that before. Holy shit, did you grow a pussy too?”

“Jesus, I’m a fucking chump. I can’t believe I just said that.”

“No shit, me either.”

Throwing back my drink, I shook my head at myself.

“So... is there more to that story, Leo?”

“I haven’t talked to her since she left.”

“Damn, that was almost a month ago. I just spoke with her yesterday.”

“Thanks for throwing fucking salt on my open wounds, jackass.”

“Listen, she’s happy,” he reasoned, taking a swig of his drink. “She told me she’s having the time of her life. So, while you’re here sulking like you’re Charlie fucking Brown, she’s off living her best life like you should be too. You slept together. It was bound to happen. I’m surprised it took this long.”

“There’s more to it than that.”

“If you’re referring to the Playboy Pact I’m going to—”

“I think I made it because of her.”

Cain’s gaze didn’t change, he wasn’t shocked by what I just shared.

“Have nothing to say?”

“If you’ve had that realization, I think I’m more stunned that you haven’t gone after her yet.”

“You think I should?”

“We all love Mila, Leo. She’s hard not to love.”

I zeroed in on him and he gripped onto my shoulder.

“But don’t worry, dude. I’ll take care of our girl.”

My phone ringing brought me back to the present.

“This is Leo.”

I spent the rest of the day fixing the problem with the subs and finally, by ten at night I was able to ensure someone would be over there first thing in the morning. Despite wanting to talk to Mila from the comfort of my home, I was still in my

office when I opened my computer and logged onto fucking Facebook of all places to talk to her.

I waited.

And waited.

And fucking waited.

By the time eleven rolled around and she still hadn't logged on I decided on a different approach. I called her from my office line instead of my cellphone. She didn't have that number.

She answered after two rings. "Hello."

There was no reeling in the sharp tone in my voice, I snapped, "So you're standing me up now?"

"Leo?"

"Are you expecting another man from Tennessee to be calling you this late? Cain is already there with you."

Silence.

"You've been taking his calls. How about you tell me why you're not taking mine?"

More silence.

"Is this how it's going to be, Mila? You're playing games with me now?"

"I'm not."

"Then why are you blowing me off?"

"I'm just busy with work and school."

"But not too busy to talk to Cain?"

More silence.

I sighed, applying pressure to the bridge of my nose. "Lala, I miss you."

Nothing.

"I miss my best friend."

Not. One. Damn. Word.

“Hello... did you hear me say I miss my best friend?”

Again, nothing.

“Mila, just fucking talk to me. How’s your life? How’s school? How’s work? You settled in yet? You like your job? Tell me something, anything. Please.”

“My life is good. I’m doing good. School is hard, but I’m adjusting. Work is good too. I’m making a lot of money. I haven’t settled in completely, there’s still a few things in boxes, but I love my job, and I’m always busy.”

“See? Was that so hard?”

“How are you?”

“Better now that I’m finally talking to you and not your voicemail.”

“I told you, I’m just busy.”

“You’ve always made time for me, Lala. What’s going on?”

“I don’t know what you want me to say, Leo. We don’t live ten minutes away from each other anymore. We’re in the real world now, I can’t cater to you and be at your beck and call like I used to.”

“I’m not expecting you to, but fuck, Mila... we’ve never gone this long without speaking before. You can’t understand my frustration? The last time I saw you, you were leaving and wanting me to tell you to stay—”

“I was wrong.”

Talk about a knee to my fucking balls.

“I shouldn’t have asked you to do that.” She sighed. “I’m actually glad you let me go. I’ve never been happier. I’m in a good place, Leo. I promise. You don’t have to feel bad about us having sex and needing to check up on me,” she scoffed out. “Okay?”

“You think I feel bad about us sleeping together?”

“I know I do. It shouldn’t have happened. It was a mistake.”

I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. How cold and detached her tone was. I didn’t recognize the woman I was talking to, this wasn’t my best friend.

This was a complete stranger.

“You think it was a mistake?”

“I know it was.”

I opened my mouth to respond but what the fuck do I say to that?

“Leo, I really have to go.”

“Are you trying to hurt me?”

“No. Of course not, but I really do have to go.”

“When will I talk to you again?”

“I don’t know. Let me get my schedule in order and I’ll give you a call when I can.”

“Lala—”

“Bye, Leo.”

Click.

“Wow,” I rasped, hanging up my phone.

It took every ounce of self-control to not punch the damn wall. I sat there staring at it, not regretting one minute of us having sex. I thought about it almost every night, fucking my fist to the image of her naked beneath me.

What she tasted like.

How she felt.

Her moans.

Her pants.

Her screaming out my name.

I hadn’t slept with anyone since Mila and the crazy part was that I didn’t want to.

All I wanted was *her*.

It didn't matter in what way, I just needed her in my life.

How did this happen to us? How could I let this happen?

My eyes caught the picture frame I had of us on my desk. It was a photo from graduation that my mom took. Mila's arms were wrapped around my neck from behind me and she was kissing my cheek.

She looked so beautiful.

So happy.

So enamored with me.

Unable to control my emotions, I grabbed it and chucked it at the wall, shards of glass flew everywhere until it crashed to the ground. Mimicking our friendship.

Leo and Mila.

Mila and Leo.

No longer a twosome.

No longer best friends.

No longer anything.

We were in fucking limbo and my heart couldn't handle that.

CHAPTER 27

—Mila—

One month later

“We’re going out tonight, Mi.”

I handed Cain his lunch.

“Thanks, darlin’.”

Smiling, I held out my hand. “You’re welcome.”

He chuckled, grabbing some cash from his wallet. “No tomatoes?”

“I’ve been making your lunch every day since your plane landed. I know how you like it.”

“Why don’t you let me show you how I like it in the bedroom?”

I ignored his smartass mouth. “Extra jalapenos. No tomatoes.”

“Good girl.” He handed me a ten-dollar bill.

“Where are we going tonight?”

Cain and I were spending a lot of our free time together.

Who was I kidding?

We spent a lot of time together in general. We both lived at the marina, and I worked for him so to speak. Cain used his employer status over me to his benefit. I made him breakfast, lunch, and dinner, on top of helping him with his catamaran whenever he needed it. We’d gotten close. On my days off, we were drinking buddies, sightseeing homies, or we were on the couch or in my bed, binge watching series after series like television junkies.

His catamaran wasn’t exactly ready to live on, but since he had all the amenities like a shower on the property of the marina, the only thing he used his sailboat for was to sleep. Although, he did crash on my couch more than he was actually

sleeping on his catamaran. I didn't mind, I enjoyed having him around. It felt like I had a piece of Leo with me and his presence in my daily life was comforting, to say the least.

Leo and I had only spoken twice in the last month. Both times were brief and on Facebook messenger. I ended up changing my settings to not show when I was online or else, he'd message me as soon as he logged on. To my complete and utter surprise, Leo spent a lot of time on Facebook. Stalking my page. Except he didn't interact with my posts and the only reason I knew he was seeing them was because he'd call me out on whatever I recently posted when he'd randomly pm me.

The most recent...

Remember when I used to make you smile like that?

Leo was referring to the photo that the marina took of me and Cain on his boat. They tagged both of us in it. His arms were around my waist, about to toss me in the water. We had huge smiles on our faces and from an outsider looking in, it probably appeared as if we were a couple.

We weren't.

However, I ignored that message from Leo too.

"You are off tomorrow, let's hit up the bars tonight."

"Awe," I sarcastically stated. "You remember my schedule."

"I pay attention to detail. It's why I'm so smart."

"You're smart?"

He grinned before taking a bite of his chicken sandwich. "I convinced you moving here was a good idea."

"It's not like you had to twist my arm."

Last weekend, we went to the carnival that was in town. We rode roller coasters the entire day, screaming and laughing with each other. He literally threw my body over his shoulder for a few rides, only the ones I refused to go on with him. We

stayed there till the park closed and then went dancing until the sun came up.

The next day was mostly spent on my couch, we were both hungover as fuck.

“You can wear that little baby blue panty set you have.”

“You Peeping Tom!”

He chuckled, “You leave your clean laundry on your bed and I’m just trying to help you get laid. You know, like Leo used to.”

I stopped smiling.

“Something I said?”

“I don’t want to talk about Leo.”

“You never want to talk about Leo.”

I didn’t.

“You know he misses the shit out of you, right?”

“Mmm hmm.”

“Why are you torturing him?”

“I’m not.”

He arched an eyebrow. “Mi...”

“It’s a long story.”

“I have time.”

“Well I don’t, I have to get back to work.” I turned to leave.

“Sex always complicated things for me, Mila. It’s why I made the pact.”

I snapped back around. “Leo told you?”

“His exact words were, ‘We made love.’”

“He said that to you? When?”

“The last time I saw him. It was the week before I flew here.”

“And you’re just now telling me this?”

“You never want to talk about him.”

“What else did he say?”

“I thought you didn’t want to talk about him?”

“Cain—”

“Mila!” Captain Jack shouted from his yacht, breaking up our intense conversation. “Could you help me with my rope?”

“Of course!”

I didn’t go back to Cain’s catamaran for the rest of the day. At ten-thirty he was knocking on my door ready to go. We strolled down to the bars that were within walking distance of the marina. Neither one of us brought up the conversation from this afternoon. We found a little dive bar that served food and had live music with karaoke. Sitting at dinner for the next few hours, we talked about nothing in particular, enjoying one another’s company.

“Is that the love of your life who keeps texting you, Cain?”

“No, Mi.” He winked. “She’s sitting right in front of me.”

I giggled, “Who keeps texting you?”

All it took was one word to damper my buzz.

“*Leo.*”

“Does he know you’re with me?”

He nodded.

“Is he asking about me?”

He nodded again.

“Is it bad?”

“He’s not happy.”

“About?”

“Us.”

“What about us?”

“I’m not going to lie to him, Mila. He knows we’re together all the time.”

“So what? We’re just friends.”

“Are we?”

I jerked back. “Are we not?”

“I think we could be more than just friends.”

I smiled. “You’re totally fucking with me right now.”

He leaned into the table, displaying those irresistible dimples of his. “What if I’m not? You’re gorgeous, fun, have a killer body, I could do worse. Actually, I have.”

“Cain, are you drunk?”

“Maybe, but you know what they say, a drunk never tells lies. I like you, Mila. I know you like me. We should see where this can go.” Cain slowly slid his fingers into my hand and started stroking my palm.

“As in you and me?”

“Do you need me to spell it out for you, Mi? I want you to ride my dick.”

“Oh...” I nodded. “This is about sex?”

“No, sleeping with me is just an added bonus.”

“You’re messing with me.” I stood, laughing. Not believing a word he said. “I’m going to the bathroom, be right back.”

I took two steps and out of nowhere, Cain grabbed onto my wrist, yanking me onto his lap.

“What are you—”

He. Kissed. Me.

Cain fucking kissed me.

Slowly at first. The second I felt his tongue on my lips, I opened my mouth for him. It happened so fast. One minute I think he’s joking with me and then the next, we’re kissing.

I'd be lying if I said I didn't enjoy it. I did. Cain was a damn good kisser.

"Whoa," I breathed out, leaning my forehead on his.

"Wait until you sit on my face."

My eyes widened. Never in a million years did I expect him to add...

"You just have to give me a chance."

—Leo—

I'm with Mila. Talk later.

I threw my phone on my desk after getting that last text from Cain, experiencing jealousy like I never had before. Every time I pictured them together.

Laughing.

Smiling.

For fuck's sake, just simply talking.

It drove me mad with jealousy.

His arms around her.

Touching her skin.

Feeling her warmth.

Hearing her giggle

Her head on his chest had me seeing nothing but red.

I wanted to punch his lights out, bury him alive. The irrational thoughts were taking me hostage, and I was right there along for the ride. Hanging on by an extremely thin thread. Ready for it to snap any second.

My blood was boiling, feeling fury in every inch of my skin. I wanted to hurt somebody.

Him.

My best fucking friend.

CHAPTER 28

—Leo—

One month later

“Hey, you listening?” Kylie asked.

“Mmm hmm,” I lied. I couldn’t stop thinking about Mila.

“I had a really good time tonight. You think we could do it again?”

“Sure.”

“Good. I like you, Leo.”

I nodded, not knowing what else to say. Women had been telling me they liked me for as long as I could remember. It was never a big deal. I didn’t care about the illusions they created in their heads of what they thought was going to happen between us.

I made no promises.

Ever.

Not even to Mila who I’d only spoken to once in the last month.

One. Fucking. Time.

Cain however, had no problem updating me on their status. Saying some shit about them seeing where their friendship could go.

Kylie slightly turned, nuzzling my neck with her nose. I felt my dick stir and before I knew it, I turned my mouth to meet hers and we were kissing. This was the first time since Mila left that I’d been with someone else.

Sawyer had set us up. He was trying to bang her roommate and I ended up being his wingman. This was the second time I hung out with Kylie. She was pretty, sweet, not the brightest crayon in the box though.

My mind couldn't catch up with the movements of our mouths and the way my dick throbbed with how she felt against me. The crazy thing about it was I didn't like her, I had no feelings for her whatsoever, but I couldn't stop kissing her.

Only because I was thinking about someone else.

Mila.

My tongue slid into her mouth, she tasted of mint ice cream. Mila's favorite. She moaned when she glided her tongue past my lips, triggering my dick to twitch from the sound. It reminded me of Mila.

I leaned forward onto her couch, pressing her back against the cushion.

"I like her, Leo."

Cain's voice from this afternoon's call filtered in through Kylie's moans.

"You like everyone."

"It's different. Mila's different. You don't have a problem with it, do you?"

"Are you really asking me that right now?"

"Man," he sighed. "I don't want to fight with you. You're my best friend, and she is yours. But I like Mila, and I think she likes me too. And we've kind of been dating for the last month."

"What?" I knew this would happen. I fucking knew it. "Why am I just now hearing about it?"

"Dude." He paused. "I've been trying to call you. You're always fucking working. You're working your life away. But she deserves to be happy, Leo. And I think I could make her happy. I mean, unless you want her? I'll step down if you tell me to. I would never let a woman come between us. This is why I'm asking you for your permission. Do you love her? More than a best friend?"

"Hey." Kylie grabbed my face. "Where did you go?"

I abruptly sat up. "I can't do this."

“What?”

“I can’t believe I’m fucking saying this.” I stood, looking every bit confused as I was. “But I can’t do this with you. I’m sorry. It’s not you, it’s me.”

She jumped up. “Are you for real? You’re really giving me a line?”

“No.” I shook my head. “You’re a great girl, and you need to find a guy who will appreciate that. I’m not him, Kylie.”

“We’re just going to have sex. I’m not expecting a marriage proposal.”

“If you would have said that to me four months ago, I’d already be balls deep inside of you. I just can’t do it. And I’m still trying to figure out why.”

“What the fuck?” she seethed, going into full crazy, psycho girl mode. “Of course! Of course, this would happen to me!”

This was my cue to get the hell out of there before she started throwing shit at me. Believe me, I’d been there before. You’d be surprised how fast girls could get attached. I grabbed my jacket and did exactly that. On my way out of her building, I texted Ashton and Sawyer to meet me at the bar downtown.

Twenty minutes later, I was walking into the place.

“Hey, man,” Ashton greeted as I sat down next to them and ordered a stiff ass drink.

“What’s up, bro?” He stared me down. “You look like someone killed your dog.”

“I don’t have a dog.”

“I know but if you did... this is what you would look like.”

I nodded. “Yeah.”

Gripping onto the back of my neck, Sawyer asked, “Did something happen?”

“You could say that. I don’t even know where to start.” I took a swig of my drink. “I’ve had so much fucking fun these last few years. You know? Chasing girls, seeing how many I

could sleep with in a night, it was never a problem. Smooth sailing, always. I loved it.”

“Why are you talking about it like it’s gone?” Sawyer cocked his head to the side. “Weren’t you just with Kylie?”

“I was.”

“So what?” Ashton questioned. “She a bad lay? I hate it when that happens. You can never really tell.”

“No, I didn’t fuck her.”

Ashton groaned, “That time of the month?” He shook his head. “God gives us this beautiful wet pet and every week out of the month, they bleed and don’t fucking die. Makes no sense.”

“I couldn’t fuck her.”

“Whiskey dick? I got some Via—”

“No, Ashton,” I snapped. “It has nothing to do with my dick. He’s actually pretty fucking pissed at me right now. I cock blocked him.”

Sawyer let go of my neck. “You cock blocked yourself?”

“We were making out. She was ready, and I just couldn’t pull it off. I couldn’t stop thinking about Mila, and then I couldn’t stop thinking about Cain, and then it turned into thinking about both of them together.”

“Together?” they said in unison.

“Yeah. He didn’t tell you?”

They looked at each other before Sawyer answered, “Tell us what?”

“They’re dating. They’ve been dating for the last month. He called me before I picked Kylie up tonight.”

They didn’t say a word. However, the expressions on their faces spoke for themselves.

“How do you feel about that?”

“I don’t know, Sawyer. I honestly don’t fucking know. I’m so blindsided by this.”

“Are you though? You know Cain. He’s charming and Mila’s hot as fuck.” Ashton shrugged. “They basically live together—”

“Excuse me, what?”

“Oh,” Ashton breathed out, rubbing the back of his neck. “He’s still working on his boat. He crashes at her place a lot.”

I jerked back, shocked. “Are they sleeping together?”

“Like fucking?” He shook his head. “Not that I know of. He stays on her couch, but it’s a studio space so they’re in the same room. Don’t look at me like that. I’m not fucking sleeping with her.”

“I can’t believe any of this.”

“I’m sorry, bro. Do you want me to find you some pussy?”

“I just left a wet one, Ashton.”

“And this is why—” he pointed to himself “—I’ll never break the Playboy Pact.”

“Who would have thought that Cain would’ve been the first one to break it out of all of us? Especially with what happened with his parents. It doesn’t make sense. Cain doesn’t believe in love and if he’s messing around with Mila’s heart, he knows you’ll have his balls for it.” Sawyer thought about it for a second. “I don’t know, man. It just seems weird to me. You sure there’s not something else going on?”

“Like what?”

“Maybe he’s trying to stir the pot between you and her? Like a fucking shit stirrer, I don’t know. I wouldn’t put it past him. You were there for him the most during the divorce.”

“Are you saying he’s pretending to like her? For me to what? Kick his ass?”

“I don’t think he’s pretending to like her. Mila is a likable chick. We all like her. Listen, all I’m saying is Cain doesn’t do relationships. You know this, we all do. Including Mila. I think he’s trying to get a rise out of you.”

“For what?”

“Not for what, for who—Mila. You’re obviously not fucking happy about it. Why do you think that is?”

Ashton peered back and forth between us, raising his finger in the air. “We’re going to need another round and some shots. I think our boy here—” he threw his arm around my neck and pulled me into his side “—needs to realize why he has a problem with them dating and that’s going to take...”

He brightly smiled. “A shit ton of fucking booze.”

CHAPTER 29

—Mila—

Two weeks later

We were at the gym and Cain was bench pressing two hundred and thirty pounds. Every time he lifted the bar, he grunted extremely loud and it was ruining my concentration on my yoga mat.

“Cain!”

He set the bar back onto rack.

“Must you sound like a barbarian every time you’re working out? Your man grunts are disrupting my form.”

Glancing in my direction, he looked down my body. “You’re on the floor spread eagle and I’m disrupting your form?”

I laughed, letting go of my legs. I was in the upside-down frog pose.

“I have one more set and then I’m all yours to help you—” he winked. “—stretch.

“I don’t need help stretching.”

“You want to race on the treadmills again?”

“Oh, you want me to kick your ass again?”

“Did you say kiss it or kick it?”

I rolled my eyes smirking. Since I couldn’t focus with the caveman sounds coming out of his mouth, I moved to the punching bag in the corner of the gym. Grabbing a pair of boxing gloves hanging from the ring, I started hitting the big red bag.

A sequence of right and left hooks, I relieved all the stress I felt. Leo and I hadn’t spoken in six weeks and in the last two, he just stopped calling me.

No emails.

No letters.

No Facebook messages.

In fact, he also hadn't logged on in the last two weeks as well.

I punched the bag again and again, hitting it made me feel better. I lost count of how many times I actually struck it.

Cain interrupted my thoughts, "My Mi knows how to throw a punch. Good to know. Here I thought you were just a wimpy girl who only did yoga."

"Call me a wimp again and I'll use you as my punching bag next."

He grinned before looking down at his cellphone.

"Why are you always looking at that thing?"

He finished whatever he was doing and then gazed back up at me. "It's a mix between the stock market and Leo. Which would you like to discuss?"

I overlooked his sly grin. "Why do you always want to talk about Leo? Tell me about the stock market instead."

"Yeah, it's how I make a living."

He slid his phone back into his es and made his way over to me. When he was close enough, I put my hands on his chest, giving him a little shove.

"You never told me that."

He smiled, realizing what I was doing. His eyes zeroed in on me, amused with my push.

"How else did you think I was tipping you?"

"Not sure, I thought maybe you were selling drugs."

"Oh," he sarcastically stated. "I only do that on the weekends." Quickly throwing on a pair of gloves, he held them up in the air and nodded. I understood his silent command and began hitting his open gloved hands.

"How long have you been in that volatile relationship?"

“It’s only volatile when I lose money.”

“How often does that happen?”

“Not often. I’m good at keeping it up.”

“Ha!” I punched his right hand as hard as I could.

“Nice,” he encouraged, nodding to keep going.

I rocked my head side to side, jumping up and down, from my left foot to my right, I held my fists out in front of me like a boxer.

“Who taught you how to fight?”

I kicked his left hand. “Leo.”

“Well, the man can throw a mean ass right hook. I remember when he beat up your last boyfriend.”

“He cheated on me.”

“Leo has always been your knight and shining armor, hasn’t he?”

Left hook, right upper cut, I ended with a side kick to his arm. Cain barely wavered, only pissing me off.

“How much money do you have invested in stocks?”

“I see you’re going to ignore my last question.”

Spinning around rapidly, I went to back kick his right hand but at the last second, he slightly turned, and I accidentally kicked him in the balls instead. He instantly fell to his knees on the ground.

“Oh shit!”

Peeling over on all fours, Cain grabbed onto his junk. His eyes were tightly shut, and his head was hanging in between his arms.

“I’m so sorry! I wasn’t aiming for that. You moved! Why did you move?”

He started coughing, almost like he was going to puke.

“Do you need me to get you a bucket?” I didn’t allow him to answer, I ran toward the bathroom and found the first thing

I could. A garbage can. Hauling ass back to him, he was still in the same condition.

“Here. Throw up in there.”

He spit into the can.

“Did I break it?”

Heaving in and out for a few more seconds, he found his breathing. “I can barely fucking see straight.”

“Should I get you some ice?”

The last word barely left my mouth before he tackled me onto the ground. Now I was underneath him.

I gasped, surprised by the turn of events. His body was in between my legs, pressing his injured dick into my core. His right leg was hitched against my ass and the other stretched out behind him. He had one hand gripping my left thigh up to his hip and the other around the back of my neck, locking me firmly with his weight.

Looking deep into my eyes, he spanked me, hard.

“What the fu—”

“That’s for being a very, very, very bad girl, Mila.”

“Cain, don’t you dare!”

With a serious look in his eyes, he let me go a little. “That wasn’t very nice, Mi.”

“It was an accident.”

“Accident my ass.”

“You moved! You did it to yourself.”

His thumb started to caress my cheek as he rubbed the tip of his nose against mine. The scent of mint and Cain mixed together assaulted my senses, causing a wave of sensations to erupt.

Cain wasn’t looking for anything serious and to be completely honest, neither was I. We were just having fun and enjoying one another’s company. This was the first time since

we started whatever this was six weeks ago that we were in this compromising position.

My eyes shifted toward the door. Thinking someone could walk in and I'd get fired.

"You're going to get me in trouble."

"Not any more trouble than you're already in with me."

With that, he kissed my lips.

My eyes closed.

My breathing hitched.

My mind went somewhere else entirely.

This embrace was much different than the ones we'd been having. His lips were rough but smooth against mine, his touch firm yet gentle. My heart drummed so fast, I swear he could hear it, feeling it against his chiseled chest. He pulled me closer by the nook of my neck as if I wasn't already close enough, pinned beneath him.

"Fuck you feel good," he huskily groaned. "How do you feel this good?"

All I could see...

All I could hear...

All I could feel...

Was *Leo*.

My knee moved on its own, my body just reacted to what he was saying, and I kneed him in the balls again.

He doubled over me. "Mila, what the fuck?"

"Ugh! I'm sorry I couldn't breathe."

"Yeah." He fell to the side of my body, groaning, "Now neither can I."

"I didn't realize your balls were so close to my knee," I lied. "I was just trying to get comfortable."

"So was my dick."

“I’m so sorry.” I kissed his cheek. “I’m going to get my big strong guy some ice, okay?”

“Oh, you’re going to give me that and more. Later. When I don’t feel like my balls are in my stomach.”

I didn’t know what to answer, other than, “I’ll be right back. Stay put.”

“I don’t have another choice, now do I? My dick is going to be afraid to show you how mighty he is if our close encounters keep going like this.”

I frowned, and stood, hurrying out of there.

Except, it wasn’t Cain on my mind the entire time I babied him back to health.

It was Leo.

My best friend who stopped trying to be in my life.

And I couldn’t blame anyone but myself.

CHAPTER 30

—Mila—

Two weeks later

“Mi! Come here,” Cain excitedly hollered.

It was the first time we took his catamaran out to sea. He finished rebuilding his engine the night before and we were taking her out for a spin.

I walked up to the upper deck and looked out to where he was pointing. Two dolphins were frolicking in the distance. It truly was an amazing sight to see with the sun beaming down on our faces, warming our skin.

“I love dolphins, let’s go swim with them.”

He laughed, “We’re not swimming with the dolphins. We’ll scare them away.”

I peered up at him grinning, recognizing the gleam in his gaze. It was a little off, sort of strange. I could read him pretty easily by this point and I could tell what he was thinking. He was getting ready to attack. I screamed when he effortlessly scooped me up.

“You want to swim with dolphins?”

“No, I was joking. Don’t you dare, Cain! I’m wearing a dress. Let me put on my bikini,” I demanded, tightening my arms around his neck. “Trust me, if I go in, you’re coming with me.”

He chuckled, “You do realize that I am a hell of a lot bigger than you, don’t you?”

“And you realize I could—”

“You could what, Mila?” He knew he had the upper hand. “Tell me what you could do?” With ease, he shifted my body, and my legs naturally wrapped around his waist.

“So, where can a girl get a drink around here?”

“I got you margarita mix. It’s in the fridge along with your Don Julio tequila.”

“Does that mean you’ve forgiven me for hurting your friend?”

“What friend are you referring to?”

I narrowed my eyes at him, not understanding.

“Leo or my cock?”

“I’m hurting Leo?”

He set me down on the ground. “When’s the last time you talked to him?”

“I don’t know. I’m not keeping track.”

He arched his eyebrow as if calling my bluff.

“What? He’s the one that stopped reaching out to me. I guess he’s too busy with work—”

“I talked to him this morning.”

Before I could regret asking, I blurted, “Does he know about us?”

“What about us? We’re basically friends who kiss sometimes unless you’re kicking me in the balls. That’s the only time you’ve touched it since we started whatever this is.”

“I told you it was an accident.”

“And I told you, you’re full of shit.”

I rolled my eyes. “Is that your way of telling me he knows?”

“Do you want him to know?”

I thought about it for a second. “I’m not sure.”

“Don’t you think you should be sure? I’ve been the perfect gentlemen and you barely kiss me and when you do, it’s brief—” His phone rang, and I was beyond relieved.

He answered the call and while he was handling that, I took the opportunity to compose myself and went to change

into my bikini. A yellow bandeau top and matching cheeky bottoms.

Cain wasn't exaggerating, I did avoid intimate situations with him. Anytime he kissed me, I thought only about Leo.

I missed him. *A lot.*

I missed my family.

My home.

My swing.

Four months into living in St. Thomas and I was already homesick. This was the longest Leo and I had ever gone without speaking.

On my way toward the fridge, Cain's computer dinged. Pulling me away from my thoughts, I recognized the sound, it was Facebook messenger. His laptop was open, and I couldn't resist. Curiosity got the best of me and I checked who the message was from.

Are you referring to you and Mila? Do whatever you want. I don't control her life.

I read Leo's newest response to Cain, and my heart fluttered against my chest. This uncomfortable feeling swept through my skin. I couldn't help myself and my finger was moving the cursor to see more of their conversation.

In seconds, my whole world came crashing down.

Tonight's the night.

What do you want me to say about that, Cain?

What? Cain wanted to have sex tonight?

I want you to tell me that you're cool with it.

I have no claim over her.

Damn. Thanks for nothing, Leo.

You're her best friend.

Am I though? Or have I just become another girl you slept with?

I knew I was being irrational, he didn't ask me to stay and I was still pissed about the whole situation. The fact that he just stopped trying to be in my life after a couple of months was the icing on the cake. Even though I was the one who wouldn't speak to him at first.

That was it? I was just worth four weeks of his time? After twenty-two years of friendship, four weeks was all I meant to him?

And you're the guy she's dating. I haven't spoken to her since you told me you were together.

Whoa. Was that why he stopped trying to talk to me?

I hope you didn't do that for me, Leo. She misses you.

She misses me so much she's never tried to reach out to me the entire time she's been gone? Mila was right. We shouldn't have had sex.

Ouch. Seeing that blatantly written out was harder than I ever imagined it could be.

I thought you said you made love like a fucking needy chick?

I haven't been with anyone since Mila. All I do is work, asshole.

You need to get your dick wet, motherfucker.

Don't tell me what I need, Cain. You don't know.

Apparently, neither do you. Considering it's right in front of your fucking eyes.

Are you referring to you and Mila? Do whatever you want. I don't control her life.

I slammed the laptop shut. "Screw you, Leo." I decided right then and there that one drink wasn't going to be enough. Making a pitcher, I brought it back upstairs with me.

Cain was driving the boat. He turned in my direction when he heard my feet coming up behind him, immediately taking in my body with his predatory glare and he wasn't subtle about it. I handed him his drink, set down the pitcher, and then moved to sit in the co-captain's chair.

For the next hour we talked, flirted, and I desperately tried to shove their conversation away from my mind.

Drinking more and more.

I have no claim over her.

Leo's words repeated over-and-over in my head. I could literally hear him say it to Cain, who was telling me about his plans to open his business soon and how excited he was.

The Virgin Islands agreed with Cain, he loved the water. It was obvious. He never appeared happier to me than he was in that moment. Talking passionately about his plans and future. Although, it wasn't the distraction I needed from what I was suddenly feeling, I think I played it off enough.

The booze sure made it easy to do so.

Other than telling him that maybe he was a pirate in a past life, I let him do most of the talking and before I knew it, I drank the entire pitcher of margaritas by myself.

When Cain leaned over close to my lips, and rasped, "My dick's had a rough time with you since the gym and you haven't even given him a hand to show him you're a friend and not foe."

I smirked because what could I say to that? He took the opportunity of our close proximity to kiss me, and I kissed him back for a moment until I remembered what it felt like to be in Leo's arms.

Pushing him back, I said a little too loud. "Guess what?! It's time to go swimming!"

"Swimming? Really? You're not scared of sharks?"

"Sharks are more scared of you than you are of them. They only come up to you because they're curious and usually only attack if they feel threatened."

"You're a marine biologist now?"

"Cain, I want to go swimming." I turned and jumped into the ocean. I seriously chose sharks over Cain...

What the hell Mila?

As soon as I popped back up, I realized my boobs were free. "Shit! I lost my top!"

He laughed a little, jumping in after me, in search of my top he went.

“Oh my God! Dolphins!” I shouted while he was underwater.

Cain resurfaced, lifting my top in his hands.

“Look! The dolphins came to see us!”

He smiled, throwing my top over to me. I caught it in the air. As I was putting it back on, one of the dolphins swam to Cain.

“Wow. They’re fast.” I made sure my top was securely in place as I watched the dolphin circle him a couple of times. “I think she likes you.”

“What’s not to like?” He reached over to pet it, but the dolphin had other ideas in mind.

Out of nowhere, I witnessed with wide eyes as it started to grab ahold of him.

“Ummm... Mila, what’s going on?”

I could hear the worry in his tone, and I tried to stay calm. “I’m not sure. Whatever you do, don’t move.”

“Why?”

“I think... I think it’s trying to—”

Yep, it sure is.

“Mila!”

“Oh shit!” There was no holding in my laughter, I laughed so hard my stomach was instantly cramping.

“Mila!”

“Dude! Don’t move!” I hysterically laughed. “You’re only egging it on!”

“Mila! I’m getting fish fucked!”

“I know, and it’s fucking hilarious! But technically, it’s a mammal!”

“Mila! Fuck the biology lesson! Come over here and help me!”

“Okay! Okay!” I splashed water at them. “Shoo! Shoo! He won’t come off, he really likes you!”

“Stop fucking splashing me and go get the flare gun!”

“The flare gun?”

“Yes! Aim toward the air and fire!”

“Isn’t that only used for distress?”

“What the fuck do you think is happening to me right now! Do I not look distressed enough for you? What part of me isn’t distressed while this dolphin is humping my leg?”

“I hope you don’t get pregnant!”

“Mila!”

“Okay, okay! I’m going. I’m going. Where is it?”

“Under the steering wheel in the cabinet box.”

By the time I got back to the boat, the dolphins suddenly swam off.

“Oh look! He let you go!”

Cain quickly made his way toward the boat. I’d never seen anyone swim so fast before. Once he was pulling himself back onto the platform, I started laughing again.

“Oh, it’s so fucking funny, I just got molested by a dolphin.”

I shrugged, chuckling, “It could have been worse. They could have wanted a threesome.”

CHAPTER 31

—Mila—

I wrapped my sarong around my waist and Cain grabbed my hand to step off his catamaran. We were back at the marina. We left shortly after his attack. At least that was what he was calling it. I thought it was more like love at first sight.

“Are you still traumatized?”

“What do you think?”

“I think we’re going to go back to my place and I’m going to make you some delicious dinner.”

“Hey, at least you offer me dinner before taking advantage of me.”

I hid back a giggle. “Of course, let me wine and dine you.”

While Cain showered, I cooked the grouper we caught from trolling a line in the back of his boat.

We ate in somewhat silence, listening to soft jazz music. After dinner was done, I excused myself to go take a shower.

Tonight’s the night.

Those three words wouldn’t let up. I thought about them the entire time I was washing my hair.

Was tonight the night? Could I go through with this when I couldn’t even handle his kisses?

She misses me so much she’s never tried to reach out to me the entire time she’s been gone?

Of course I didn’t! I wanted you to fight for me! Why are men so stupid?

Mila was right. We shouldn’t have had sex.

Was I right? Why did making love with him feel so fucking right then?

“Ugh!” I huffed my frustration.

It felt like we were making love to me too. It was the first time I'd ever felt that connection to someone. Usually, it was just sex. Sometimes it was good, sometimes it wasn't.

With Leo...

It felt so fucking amazing.

He was the best sex of my life.

"Enough, Mila!" I said to my reflection in the bathroom mirror. "Enough thinking about Leo. You're with Cain. He likes you. You just have to get over Leo and the only way you can do that is to get under someone else."

I liked Cain. I could sleep with him.

I mean, why not?

I could totally do this. Peeking my head out the door, Cain was standing on the balcony and I rushed toward my dresser. Quickly, I pulled out that little baby blue panty and bra set he was requesting. I decided it was time. If I was going to get over this speed bump that was my former best friend, then I needed to sleep with someone else. It didn't matter if it was Cain or a random stranger. I needed to be under a new man, so I'd forget about the last one.

Leo.

After slipping it on, I walked out onto the balcony that Cain was still on. He was looking up at the moon, nodding toward it.

"It's a full moon tonight."

"It's beautiful."

He turned to me, instantly caught off guard with what I was wearing.

"You like?"

"Wow. You're beautiful, Mi." Grabbing onto my hand, he pulled my body into his chest.

We danced for a little while. Time just seemed to fly by. At that moment, all of it seemed perfect. Believe it or not, Cain

turned out to be everything I ever wanted, and no one could have been more shocked than me. My mind should have been right there with him, but it wouldn't stop thinking about the conversation I read earlier between him and Leo.

Do whatever you want. I don't control her life.

You're right. You don't control my life and I'm going to prove it to you.

I shut my eyes and allowed the music to take over. Slipping out of Cain's embrace, I slowly spun around until my back was to his front. Swaying my hips side to side, I slid my hands slowly up my waist to my head, running my fingers seductively through my hair as I lifted it up off my neck.

There was a strong shift in the air, the space, the energy all around us. Every inch of my skin stirred with an awakening.

My breathing tethered.

My pulse accelerated.

My heart started pounding out of my chest.

I licked my lips, my mouth suddenly dry. Getting lost in the overwhelming emotions, going back and forth in time.

I haven't been with anyone since Mila.

Was he lying? Or was he telling the truth?

Almost instantly, I was engulfed in another familiar, husky, masculine scent. Cain's lips effortlessly glided along the crook of my neck. I gradually tilted my head, leaning away to allow him more access to make me forget.

"Are you dancing for me?"

What did he mean by that?

"Who else would I be dancing for?"

Not meeting his eyes, I moved my hips against his and he started swaying his ass with mine. He wrapped his strong arm around my waist, tugging me closer to him. Close enough to where there was nothing in between us, only the friction of our heady movements.

It seemed like hours passed us by, and for the first time in I don't know how long, I sought comfort in another man's arms who wasn't my best friend. Anxiously, I tried living in the moment with a man I considered a friend, not a boyfriend. Not someone I was seeing or had any interest in. Cain still felt like just a good friend to me. Even now, with his hard dick pressed into me, I wasn't turned on.

As if reading my mind, he spun me to face him. I kept my eyes closed, knowing if I opened them it wouldn't be the man I wanted looking at me that way.

I have no claim over her.

The smell of Cain's cologne was intoxicating, luring me in with the strum of the tune still playing from my apartment. He gripped onto my ass and wrapped my legs around his waist. I moaned, his mouth now close to mine. Inches, centimeters, seconds from touching each other. Wearing my emotions on my sleeve, he read me like a book.

“Who are you thinking about, Mi?”

I grinned, and lied, “The dolphin trying to take advantage of you.”

Before he could say anything else, I kissed him as passionately as I could. Trying to awaken my body for him. The ocean breeze blowing the thin white curtains did little to cool the heat between us. We didn't stop kissing as he carried me back to my bed, softly laying me down on the mattress. He got on top of me, placing his body between my legs.

“Is this what you want? Do you want me, Mila? What are we doing?”

My mind instantly jolted back to when Leo asked me that same question.

“What are we doing?”

“I don't know.”

“Do you want me to stop?”

“No.”

“Do you want me to keep going?”

“Yes.”

“How far do you want me to take this?”

My heart was pounding, mirroring his. I could feel it against my chest.

Boom.

Boom.

Boom.

“I’m leaving tomorrow.”

“I’m aware, but that doesn’t answer my question.”

I kissed him again, moaning into his mouth. “I don’t want you to say goodbye to me, Leo.”

“Mila.” Cain’s voice dragged me back to the present. Where he was the man now on top of me. “Where did you go?”

“Nowhere.” I smiled. “I’m right here with you.”

“Good.” He kissed his way down my neck. Never taking his eyes off mine.

I can do this. I can do this. I can do this.

I repeated the mantra over and over again, especially as he nuzzled under my ear. Grinning like a fool, he pecked his lips down to my chest, and before he could get to my breasts, I immediately grabbed his hand.

“I’m so sorry, Cain. I can’t do this.”

He opened his mouth to reply but was cut short. The front door of my studio apartment flew open and both of our eyes snapped toward the disruption.

“Oh shit.” My heart dropped, sank right to my stomach, locking eyes with the man I least expected.

His seething glare shifted from me to his best friend that still had his face above my cleavage.

“I’m going to fucking kill you!”

And that was the first thing I heard Leo say since we spoke last.

CHAPTER 32

—Leo—

I thought about that fucking Facebook message all damn day. Not once did I stop thinking about Mila and Cain fucking.

Tonight's the night.

Three words.

Three fucking words that put my ass in check real fucking quick.

I was driving to the airport with no luggage, no flight information, no boarding pass, just pure mad driven love. I was coming for what had always been mine.

Mila.

She shrieked while I lunged toward Cain at the same time. Jumping off the bed, Cain put his hands in the air. “Bro, it’s not what you think!”

Before the last word left his mouth, my fist was connecting with his jaw.

Mila loudly gasped as his head whooshed back, taking half of his body with it. He stumbled, catching his footing, meeting my intense rage.

I never thought it would come to this.

Bullshit.

Yes, I did.

I knew it would the second I found Cain in her bedroom of her apartment all those months ago in Tennessee. I knew it then, however I tried to pretend like my best fucking friend wouldn’t betray me like that.

Both of them.

“Leo, you need to calm down!” she exclaimed.

“Calm down? Calm down? You want me to calm down when my best fucking friend was about to fuck you!”

“What does it matter? You don’t claim me, remember?”

All the blood drained from my face. I jerked back, glaring at Cain who was purposely moving around his jaw. “Whoa, you fucking told her? You piece of shit!”

“No! I read it on his laptop! It isn’t his fault that you regret sleeping with me! Now it makes sense why you wouldn’t ask me to stay!”

“You wouldn’t ask her to stay?”

“Fuck you, Cain!”

“Leo! Stop it!”

“You said you regretted sleeping with me, remember?”

“Leo.” Cain held his hands up in the air again. “Come on, this isn’t the right way. I’m your best friend, just think about it for a second.”

“Are you fucking kidding me? Think about what? Your dick inside of her? Because that’s the only thing I’ve thought about all fucking day!”

“Great,” he shamelessly admitted. “I wanted you to.”

“You son of a bitch!” I punched him in the nose, and blood shot out in an instant.

“Oh my God!” Mila jumped off the bed, showing me what she was wearing, or what little she wasn’t.

“Put some fucking clothes on!” I roared, pulling off my hoodie, I threw it at her.

“Jesus! You fuck!” Cain held onto his nose which wouldn’t stop gushing blood. “I’m only with her so you can get the stick out of your ass and realize you fucking love her!”

“What?”

“Do you need me to spell it out for you? You love Mila! She loves you! You two have loved each other our entire lives, you stupid dip shit! Making fucking sense now?” He looked

up at the ceiling. “Can someone get me a towel? I’m fucking dying here!”

Despite the pissed off expression on her face, Mila slid my hoodie over her head, hurrying into the kitchen.

“What the fuck is going on?” I asked, impatiently waiting for an answer.

Mila rushed back toward Cain, holding the towel up to his nose. “I have no idea. This is news to me too. So what, Cain? You were just using me?”

His eyes met hers. “You really want to question who was using who, Mi?”

“Stop fucking calling her that. She’s not a fucking dog.”

“Oh really? Because Lala doesn’t sound like a goddamn poodle!”

“Stop!” she chastised. “Both of you.” Grabbing Cain’s arm, she guided him toward the couch to sit down.

“He’s fine, Mila. Stop babying him.”

“Eat my dick! I can’t breathe! I think you broke my nose!”

I heard a loud pop, followed by Cain growling out in pain, but the blood stopped flowing.

Mila shrugged. “Not anymore.”

He peered up at her. “How did you know how to do that?”

“Grey’s Anatomy,” I responded for her. She made me watch that shit show more times than I cared to remember.

“You’ll be okay.” She let go of the towel. “You’ll bruise, but you’ll heal fine.”

“Fuck your nose. You should be thanking me for fixing your pretty boy fucking face!”

Cain stood, and she gripped onto his arm, holding him steady.

“He’s not a little boy, Mila. Let him come at me like a man.”

“If you try to hit me again, Leo! I’m going to fucking hit you back!”

“Oh my God! Are we at the playground?” She pointed to me. “You stand over there. And you.” She nodded toward the farthest corner of her place. “Go stand over there. If you’re going to continue to act like children then I will treat you like them. You’re no longer allowed to be within hitting distance of each other.” When neither of us moved, she ordered, “Move it!”

We did as we were told, and she sat down in the middle between us, on her coffee table. Taking a huge deep breath, she glanced at me first. “What are you doing here?”

I didn’t hesitate in speaking my truth, “I’m here for you.”

“Come again?”

“You heard me, Lala. I’m here for you. You’re coming home with me and that’s the end of it.”

Her eyes widened. “Ummm... excuse me? How about you rephrase that before I’m the one that’s hitting you.”

“What part needs rephrasing, Lala? That I’m here for you or that you’re coming home with me even if I have to throw you over my shoulder kicking and screaming?”

“Oh, this is good.” Cain slid down the wall until he was sitting on the floor with his elbows on his knees. “Say that again, Leo. I really want to watch when she knees you in the balls. Trust me, she’s a fucking pro at it.”

“Mind your own fucking business, Cain. Your nose is already so far up her ass I’m surprised you can still breathe straight.”

“Wow. If you’re both going to continue acting like this toward each other then I’m going to leave, and you can have it out without me. Now which is it going to be? Are we going to behave?”

Cain grumbled, “He started it.”

“Oh, fuck you, man! I didn’t start shit. I wasn’t the one barking up the wrong tree.”

“Hey, shithead! I asked you for permission first!”

“Is that before or after you asked her to come to St. Thomas with you? Were you thinking about me then too?”

“As a matter of fact, I *was* thinking about your bitch ass! It’s the only reason I asked her to begin with!”

“Hello!” Mila interrupted. “Can we not talk about me like I’m not sitting right here!”

Through a clenched jaw, Cain gritted out, “The only reason I asked Mila to come here with me is because I thought it would be enough for you to see the error of your ways, ol’ buddy, ol’ pal.”

“Oh, how fucking noble of you, dickwad. Were you going to have sex with her for me as well?”

“Oh, Jesus.” Mila abruptly stood. “Time out! I’m calling a fucking time out! No more words out of either of you. You’re both driving me crazy!” She pointed to herself. “Now it’s my turn to talk and you two will listen to everything I have to say or I’m going to kick both of you in the balls. Understood?”

We unwillingly nodded.

“First of all,” she snapped at me. “Cain did not make me leave with him, Leo. I make my *own* decisions. I came here on my own free will. Now, had *you* asked me to stay, I would have. Why? Because I fucking love you. *There*. I said it. I’m so in love with you it’s disgusting. The only reason I dated Cain was because I was trying to forget about you. And maybe, just maybe, I was trying to get back at you for shitting on my heart and not asking me to stay. So there.” She put her finger in the air, silencing me from opening my mouth.

“Now you,” she snipped at Cain. “Was I using you? Maybe. But at first, I thought you were looking for a good time, some fun so I said... why not? I didn’t think for a second that you were that into me until you started to lay it on real thick. You were everything I thought I wanted.”

“No shit.”

“But you aren’t Leo.”

“I know. It was part of my plan to get you to realize your hero has always been him. I had to make it believable or you would have never realized it.”

Mila’s expression drastically changed when he spoke with conviction...

“I sold you the dream, Mi. And guess what? You didn’t want it. At least not... from me.”

CHAPTER 33

“Oh. My. God.”

“I’m a good actor. It’s how I get laid so much. I can do anything I set my mind to.”

My mouth dropped open. “You told me. You freaking told me!” With that, I stood and grabbed a pillow off the couch, chucking it at Cain.

He caught it before it hit his face. “Hey! Broken fucking nose here! Don’t throw shit at me!”

“You asshole! You spineless fucking asshole!”

“Listen.” He threw the pillow to the side of his body and adamantly stood. “I’m a good fucking friend! Do you have any idea how hard it was to keep my dick in my pants? Especially with you prancing around in your tiny bikinis! I should get a badge of honor for not trying to slip my cock into your pouty little mouth!”

Leo stepped forward and I raised my hand stopping him.

“Look.” He took in Leo’s fiery glare. “That came out wrong. This is the longest I’ve gone without getting laid. She’s hot as fuck, Leo. I’m a man, not a saint. I don’t know what more I can say. My intentions weren’t malicious. I had no intentions of having sex with her.”

“Really?” Leo lowered his eyebrows. “So, you were just on top of her for shits and giggles?”

“Dude, she stopped me. Right before you walked in. She. Stopped. Me. Saying she couldn’t do it.”

“And what if she hadn’t?”

“I never for one second thought she wouldn’t. And that’s the God’s honest truth. She loves you. I knew you would show up. I checked the times for flights today before I sent you that message. I know you, Leo. Obviously better than you know yourself. I timed it out, and you showed up exactly when I knew you would.” He stopped to let his words sink in. “You

were there for me through all the bullshit with my parents. You don't think I feel like shit about that? Up until you told me you realized you made the Playboy Pact for Mila, I thought you made it for *me*. I couldn't allow you to do that for me anymore, when it was so blatantly evident to everyone but you two dumbasses... that you're in love with each other. So I..." He shrugged. "I took matters into my own hands. I figured what other way to repay you than by making you see what has always been right in front of you." Cain pointed to me. "*Her*."

I felt so bad for him at that moment and without thinking about it, I went to him and threw my arms around his neck. Cain hesitantly hugged me back, probably from feeling Leo's jealously burning a hole in my back. I could only imagine the look he was giving Cain.

"Is Leo staring at us?" I whispered for only him to hear.

"Like you're his favorite chew toy and I'm the neighborhood stray."

"Good. Let him sweat. Even if Leo wants to tear you to shreds right now. You're a good friend. To both of us."

"That's really sweet, Mi, considering I'm about to die."

I laughed.

He pulled away and smiled, before letting me go. I watched as he walked over to Leo until he was standing in front of him.

"I'm sorry, man. I was just trying to return the favor because you've always been such a good friend, brother, to me."

"You fucking kissed her, dickhead."

"Like maybe a handful of times. Very brief. And I've never seen her naked or touched her, so that has to count for something?"

Leo bit back a smile and Cain extended out his hand. "We cool?"

"I'm not sure yet."

“Well.” He nodded. “You know where to find me. I’ll leave you two love birds alone.” Cain winked at me and after he shut my door behind him, Leo made his way over to me.

Once we were a foot apart, he proclaimed, “I love you too, Mila. I’ve always loved you and I always will. I’m *in* love with you.”

My heart melted. “Then why didn’t you ask me to stay?”

He swept my wet hair away from my face and lovingly gazed into my eyes. “I thought if I did that you’d just end up resenting me for choosing your future for you. I knew if I asked you to stay for me then you would have, and I didn’t want that kind of resentment building in you. I couldn’t ask you to stay, Lala, but that doesn’t mean I wanted you to go. I needed you in my life, and if that meant we just stayed best friends then so be it. If I would have known for one second that you were going to push me away then I would have begged you to stay with me. Please tell me you at least know that.”

“I thought you didn’t care about me. We ended things so badly and we’ve never fought like that before. I didn’t know how to act around you anymore. It’s why I said those things to you over messenger. I was just mad, upset, and hurt. The only way I knew how to deal with it was to push you away. I know that’s not very mature, but it’s what felt right at the moment.”

“And now?”

“I don’t know what to feel right now, other than shock that you’re actually standing in front of me. We haven’t spoken in so long and now you’re here.”

“I’m here for only you. Come home with me, Mila. I love you.”

“I... I just... I don’t know, Leo. I’ve thought about you the entire time I’ve been gone. And when you stopped trying to talk to me, it made everything worse in my mind. I understand why you did it now. It makes sense why Cain brought you up all the time.”

His jaw tightened.

“Nothing happened between Cain and me. I barely kissed him. I couldn’t. Anytime he’d kiss me, all I could think about was you and how wrong it felt. One of the biggest reasons I enjoyed his company so much is he makes me feel closer to you. And since we weren’t talking, he was a great distraction for me.”

“What I just walked in on didn’t seem like you were missing me that much, Mila.”

“The only reason you walked in on that, was me trying to forget about you. I read your conversation with Cain this morning on his laptop which he obviously left open for me to see and I was so angry, I wasn’t thinking. I acted irrationally and impulsively. The only reason I did that was because I was trying to forget about you.”

God, how could I have been so blind?

He gave me so many hints this entire time, but I didn’t catch on to any of them.

“Everything you said to Cain was another knife in my heart. I thought I could go through with it. I thought I could have sex with him.” I shook my head, pausing for a second. “I couldn’t. I did stop him, and I was about to tell him I just wanted to be friends.”

“All you guys did was kiss?”

“Yeah, and like he said, those were brief. I actually kneed him in the balls one time just to stop kissing him.”

“Good girl.”

I half-smiled.

“These last few months haven’t been a walk in the park for me either, Mila. You pushed me away. You blew me off. *You* told *me*, that you regretted us making love. How the fuck am I supposed to feel about that?”

“I know. I was wrong. I’m sorry, Leo. I just thought you didn’t care about me and that you expected us to go back to being Mila and Leo just like that. I didn’t know how to do that. I couldn’t pretend like you didn’t hurt me. Especially when

you've never hurt me before. If I could go back, I would have just talked to you about it. We've always been able to talk about everything and this shouldn't have been any different. I got scared. My mind wasn't thinking clearly. For a moment in time, I overlooked who we were to one another. How we're best friends first, no matter what."

"I'm sorry for hurting you, Lala. But I'm finally where I need to be. I'm standing in front of you right now, telling you I love you. That I'm in love with you. I've always been in love with you. Come home with me. I need you, more than I've ever needed anyone. You're my girl."

The serious expression on his face captivated me in the same way it always had. Placing his hands on the sides of my face, he brought me closer to him. "I can't lose you again. I won't. Please come home with me."

My chest rose and fell with each word he said. I felt him everywhere and all at once.

His scent.

His body.

His stare.

His mouth.

"I don't know if I can come home with you, Leo. I have a life here. It's only been four months and..." I shrugged. "I'm so confused. I wasn't expecting any of this."

His mouth was so close to mine I could feel his breath on me.

"You're just being fucking stubborn, Lala."

I shut my eyes. I had to. "Leo, please..."

"Please what, baby?"

"Please... I just don't know. I'm sorry. I know that's not what you want to hear, but it's the truth. I just don't know—"

He kissed me.

Long.

Hard.

True.

Making me feel whole.

Softly, he pecked my lips one last time before rasping against my mouth, “You know, Mila. You know just like I do. You’ve always been mine, like I’ve always been yours.”

“I need some time, okay? I need to think. Can you please give me that?”

He reluctantly nodded, backing away. I didn’t stop him when he turned and left.

This time... I was the one who let him leave me instead.

CHAPTER 34

—Leo—

One day later

“I told you.” Ashton lifted his beer. “The Playboy Pact for fucking life.”

“I don’t know about all that.”

“Oh come on, dude, don’t give me that shit. You just got your heart stomped on by your little Lala.”

“Don’t talk about her like that.”

“How can you defend her when she just let you leave like that? That plane ticket cost you fifteen hundred dollars, one way, because it was so last minute, and you didn’t even get to cop a feel. If I were you, I’d send her a bill for wasting your fucking time.”

“Ashton, I’m fine.”

“Bullshit. You’re not fine. You don’t even look fine. You’re miserable. I say, we go see some strippies. Titties in your face, on me, bro. What?” He jerked back. “Don’t look at me like that. I’m trying to help you get over her and the only way to do that is by letting another woman ride you. Okay?” He patted my shoulder. “Let’s go.”

“I’m not going anywhere. Especially to a fucking strip club. If I wanted titties in my face, Ashton, I wouldn’t have to pay for them.”

“Free titties end up being more expensive in the long run. They want dinner and drinks and to go to the movies.”

“Not tonight, man.”

He shook his head, sighing. “Fine. But can you promise me one thing?”

“What’s that?”

“You’re not going to sit here all night and think about Mila.”

“I can’t promise that.”

“Dude, look at you. She’s got you by the balls and you’re not even getting a blowjob.”

I chuckled, and for the next two hours, we drank, talking about nothing in particular. It was well into midnight by the time I found myself sitting on her swing, in the cold, frigid night air. I sat there, wanting to feel close to her.

Waiting.

Like she’d magically show up. I don’t know how long I sat there feeling her, but not seeing her when my phone rang, and Cain’s name appeared on my screen. We hadn’t spoken since last night.

I answered, “Yeah?”

“We cool yet?”

“I’m not sure.”

“Leo, I swear to you on the Playboy Pact and our friendship that I was never going to have sex with her. I knew she’d stop me, I knew you’d show up and find us together, it was why I was provoking you. I wanted you to show up. It was the only reason I started dating her. I have no interest in Mila other than friendship. I need you to believe me. I can’t lose you as a friend, a brother, I fucking love you, man.”

“I know. I fucking love you too.”

“So we’re good?”

“I might need to hit you a few more times, but yeah, we’re good.”

He scoffed out a chuckle.

“As much as I hate to admit it, you did help me realize how much I do love her. I never had a problem with any of her shitty boyfriends because I knew nothing would come of them. With you, it was immediately different. I mean fuck... I knew I was in love with her after we made love, but I couldn’t ask

her to stay for me. And now, I'd get on my knees and beg her to come home to me. Shit, I almost did."

"You're breaking the pact, huh?"

"I should have broken it a long time ago."

"Well, I got some good news for you."

"Oh yeah? What's that?"

Out of nowhere, someone started pushing me on her swing.

"Ashton," I groaned, thinking he came back. "How many times do I have to tell you? I don't want titties in my face."

"Not even mine?"

My eyes snapped toward the familiar voice, as Cain stated, "You're welcome," into the phone.

I hung up and she smiled.

"So, I thought about it."

"And?"

"I can't stay away from you any longer. I shouldn't have let you leave last night, but you're right, I was being stubborn. I got all my stuff in order today and left as soon as I could. I'm here, for *you*. I also realized something else though."

"What's that?"

"I'm glad you let me leave."

"Is that right?"

She looked deep into my eyes, and the same intense gaze stared back at her.

"Mmm hmm. If you hadn't let me leave, then I wouldn't be standing here, finding my way back to you. I love you, Leo. With all my heart. It's just you and me. It's always just been Leo and Mila. I never want that to change about us. You'll always be my best friend."

"But now you'll get to sit on my face too." Standing, I brought her lips to meet mine. With my hands framing her

face, I kissed her.

Slow.

Passionate.

Intense.

“I want you,” she moaned, and I didn’t have to be told twice.

Moving my hands from her face down to her body, I gripped onto her ass and wrapped her legs around my torso. Placing her on my lap when I sat back down on her swing. Our hands started to roam everywhere, unable to decide where we wanted to touch each other the most. Her tiny, delicate hand slid into my gym shorts.

“Fuck,” I growled, as she stroked me up and down. Her hand barely closed around my shaft. I slid over her silk panties and she was already soaking wet for me, making my balls ache.

I couldn’t believe I was finally touching her again. Her hips moved against my hand.

Faster and faster.

Wetter and wetter she became.

“Yes, baby... Come on my fingers.” Kissing along her jawline, I took in every blush of her face, every moan of her lips, and every movement Mila made, had my cock throbbing.

“I love you. I love you, Leo.” Her body tightened fucking fierce, getting off on the back and forth motion of my fingers hitting her g-spot until she released a fast-heavy stream. “Oh God.” Her legs quivered, and her body trembled.

“You just squirted down my hand, you dirty, dirty, girl.”

“I don’t know how you keep doing that.”

“I do.” Positioning myself at her opening, I teased her with the head of my cock, before choking the fuck out of my shaft with her tight pussy. Spreading her wetness, inch by inch, a little more each time. Her mouth parted, her eyes shut tightly as she took me in completely.

“And now I’m going to make you come on my cock.”

She panted, I filled her to the tilt. Slowly, she swayed, getting used to the feeling of my dick deep inside of her.

“Have you been with anyone since—”

“No.”

“Wow. Good to know.” She smiled against my lips. “You’re not going to last a long time at all.”

I laughed from deep within my chest. Shaking the entire swing while she gazed adorably at me. This wasn’t how I pictured our reunion, but I loved the fact that we were still being us. Nothing had changed.

Our connection.

Our friendship.

Our love.

We were still best friends.

Mila.

Leo.

One.

With a hard, strong hold, I gripped onto her hips, rocking her back and forth on my dick.

Over and over again.

She locked her arms around my neck. We fervently kissed as she rode me, there on her swing. The whole world was shut out. Even in the cold, I’d never felt hotter.

It was just the two of us.

And I never wanted to leave.

“You’re so fucking beautiful with my cock inside you.”

“You’re just saying that because you like to watch your cock go in and out of my pussy.”

“What can I say? It’s the three most beautiful things. You and my cock.”

“Is having sex with me making you lose your mind? What’s the third one?”

“Making you come.”

“Then I suggest you get to work on the last one.”

“That a challenge, Lala? Taunting me like I didn’t just make you squirt for me.”

“Only one way to find out.”

I moved one of my hands to her clit. Her breathing escalated as soon as she realized what I was about to do. She encouraged me, bucking her hips forward.

“Leo...”

“Yeah, babe. Just like that... Fuck me...” I growled from deep within my chest.

My other hand roughly dug into her hip bone, helping her ride my dick. I could feel her pussy tighten, gripping my cock like a fucking vise. Vaguely feeling her shiver. Leaning in, she started kissing me more aggressively than before. I grabbed the back of her neck instead, wanting to bring her closer, needing that connection, our bodies touching.

Our lips moved on their own accord, no longer having control over our movements.

I growled, “Fuck... you feel good,” Thrusting my hips upward, I roughly gripped onto her hips again.

Moving her harder.

Faster.

For her pleasure and mine.

Feeling her g-spot on my tip.

My fucking sweet spot.

My pace increased as I made her fuck me as hard as she could, unable to get enough. I couldn’t help it, I wanted her to feel me in the morning and be walking like my cock was still inside her.

Our mouths parted.

Breathless.

Riding the high, waiting to fall over the edge together.

I slid my tongue into her mouth when I felt her pussy throb, pulsating long and tight. I muffled her screams.

Her quivering was my undoing.

She was my undoing.

Another groan escaped from deep within my core, coming so hard I saw bright, white stars.

We stayed there for I don't know how long, both of us trying to catch our breaths. Leaning my forehead on hers, I didn't have to tell her to open her eyes to look at me. They were already open, full of love for me.

"I love you, I love you, I love you," she repeated, making my dick hard all over again.

I carried her up the stairs and into my bed, where we made love.

All. Night. Long.

EPILOGUE

—Mila—

One year later

“Lala, I can’t talk to you when your ass is up in the air and you look like you’re ready for me to fuck you.”

“Leo! I’m doing yoga!”

“Can you not do it in my office?”

“How else am I supposed to see you? You’re always in here.”

“We have a whole ass house, Mila. I built it for you.”

There wasn’t a corner of this house that we hadn’t christened. We spent our first month alone, making sure we had sex in every spot of our new home.

I smirked, shifting into another position.

He groaned, “Are you trying to torture me? I have a conference call in about two minutes.”

From the moment I returned home, we started living together in the cabin while he built our house with his company. Since he was overseeing the entire build, he was able to finish it much faster than expected. We lived a couple of miles away from our parents. Aside from Cain, who was still living in St. Thomas, the boys were at our place often.

Sawyer was in med school, but anytime he wasn’t studying he was at our house. Same with Ashton, who was working as a real estate agent for Kymen Homes. His clientele was mostly women which didn’t surprise anyone. It had become his dating pool.

Leo and I were great. We were exclusively together and couldn’t be happier. He didn’t work seventy-hour weeks like his dad would have preferred, but he still worked a lot. They developed a better relationship in the last year. I think his mom talked to his father and let him know that things weren’t going

to be the same for us like it was in their marriage. His dad loosened his expectations a bit and it helped Leo feel like he belonged. He began enjoying his role in his father's company.

Things were good, they were both happy.

I on the other hand, was in graduate school and helped Leo whenever he needed it. I was basically his secretary/sex slave, his words, not mine.

Getting back on my knees, I crawled my way over to him. Under his desk I went, until I was crouching in front of him with hungry eyes. "Would you like me to take care of anything while I'm down here?"

"There's one thing I'd love for you to suck on if you're up for it. Since I sure as shit am."

Unbuttoning his jeans, I unzipped his pants and pulled out his dick. He watched as I wrapped my hand around his cock, sucking on his head.

"Fuck..."

Already tasting his pre-cum on my tongue, I deep throated his dick to the back of my throat.

"Mila..."

His computer rang, and I released him with a loud pop. "Better answer your phone, babe. Don't want to seem unprofessional."

"My cock is in your mouth, Lala. I can't get any more unprofessional."

He answered on his laptop. "Hello."

"Mr. Hawkins—"

"You can call me Leo."

I slid him back into my mouth, making sure to play with his balls as well.

He shut his eyes and his head fell back against the headrest, mouthing, "Harder, Lala."

Leaning forward, I did as I was told. Working him over effortlessly. I knew what Leo loved, like he did with me. I felt him hold in his breath when I licked around the tip of his dick, before my warm mouth sucked him in again.

“Ummm... Sir?”

“I said you can call me Leo.”

“Oh, well... um... Leo.”

“Yeah,” he replied a little too huffy.

My hot mouth glided down his shaft in a slow, torturous rhythm, taking him deep and then back out.

“Fuck...” he muttered under his breath. Grabbing onto the back of my neck, he thrust his cock even deeper in my throat, causing me to gag.

“Leo,” the man on the phone addressed. “You know this is a video call, right?”

Instantly, his eyes opened, sitting straight up. The sudden movement caused his hand on my head to shove his dick deeper down my throat and there was no holding back on my part.

I bit him. A little.

The expression on his handsome face mirrored mine as I removed him from my mouth and he doubled over, groaning in pain, “Call you back.” With that, Leo ended the video call. His face was hiding in the nook of his arm on his desk.

“Oh my God. I’m so, so, so, so sorry! There was no controlling it. It just happened. Are you mad at me?”

“Mmm...”

“It was an accident.”

“Mmm... Mila. You. Just. Bit. My. Dick.”

“I know. Is he offended?”

“Mila...”

Grabbing his cock out of his hand, I apologized to him, “I’m sorry. Here, let me make it better.” I was careful sucking

him back in my mouth and when he came in the back of my throat several minutes later, I looked up at him...

And smiled, swallowing his seed like he loved.

—Leo—

There wasn't a place on Mila's body I didn't kiss, touch, or suck. There wasn't one moan, pant, or I love you left for her to say after I thoroughly made love to her.

I had everything I ever wanted.

Everything I ever hoped for.

My best friend had always been my soulmate.

"Hmm..." she groaned, her eyes fluttering open as I licked her pussy the next morning. "Happy morning to me. Does that mean your dick isn't mad at me anymore?"

"He was never mad at you."

"Lies."

I pushed two fingers into her warm, wet heat, and her back arched off the bed as I hit her sweet spot while I fucked her with my mouth.

"That feel good?"

Her breathing hitched, and her legs trembled.

"What?" I pushed harder and sucked faster.

Her legs tightened fucking hard around my head as she came all the way down my face. I savored her taste on my tongue, swallowing all her juices. Her eyes opened, and the light shining in from the window by our bed, brought her attention to her left ring finger.

The two-carat princess cut diamond sparkled in the bright sun, the ring I snuck on her finger without her noticing.

"Leo..."

"I never imagined I'd be in a relationship. I never thought I'd want to get married, have kids, or settle down. Now I can't imagine *not* doing any of those things, with *you*. I love you, Mila. I've always loved you. Be mine forever. Marry me."

Her eyes glazed over with fresh tears. “Are you serious?”

“I’ve never been more serious about anything in all my life.”

She sat up and threw her arms around my neck. “I love you too. Of course, I’ll marry you.”

Before I could claim her lips, Ashton barged into our room.

“Guys!”

“Dude!” I argued, covering Mila’s naked body with mine. “What the fuck!”

“Bro! I’ve been trying to call you! You won’t believe what happened to me!”

“Ashton,” Mila exclaimed, grabbing the sheet to cover her chest. “How did you get in?”

“I used my key.”

“You have a key?” she asked.

“That’s beside the point, Mila.”

“Ashton, if you don’t get the fu—”

“I have to tell you something.”

“What?” we both yelled in unison.

“Leo, Mila, I met someone. She’s a single mom and a Kindergarten teacher. And guys...”

I thought I’d never hear him say those seven little words that carried the biggest punch...

“I think I’m in love with her.”

The End.

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She lives in Brandon Fl with the love of her life, her lobster, and husband Bossman. They have two German shepherd mixes, a gordito Wheaten Terrier and a user Tabby cat. She is extremely close to her family, and when she isn’t living the cave life writing her epic love stories, she is spending money shopping. Anywhere and everywhere. She loves reading and spending time with her family and friends whenever she can.

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