

A highly muscular man is the central focus, shown from the waist up. He is wearing bright blue shorts and is looking down with a serious expression. His physique is extremely well-developed, with prominent abdominal muscles and broad shoulders. The background is a solid black, which makes the man's skin and the blue of his shorts stand out. The entire image is framed by a decorative border of red floral and vine motifs, with a dotted line running along the inner edge of the border.

The

NEXT-DOOR NEIGHBOR

AMAZON BESTSELLING AUTHOR
LENA LITTLE

THE NEXT-DOOR NEIGHBOR

STEAMY SHORTS: BOOK 6

LENA LITTLE



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PREVIEW

I fu*king hate my next-door neighbor, Piper.

She always turns her nose up whenever we bump into each other in the hallway, tells me to lower my music when I can barely hear it myself, finds something wrong with me, and glares at me every chance she gets. It's like she gets offended by the very air I breathe.

It shouldn't turn me on, but it does.

Especially since it's hard to ignore just how beautiful she is, how her eyes light up when she's genuinely happy, or how she tries to mask her sadness with anger.

I fu*king hate Piper.

Mostly because she ignores me.

So I do what every mature, self-respecting man in his mid-30s does when he's attracted to someone who won't ever give him the time of day—I piss her off, then flirt with her, then ask her out.

Piper thinks I'm joking.

She never says no, just rakes her eyes up and down my body and turns her back on me with a scoff.

Fine, Piper. Fine. I get the message.

Challenge accepted.

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“Oh my God. Why is there a pig in the hallway?” Piper shrieks, face burning bright red, eyes staring daggers at me, nostrils flaring.

Jesus Christ. How can a woman look this beautiful even when she’s all riled up? I can’t stop staring at her, even more so when she crosses her arms over her chest, unknowingly pressing her tits together and making my cock twitch.

Now’s not the time to get hard, boy. Let’s wait until I’m alone in the shower.

But the increasing hardness is evidence that I have no control over my body’s reaction when it comes to Piper. None. That has always been a problem.

She’s wearing a short pale pink sundress and matching ballet flats. Her long blonde hair falling in waves over her shoulder and back. Her ice-blue eyes pulling me once again into their depths. Her red, full lips pressed together in a thin line. The freckles across her nose and cheeks become more prominent when she’s annoyed or pissed off.

Like right now.

“Chill, lady. He’s my pet, and he has as much right to be here as me and you.”

I sit on my haunches and run a hand through Thor’s wiry coat. His eyes meet mine, and he grunts in agreement. I can’t help but smile.

“Your pet? The landlady let you keep a pet?”

With my hand still on Thor's back, I let my gaze sweep from her shoes to her face. "Yeah, why?"

"Why did she say my parrot will only disturb the neighbors? Fifi only says hello and goodbye."

"Yeah, well, Thor says neither. He's a quiet, peaceful pet. He may grunt sometimes, but most of the time, you won't even know he's there. Also, who names their parrot Fifi?"

Piper taps her foot and raises one eyebrow. "You're one to talk. Who names their pig Thor? He doesn't even look like a Thor."

Standing up to my full height, I raise both palms to her, my face in mock outrage. "Woah, woah, woah. Pretty judgmental, are we?" I lower my voice and dart my eyes to Thor. "No one shames Thor in front of me, and he's pretty sensitive so you may want to keep those thoughts to yourself."

She rolls her eyes and expels an exasperated breath, the air whooshing through her bangs. God, it's adorable and effortlessly sexy. "Just... Why do you have that? Who has pigs as pets? Can't you just get a cat or something? You know, like a normal human being?"

"Piper, Thor is the sweetest swine in the world. Besides, this is just a temporary living arrangement."

"What?"

"Mrs. Bernards asked me to look after it because her husband kept badgering her to turn Thor into bacon."

The corner of her mouth twitches, and her cheeks dimple with the effort to stop herself from cracking a smile. She clearly struggles to keep a straight face.

Come on, Piper. Smile for me, baby. You know you want to.

She probably realizes how close she is to laughing because she huffs and lifts the grocery bag from the floor. "Just make sure he stays out of my way, especially when I'm bringing stuff. If he slams into me, I'm turning him into breakfast myself."

Piper turns her back on me, but I call out, "Have breakfast with me, then. I'll buy you bacon, and I promise I'm a fun

company.”

She doesn't respond or turn around, just continues to walk to her door, her hips swaying slightly, her calves flexing with each step.

Jesus, it's been five months since I first met her, and my obsession only keeps growing. It's not healthy for me, but goddammit, I can't stop. And if I'm being honest with myself, I don't think I want to.

This has been a typical interaction for us. A norm between next-door neighbors if you can call it that.

We banter—okay, argue about pretty much anything and everything—then I flirt with her, and it always ends with her retreating and not rising to my bait. At this point, I'll probably get thrown off my game if she says yes.

The problem is, this is not a bait. Not really. It's real. My feelings are real. Me asking her out is not a joke, but I try to throw it like it is because she never takes me seriously. Besides, it's the only way she'll notice me. I prefer Piper being annoyed with me than ignoring me any day. Pathetic, I know.

But at least I try. Every single time we see each other, I try. Who knows? Maybe one day she'll eventually see me as more than just dirt under her shoe.

“WAIT! HOLD THE DOOR.”

I raise my head to find Piper sprinting towards the closing doors of the only elevator in the building, arms flailing. Of course, she's wearing high heels, and I wonder how she can run in them like she's not scared of breaking her neck.

Knowing her, she's probably not. She's kind of a superwoman like that.

I thrust my hand in between the doors, and in seconds, she lunges forward.

There's no one else inside, and she's breathing hard like she just ran a marathon. Unashamedly spinning to stare at her, I smirk and tip my head to her. “You're welcome.”

She throws me a glare even as she tries to catch her breath, chest heaving and fingers splayed across her chest, her shoulder bag sliding to her bent elbow. She's wearing one of her favorite office dresses—those vintage-y kind with lace sleeves and some kind of tie at the neckline. Her long, toned legs are in full display and my mouth waters at the thought of skimming that smooth expanse of skin with my tongue.

Piper is fucking delectable. There's a reason why I spend hours awake most nights, just thinking about her and wondering what I need to do to make her mine.

“You know, you can just—”

My words are interrupted by a couple of kids rushing to get inside, along with someone who's most likely their mother. I give her a nod and step back to make room for them. Piper does the same, and we're both pressed to the back. Before the door closes, a big, burly guy carrying a box hurries and positions himself beside the kids, just in front of Piper.

See, Piper is a small thing. She's 5'4 at most and only looks taller because of her sky-high heels. Without them, she probably only comes up to my chest. The guy in front of her is almost three times her size, and when he instinctively steps back to avoid the playful kids, he almost ends up crushing Piper's toes.

I've always been the protective kind, but with Piper, it's magnified a hundred times.

My hand shoots out, arm crossing over her body as I lightly pull her to me. She gets it in an instant, and while she steps to my side, I move in front of her, and we switch places.

I'm now behind the big guy, and the kids are in front of Piper. One of them holds a baseball-shaped balloon and swings it, so my arm once again automatically reaches out to protect Piper, draping across her tiny frame.

The boy's mother scolds him, and he behaves. When he does, I try to pull my arm back, but Piper's fingers curl around my bicep.

I inhale sharply, heat rushing up my arms and heading straight to my groin. Time slows or stops completely, I don't know anymore. But it doesn't feel like we're in a closed space with our neighbors. It's as if it's just me and Piper and the breaths we're both holding.

When she lets out a stuttering breath and digs her nails into my skin, it becomes increasingly impossible to bring myself under control. My whole body thrums with need—raw, primal hunger to have her. I take a peek at her, and she keeps her eyes in front of her, not even glancing at me or her hand on me or my arm on her.

It's not even just that because she tugs on my arm and my elbow rests on her tits—soft and so squeezable. I can't move. I can't even fucking breathe. I'm not even sure my brain still functions properly.

I'm pretty sure this happens in just a span of seconds, but it's almost like an eternity. It's as if Piper and I are playing a weird game of who gets to snap first.

It's just her hand on my arm, my arm across her body, and my elbow on her tits. And yet I'm about to come in my pants like a fucking schoolboy.

A dull chime resonates throughout the elevator, and I realize we're on our floor.

Whatever spell is on us breaks, and Piper turns her body sideways to hurry out. The moment I step out of the elevator, she's already making a mad dash to her apartment, fumbling with her keys and refusing to look at me.

Huh. Piper usually does things with grace and poise, even if it's something as simple as carrying a bag of groceries or getting out of the taxi. Right now, though, she looks like someone trying to escape a serial killer on her heels.

Damn.

Maybe I'm starting to grow on her. Maybe... maybe it's not so hopeless now.

What was that? What the hell was I doing? What was I thinking?

I try to shove the memory from my mind, but I can't.

God, what's up with me lately? I hate to admit it, but Parker royally messes with my head. I hate it. I hate him. I hate that he lives next door. I hate that there's not a day when we don't see each other.

It's one thing for me to stand so close to him, but me pulling him closer and basically pressing my breasts to his arm? Unfathomable. Unforgivable. Downright shameful.

Why was I acting like that to him? I mean, I can't deny the fact that I find him attractive. Too attractive. I may be perpetually pissed, but I'm not blind.

With those ocean-blue eyes fringed with thick lashes that I'd kill for, light curly brown hair that's always messy, the easy smile, and the weird dimple in between his eyebrows—he's good-looking. Maybe with the right woman, he's also charming. Maybe even sweet.

To me, he's just plain annoying.

Which is why my reaction to him in the elevator is baffling. It's like I was possessed by someone who knows how to flirt. Is that how people flirt? Or is that how people are when they're in a relationship? God, I don't know. I have no idea because I've never been in this situation.

I haven't had a full make-out session or had sex with anyone. I don't even remember being this attracted to anyone. Just now. Just with him. And that just annoys me even more.

Meanwhile, Parker is probably so experienced, he can talk anyone into lending him their pet pig. He most likely can talk anyone into bending over backward for him.

When I take off my clothes in the shower, I'm not remotely surprised to find that my panties are soaked and my thighs feel sticky.

Yep. Piper the Virgin just got turned on because her next-door neighbor had his arm on her body. In my defense, his arm was so corded and his biceps so hard that I had to restrain myself from salivating right there and then. It was only then that I fully understood the appeal of rolled sleeves or t-shirts on muscled men. It's sexy, and he doesn't even have to try.

If Parker finds out about this, I'll never hear the end of it. So I hope that's the last time we'll ever be that close.

Sighing, I mentally shake myself. I've never been much of a liar. And I just know I'll be dreaming of him tonight—him and his hands all over me—hoping to at least relieve the sweet ache between my thighs.

God, Piper. This is juvenile behavior, and it's embarrassing.

I reach for my lavender body wash. It's not my favorite scent because I prefer peppermint, but I once read about it being good for calming nerves.

Yes, well, I'm gonna need the entire bottle.

THE AIR around me feels thick, constricting my chest with a suffocating weight. My heart pounds, each beat echoing louder and louder in my ears until I can't hear anything else.

I scramble to inhale deeply to help ground myself, but it's as if every gulp of air takes every energy I have. My palms grow clammy, my hands tremble at my sides, clutching my silk pants.

The world begins to blur at the edges, and the brick wall pressing against my back is the only thing reminding me that I'm still here. That I'm not somewhere else watching this happen to another person.

I'm so used to being in control that I sometimes forget to be extra cautious. It's stupid of me to think he's here accidentally. Of course, he's not. This creep wants nothing more than to get in my pants, and with the way he's behaving, I'm not putting it above him to do everything to get what he wants.

I'm alone with him in the alley beside the apartment building. I don't know how he managed to follow me, but it's past 11 PM and most of the tenants are already inside their homes. It's just the two of us, and no one can help me.

I can scream, but I can't even get a word out. My throat is closing up. I'm struggling to breathe, and it's like one of those nightmares where you're trying to yell but no sound comes out except a squeak.

Physically, I can never take him on unless I manage to kick his balls. Maybe I should've listened to all those self-defense classes I was forced to take back in college. Maybe if I remember any of them, I can do something about this instead of feeling helpless.

"Hey, fuckface. Are you deaf or dumb? The lady said no multiple times. Even a third grader understands what that means."

It takes a few seconds for the fog to clear and for the familiar voice to pierce through the panic in my head. I know that voice. I hear it almost every day.

When my gaze snaps to the guy behind my creepy workmate, I almost sag to the ground in relief.

Parker.

I don't know why he's here when it's almost midnight, but I'm so happy I want to launch myself into his arms.

Brent a.k.a. The Office Creep is still an arm-length away from me, but he twists at the waist to face Parker. "This is none of your business, pal. Just go away with... Is that a pig? Why

would you...? You know what, just leave us alone. I'm just asking her a question."

Parker lowers his cap and chuckles darkly, a sound I've never heard him make. "Fat chance. Buddy, you're cornering a woman in an empty alley. A woman who already refused to go with you for coffee in your apartment. You think I'm leaving you alone with her? Damn, you stupid or what?"

Parker doesn't wait for an answer. He just shoulders his way between us and extends his hand. "Come on, Piper. Let's go home."

I reach for it, but Brent grabs my elbow. I flinch and snap my eyes shut, fear rolling through me.

But Parker rips him from me. When I open my eyes, he has Brent by the collar, lifting him easily and pressing him against the wall, Brent's feet hanging a few inches in the air.

Brent claws on Parker's hand, but it's not doing anything. Parker just tightens his hold on him and growls, "I don't think you understand, buddy. When someone says no, it's a fucking no. It's not your cue to negotiate, and it doesn't give you an excuse to force her. Touch her, or any other woman who doesn't want or welcome it, and I'm gonna beat you so bloody you won't even recognize yourself."

Oh. My. God.

Is it wrong for me to feel so hot for him right now? It's not even just the way he came to my rescue, but every word coming out of his mouth makes my body tingly.

Who is this guy and what did he do with my annoying neighbor?

I've always had this weird attraction to him, and I hate it. Feelings, particularly love, make you vulnerable—just ask my mom. The last thing I want is to catch feelings for my neighbor and get my heart broken.

Right now, though, I feel something electric through my veins, my body heating up, desire pooling low in my belly. I'm not familiar with whatever I'm feeling toward Parker, but I'm not totally dumb and I know I can't ignore it any longer.

It's the wrong time to think about it, but maybe I just need to get it out of my system. Sleep with him one time and end this once and for all.

The only issue is I'm a virgin. So that means I'm giving it to him—my first time. He's gonna be my first. Will he know it? Will he notice? As long as I don't tell him, will he figure out I have zero experience in the sexual department?

“Piper?”

A hand grazes my shoulder, and I realize Parker's talking to me. Brent's nowhere to be found, and it's just him and me and Thor.

“I'm sorry. What did you say?”

His forehead furrows, jaw clenching. “Are you okay? That was a shitty thing to experience.”

“Yeah, no. I'm fine.”

“You want to go to the cops?”

I shake my head. “He didn't exactly do anything except crowd me and intimidate me with his invitation. At least not yet.”

“Who was he?”

“A co-worker. He's been asking me out ever since I joined the company.”

“You should report him.”

“I will on Monday.”

“He doesn't take no for an answer. A dangerous kind of guy who shouldn't be around women.”

I wrap my hands around myself and dig the heel of my shoes to the ground. “Apparently not. Why were you here, anyway?”

Parker lifts one shoulder. “I was walking Thor.”

“Pigs need walking?”

“Of course.”

I'm about to answer something sarcastic, but I shut my mouth instead. I'm operating on instinct, which is to be combative

and defensive even though he's not doing anything to provoke me.

Parker has just saved me from Brent. I don't want to imagine what would have happened if he wasn't here. I froze while Brent talked, only because I knew I was powerless. If he even touched me, I might have fainted from fear.

"Thor needs a lot of loving, just like every animal, and he happens to enjoy walking and inhaling the night breeze."

"Ookay." I can't help but stare at the pig by his feet. Is Parker just pulling my leg? Am I in on one big joke?

"It also helps if you stop looking at him like you disgust him. Pets have feelings too, you know."

I sigh and rub a hand across my forehead. "Listen, I'm sorry for being a bitch to you."

His eyes glint with amusement, and one corner of his mouth lifts. "Hmmm. That's one way of putting it."

"And thank you for helping me earlier."

"You can thank me with a kiss."

There he is again, flirting with me.

He probably flirts with everyone. I mean, I once saw him charming the pants off our elderly landlady. Hmm, now that I think about it, that may be the reason why she let him keep the pig. She's so particular about cleanliness, and Thor is just... Thor.

Parker most likely expects me to act irritated again. Well then, I guess I have to be unpredictable just this once. I'll surprise him and do something he doesn't expect.

Bracing my hands on his shoulders, which feel as hard as his arm, I lift myself and press my lips against his, noting his surprised gasp. My plan to just throw him off-guard and give him a chaste peck backfires on me when his arm wraps around me and he pulls me to him. I feel such an intense, all-consuming longing all the way to my toes.

With the sudden, urgent desire to taste him, I dip my tongue into the warm recess of his mouth. I think for a moment, that's it. We'll break apart and say good night.

But Parker has other plans.

Instead of staying still, which, to be fair, I don't expect him to do, he grabs the back of my head and sucks my tongue, molding his mouth to mine. A whimper sneaks past my lips, and he swallows the sound.

I need to be closer to him, so I clutch his shirt and pull, because all of a sudden, I hate even an inch of space between us.

He deepens the kiss, and I give as much as I get, responding to him as though we're not outside, as though our neighbors can't look out their windows and find us sucking each other's souls.

At 27 years old, this is not my first kiss. But this is the only one that has made me lose my mind completely.

When we finally come up for air, I lose my footing and almost topple backward. Parker reaches his arm and catches me before I fall and land on my ass.

With his face only inches from mine, I'm about to go in for a second kiss. That is until Thor reminds us of his existence and lets out a high-pitched squeal—loud enough to wake the tenants on the first floor. I didn't even know he could do that.

Parker rests his forehead on mine and sighs. "Should we turn him into bacon?"

"I DON'T KNOW how the hell you talked me into hiking," I mumble as I wipe the sweat off my brow, already regretting agreeing to this in the first place.

Welcoming the crisp morning air, I briefly toy with the idea of enrolling at the nearest gym. We've been walking for no more than fifteen minutes, and my lungs are burning. I don't want to say it in front of Parker, but I feel like if we do this for an hour, I'll die.

Fine. That's a bit dramatic, but I probably won't be able to feel my legs on our way back.

The towering trees continue to form a canopy overhead, which offers us respite from the sun. I already slathered myself in sunblock, but I'm sure I'll come out of this totally burnt.

"It's fun and relaxing, Piper."

Parker stops in front of me, and I have to admit. He's right. Not the hiking itself, but the nature surrounding us.

From the rustling leaves to the earthy scent of semi-damp soil, it feels like we're thousands of miles away from the city. I can't explain it, but even the sunlight filtering through and the gentle breeze pulls a smile from me.

It is relaxing.

Fun? Not so much.

"Fine. Let's continue." I drag my feet and try to focus on the ground before me, twigs crunching beneath my shoes with every step.

Parker offers me his tumbler, which I decline. I notice he has a huge grin on his face.

"Why do you look so happy?"

He casts me a mischievous look. "Because I have two of my favorite things right here—hiking and you. The only thing missing is Thor."

"You have such a weirdly deep attachment to that pig. What if his owner comes to take him back?"

"I'd be sad, so I guess you'd have to comfort me, then."

I snort, and he laughs. "Tell me something. You hike regularly? On purpose? Without a gun to your head? With no one forcing you?"

"Yeah, I like it."

I almost trip on my own feet when Parker moves in front of me, blocking my way. He tilts his head to the side and smiles.

“You realize you’ve been skirting around something we need to talk about, right?”

I blow out my cheeks and release a long breath. “What do you mean?”

His smile only grows wider, the dimple between his brows deepening. “The kiss.”

Despite how much I desperately try to control my reaction, I can feel the warmth blooming on my face. “Oh. Now? You want to talk now? I can barely breathe while walking, and you want to talk.”

“Okay, then. I know a place where we can stop.”

The incline becomes more demanding, and I hear him huffing, too. My muscles are so unaccustomed to this type of activity that I can practically hear them scream in agony. I am so gonna be sore for the next seven days.

We reach a point cloaked in mist but has a huge boulder on the side. I unceremoniously slump on it, not caring that I look like a wet rug. Taking a long drink from my tumbler, I let my heartbeat return to its normal rate.

Parker sits beside me, and we stay quiet for a few minutes before he breaks the silence. “You often thank people with a kiss?”

I whirl my head so fast I feel like I’m having a whiplash. “Why? Do you often ask people you help for a kiss?”

His shoulders shake, and he levels me with a look that says, *What do you think?*

“Fair. To answer your question, Piper, no. I only ever do that to you.”

The snort comes out of me before I have time to think about it. “Right. You flirt with everyone.”

“Oh, how dare you? Who are we talking about?”

“I don’t know. The lady on the third floor.”

“Jenika?”

“Maybe? The beautiful girl with long, black hair.”

Parker bursts out laughing. “Jealous?”

“Not on your life.”

He swallows the remaining water in his tumbler and moves to kneel in front of me. He rests a palm on my knee and the air around us shifts. Turns charged. Something zapping through the space between us, and I try to focus on what he’s telling me. “She’s my cousin’s girlfriend. I’m a generally pleasant guy to be around with. At least that’s what my friends tell me. So what you consider flirting is just me being nice.”

“That didn’t bother me.”

He raises one brow and nods, visibly trying to stifle another smile. “Okay.”

“You also ask me out every single chance you get.”

“Because I want to go out with you, but you never take me seriously.”

I remember last night, how I tossed and turned and was unable to sleep because of the way he kissed me. My body felt hot all over, and it didn’t matter how cold my bedroom was, I burned.

Out of desperation, I was on the verge of touching myself, imagining his hands all over me, but I couldn’t. I knew I’d only end up frustrated and disappointed. But I did tease myself, running my fingers along the sides of my breasts.

That thought has me rubbing my thighs together, and Parker must have seen something change in my eyes because his face darkens and his hand flexes on my knee.

Maybe he senses the desperate yearning within me because he pushes himself from the ground, bringing me with him, and in one swift motion, he sits on the boulder while I straddle him.

This change in position is so quick that I barely have time to register anything. Dear Lord.

He crushes his lips to mine and kisses me hungrily, aggressively, urgently. His hands graze my back and my outer

thighs, and he cups my face, plunging his tongue in and out of my mouth.

A gush of wetness streams from me, and I grind shamelessly on him, seeking friction. He's wearing hiking shorts while I have nothing but leggings and seamless panties on. I can feel the outline of his thick ridge, and it only makes me crazier with want.

Parker lifts my top and drags his tongue along one pebbled peak, making me arch my back and yank his hair. He does the same to the other nipple while I keep rubbing my crotch to his.

The cool air sweeps over my exposed skin, and I get goosebumps all over.

“Fuck, Piper. Tell me you want this.”

“I want it.”

We're both panting, but when Parker slides his fingers inside the hem of my leggings, my hands squeeze the hard muscles of his shoulders. “Parker, wait.”

The fire in his eyes, his flushed skin, his lips red and tender from our kiss, his heavy breathing—God, he drives me wild.

But there's something I need to tell him, and it may or may not turn him off. I'm a bit scared and embarrassed at the admission, but I need to get it out of the way. “I've never done this before.”

He gives me a soft smile. “Me too, baby. I've never fucked on a trail.”

I shake my head, tendrils of hair escaping my ponytail. “No. I mean never. Like never never.”

The confusion on his face morphs into surprise. “You're a virgin?”

I can only nod and bite my bottom lip.

He clamps his jaw shut and scrubs a hand across his face. “Then, we can't do it here. I'm grateful you're giving your virginity to me, Piper, but there's no way I'm letting your first time be out here.”

He tugs my top down, but I grab his hands.

“I want it, Parker.”

“Baby, you don’t deserve to have your virginity taken—”

“I. Want. It. Right. Now.”

He blinks slowly as if he’s silently debating with himself.

I don’t want him to stop. The overwhelming desire to have him inside me threatens to fill me. It has never felt so right. This is perfect.

Without breaking eye contact with him, I reach into his shorts and moan when my fingers wrap around his thick girth. I was right. He is big everywhere.

Parker’s eyes turn glassy and wild, and he throws his head back, his hands going from my top to the smooth surface of the boulder on either side of him.

“Fuck, baby.”

“Yes, Parker. I need you to fuck me right here and right now.”

He grits his teeth and sucks his bottom lip between his teeth. “Fine, but you’re in control. I don’t want you in pain, so you control the pace.”

My thoughts freeze. “What?”

“Use me, Piper. Ride my cock like a good girl.”

Holy shit.

Parker lifts my hips off him, just enough so I can lower my leggings to the middle of my thighs, just enough to bare myself. Good thing these leggings stretch comfortably and aren’t too tight.

“Use your knees for support then lower yourself on me.”

Oh. Okay.

It’s a struggle because of the leggings, but I use one hand to hold onto his shoulder and the other to guide him to my entrance. Just the head has me whimpering. God, he’s so big and thick.

A muscle ticks in his jaw, and I just know he's fighting for control.

I slide down but my skin prickles when it begins to sting. I've met the barrier, and despite wanting to get it over with, my body's instinct is to stop.

Parker runs a hand along my thighs. "Do you want to stop or do you need help?"

"Need help."

His eyes go misty with pleasure.

He rams his hips upward, and the slight pain has tears springing to my eyes. But it doesn't take long before it disappears.

As he has promised, Parker gives me full control and doesn't move anymore. I start by sliding up and down his cock until I've adjusted to his size.

"Hey! Anyone still has some jerky?"

Parker and I freeze at the same time. We strain to hear a couple of voices and some laughter.

"They're probably still at the fork," he whispers hoarsely.

Which is around ten minutes from here.

My mind races, and I wonder how many they are and if they're about to find us fucking like animals on a boulder.

Parker senses my distraction because he nips my earlobe. "We just need to come faster, baby, and they won't find us like this."

Oddly enough, that only makes me hornier. The fact that we're out here and anyone can run into us. The fact that a couple of hikers can catch us with Parker's cock inside me.

Sparks zip through my belly, and it's like I know what to do. My arms go around his neck for support, and I bury my face in the crook of his neck while I rotate my hips and bounce on his lap. I hear a tear in my leggings, but I'm beyond caring.

"Fuck, Piper. Fuck!"

His hands go to my ass, kneading both cheeks roughly. The pulse pounding in my pussy gets more intense until my orgasm hits me with blinding force.

“Parker!”

My body trembles, but I don't stop. I keep riding him, but he's no longer immobile. His hips move in rhythm to mine, and he's rutting faster and harder.

“I'm coming, baby.” I feel him swell inside me, and he groans as his come coats my inner walls. I ride him through his climax until he slumps his head on my chest.

Five minutes later, we pass the group on our way down. They smile and greet us, and we do the same.

I wonder if they can smell sex all over me and Parker because I surely can.

Piper is mine. Finally.

It still baffles me how it happened. Between our first kiss and first fuck, I want to pinch myself just to know if this is real. No way did I get this lucky.

But if everything's part of my overactive imagination, then who is that gorgeous blonde sitting on my couch with her feet up on the armrest, mindlessly scrolling through a couple of videos about makeup?

The familiar jingle of an incoming call awakens my laptop, and I sit up straighter. My work desk is just behind the couch and strategically placed to have my bookshelf as the background.

As a freelance photographer, it means I don't need a huge office to work at. This wooden desk with nothing but a laptop, wireless keyboard, and mouse is my entire "workplace."

The face of my regular client appears, and I wave at him and smile. He was one of my first clients when I struck out on my own after years of working for a media company. I've photographed his proposal, pre-nup shoots, wedding, baby shower, and now, his baby's first birthday.

It takes us roughly ten minutes to iron out the details. He's currently discussing hiring me for a company event when I jolt in my seat after feeling slender fingers brush over my calf and toward my inner thigh.

Goddammit, Piper.

I force my eyes on the screen, nodding like an idiot even if the client's words go through my head. My fingers curl on the edge of my desk, gripping it tightly, and I exhale slowly.

Piper reaches for my waistband to tug it down because yes, one of the perks of working from home is I get to wear a button-down polo and pair it with boxer shorts.

My cock springs free, jutting against my stomach, and when Piper's fingers wrap around it, I lean my elbow hard against the desk, clench my hand into a fist, and bite on it hard.

From the other side, it looks like I'm focused on what the client's saying, but my whole body is hyper-aware of Piper. My eyes stray to her, and it's the worst thing I could have done because the moment our gazes lock, she spits on her hand and begins stroking me in a way that has my muscles straining.

"Is that alright, Parker? But of course, I'm definitely not gonna try to mess with your style, man."

"Yeah, yeah. Absolutely. No problem."

I have no idea what the fuck I just agreed to, but holy mother of God, my loins are so tight they're about to burst. I'm trying my damndest to concentrate, but Piper has taken things to the next level.

She repositions herself so her forearms are on my thighs, and she darts her tongue out to lick the bead of precum.

I rake my nails along my scalp and grab fistfuls of hair, briefly lowering my gaze only to find her opening her mouth and wrapping her lips around me.

"Do you have any changes to the contract?"

With all the strength I can muster, I interlock my fingers and rest my chin on them, nodding absentmindedly.

"Okay. What changes?"

"What? I mean, no. No changes. All good."

He nods. "Okay. A couple of things more."

That's it. I can't take it anymore. With a click, I close my camera and tell him, "Hi sorry. My connection is spotty, but

my audio's all good. Is this alright?"

"Oh, sure. No problem. We're just discussing a few more things. Anyway, you kind of know the drill since you've worked with me for so long already."

"Okay. I'm all ears."

I push back the chair, making sure the legs don't scrape the floor, and pull Piper from under the desk.

There's a playful twinkle in her eyes, and her face is flushing from arousal and excitement. This is definitely not how I pictured her to be, and fuck it, it's so much better than all my filthy fantasies put together.

"Stay quiet while I fuck you," I tell her, my voice low to make sure only she can hear.

Her mouth parts, but she nods, chewing on her bottom lip. I turn her around, and her palms rest on my desk. She's still wearing her nightgown, so I hike the pink silk material around her waist and pull her panties down, letting them pool around her ankle. She's bent at her waist and her pink pussy glistens.

"No problem with the proposed fees, I assume? I told him we need to give you more than your usual."

"Yep, no problem," I respond while I fist my cock and slide it into Piper's already-drenched pussy.

Fuck.

With me hunching over her back, my lips brush her temple while my finger teases her clit. I know I won't last long like this, but I have to. She has to come first—literally and figuratively.

I work doubly hard to stave off my orgasm while doing everything I can to make her come apart. I can't slam my hips forward since I risk my laptop falling or creating rattling sounds.

Instead, I take her with long, slow, drawn-out thrusts. I bury myself to the hilt, pull out, then do it again. All the while, my hands don't stop working on her sensitive button and tits.

It doesn't take long before pleasure wracks her body in waves, and my own climax slams into me. My breath comes in short bursts while she flutters around me, wringing rope after rope of warm come.

I draw out and tuck myself away, and Piper lowers her nightgown and pulls her panties back. With a smirk, I smack her ass and bite her earlobe. "Such a good girl staying quiet."

PIPER IS busy taking out eggs, sausages, cheddar cheese, and milk from the fridge. She casts me a curious look over her shoulder. "No bacon?"

"That's so mean. Take it back." I turn to Thor who's lying near my chair. "She's joking, Thor. She doesn't mean that."

Piper just chuckles and starts beating the eggs. I watch her, mesmerized. I must have it so bad to be this entranced by someone who's cooking an omelet in my kitchen. "Baby, I have a question."

She cuts open the package for the sausages and takes out two. Then, she shrugs and takes out two more before pouring the egg into the pan and starting cooking. "Sure. What is it?"

"Why did you hate me?"

Piper adds cheese and folds the egg. She lowers the heat and spins to me, grabbing the half-full glass in front of her. "For the record, I never hated you."

"Hmm. Can't really blame you if you did. I liked pushing your buttons. It was the only way for you to notice me."

She tips the glass of water to her lips and almost chokes. "That's so juvenile."

"I know. Not my proudest moment."

Piper finishes the omelet and sets it on a plate. She opens the air fryer, pulls out the frying basket, and drops the sausages before pushing it back and turning the dial.

She wipes her hands on a small dish towel and sits across from me. With a shrug, she picks a warm cinnamon bun and takes a

bite. "I'm not proud of how I behaved, either, and there's no way I can justify it. I was defensive and combative. I can be an asshole sometimes."

"Sometimes?" I smirk and she throws a piece of the cinnamon bun. I catch it in my mouth.

She laughs and claps slowly. "Impressive."

"My mouth can do wondrous things."

"Huh. I know."

"No, you don't know half of it."

"Don't I?"

And so I spend the rest of the day showing her... after we have breakfast, of course. I don't want to let them go to waste, especially since it's the first meal she's made for me.

Maybe I always knew it would come to this. That she'd be mine eventually. It was only a matter of time. Maybe that was why I kept pining for her even though she openly disliked me and mocked my advances.

Maybe deep down, I knew down to the marrow of my bones that she'd belong to me and only me.

Nobody's gonna come between us, maybe except Thor, but she'll grow to love him. That I don't doubt.

Parker's veiny hand grips the gearshift and guides it to reverse. He glances at the rearview and side mirrors before draping an arm over my seat. We stay silent as he looks behind us, reversing out of the parking lot, and driving me on the way to work.

I never understood how women found men who drove manual transmissions sexy. But right now, I have to clench my thighs and swallow back a whimper because of how hot and wet he makes me feel. I don't know who this woman is taking over my body, but I can't say I'm mad.

In fact, I enjoy how refreshing everything feels. Refreshing, exciting, and fun—words I never would have used. Until Parker.

When we reach the highway, he grabs my hand and links his fingers with mine.

“You should learn how to drive a car, Piper, you know, for emergencies and stuff.”

I run a fingernail along his hairy but corded forearm. I've wanted to do this since that day in the elevator. “How sure are you I don't know how?”

The side of his mouth curls up. “You always ride shotgun, and your free parking space is always empty.”

“Oh my God, Parker. How long have you been watching me?”

His face splits into a huge grin. “Long enough to know you don't like going out on weekends unless it's for groceries.

Your favorite colors are pastels—pastel pink, pastel yellow, pastel blue. You don't wear black. You like high heels and don't own any flats except a well-worn pair of rainbow flip-flops. You never have food deliveries, and your online orders are minimal.”

Parker squeezes my hand. “How am I doing so far?”

I lean back in his plush seat and laugh softly. “That's so creepy, but is it weird that it's turning me on? Just how obsessed are you with me?”

“Good question.” He runs his tongue along his bottom lip, his forehead creasing. “I guess part of the reason was because you kept ignoring me, and I took it as a challenge. I wonder if I'm gonna miss that feeling.”

“What feeling?”

“A one-sided obsession. An unrequited love.”

“Are you gonna get bored now that you already have me?”

He levels me with a dark look. “Never. With Thor as my witness, I promise you that the only time you ever have to scream is when I'm buried balls-deep inside you.”

I smack his arm, and he just laughs. “Okay, seriously. You don't like driving?”

I take a deep breath and look out the window, at the other cars, pedestrians, and shops lining the street. “No. It gives me anxiety. Honestly, I've never gotten around to applying for a driver's license. Maybe one day I will, and I'll buy those cool self-driving cars.”

“Cool and self-driving cars don't belong in the same sentence, baby. Now as someone whose love for muscle cars runs deep, I am deeply offended. Respectfully, get out.”

We both burst out laughing, and my chest constricts when I realize I've never been this happy. Never. Not when I graduated at the top of my class, not when I received multiple scholarship offers, not when I got a job offer straight out of college, not when I got promoted to a senior position barely a year after being hired.

I always threw 100% of my focus and attention to my goals, and growing up in a household with parents who thought it was financially unwise to go to college, I only had one goal—to succeed and prove them wrong.

But... I have to admit. It's been a lonely couple of years.

Sure, my officemates and bosses celebrated with me at work, but I always came home to a quiet, empty home, not even Fifi to keep me company.

Parker was right. I spend most of my weekends cooped up in my apartment—reading, watching movies, binging TV shows. If I have the energy to go out, I attend festivals and food bazaars alone. Always alone.

It crossed my mind more than once that perhaps something was wrong with me, and maybe I'd been a bitch to others. I mean, Parker is proof of that.

In hindsight, I don't even know why I found him annoying. He's only ever been nice and kind. It's just that Parker had the audacity to be consistent no matter how many times I tried to be antagonistic toward him.

Speaking of Parker...

He makes me laugh, calls me out on my bullshit, and challenges me. I like it. I like it way too much. But more than that, I can let my guard down around him. I don't have to be anyone else but myself, even if it's someone who's so far from being perfect.

“PIPER? Hi. Listen, I'm sorry about what happened last Friday. I was drunk and stupid.” Brent stands in front of my desk in the office, hands buried in his pockets, looking anywhere but me.

I don't have time for this. I have so much work to do, it's already late, and the last thing I want is this asshole interrupting me. He's already gotten on my last nerve.

With my fingers steepled in front of me and resting on my desk, I glare at him. “What do you want me to say, Brent?”

He shifts on his feet, throws his head back, and swallows hard. He's a slime through and through. It's oozing out of his pores. "I need you to withdraw your complaint from HR."

Ah, so that's why he's here. It's not to apologize for his behavior but because he doesn't want to suffer the consequences of his actions. I should've expected it. "Why should I? I didn't lie. It happened, didn't it?"

"I know, which is why I came to apologize. Listen, I can't lose this job. I have bills to pay, and my brother lives with me. I'm paying for his college."

I don't take my eyes off him as I lean back and cross my legs, fingers tapping on my desk, double-checking that my phone is within reach. "Should've thought of that before you harassed me."

He cornered me last Friday and put me in a position where I didn't have a fighting chance. Today is different.

I wait for him to flick his eyes to the walls in my office before I swipe to one particular contact on my phone—the security office downstairs. If Brent tries anything funny, he'll have more problems than just an HR complaint. Besides, there's a CCTV directly above my door, so that should've caught him entering.

"Piper, you can't be this mean. I mean everyone thinks you're a stuck-up, cold-hearted bitch, but I thought—"

That makes fury uncoil within me, and I jab a finger in his direction. "I'm mean and a bitch? Damn, Brent. Look at you. Throwing the blame at me instead of accepting responsibility like a real man. Like a real grown, mature man. Then again, a real man would never ever force themselves on anyone."

He opens his mouth, but I cut him off. "No, you listen because apparently you have some hearing problems when someone says no. The HR complaint stays. Now you either get your shit together and stay away from anyone who doesn't want to be near you or wait until the complaints pile up and you spend the rest of your life in jail. With the way you're behaving, I won't be surprised if I'm not your only victim."

Common sense dictates I should stop provoking him, but dammit, I can't. I'm drawing strength from the fact that I have Parker now and I know he'll always have my back, that I can count on him, that I'm no longer alone. It gives me the guts to confront this asshole once and for all.

Besides, guys like Brent rely on the fact that most women will cower in front of them. I did... once. Never again.

I do a quick visual sweep of my desk and check what I can grab to defend myself—a fountain pen, paperweight, picture frame with a sharp edge, my ergonomic mouse, and maybe even the hefty keyboard.

My muscles are tense, and I psyche myself up for what I need to do if push comes to shove.

Brent's left eye twitches, his lips forming a tight line, his jaw clenching. The heat of his fury radiates to me and thickens the air between us.

A dense cloud of unease begins to settle on me. Blood roars in my ears as I wait for him to make the next move. With my right hand covered by the picture frame, I press CALL. I try to mask the ringing sound by saying, "Leave. Get out of my office."

He surprises me by nodding, and despite his flaring nostrils, he turns his back to me. His footsteps echo in the small room, and when he reaches the door, he looks at me over his shoulder before opening it and letting it close behind him.

"Hello, Miss Piper? This you? It's Ben, one of the night shift guards."

I don't realize my hands are trembling until I reach for my phone and tuck it between my ear and shoulder. "Yes. I'm about to leave the office. If I'm not down in ten minutes, can you come check on me?"

"Absolutely. Are you in any immediate danger? I can go up right now."

As much as I want to act tough and brave, I know I just made the huge mistake of pushing Brent to the edge, especially since I may be alone on the floor right now. God, there goes my

mouth running off. I could've told him that while everyone was still here. "Yes, I'd appreciate that."

The silence is deafening, and it makes me nervous.

Stupid, stupid, stupid.

I toss my phone into my bag, close my laptop, and slip it into its sleeve. With one last scan of my office, I turn to the door. Just as my hand reaches the aluminum glass handle, my eyes zero in on the massive frame rushing toward the office.

On instinct, I reach for the lock and turn it. The glass between us is thick and frosted, but it's still glass. If Brent decides to smash it with a chair, it's gonna break and there won't be anything separating us anymore. My only hope is for Ben to arrive as soon as possible. I can't call Parker because I don't want to worry him. He's probably relaxing at home after a long day of outdoor photography.

Besides, Brent may not do anything reckless. Although I won't put it past him to go full scorched earth on me. After all, I seem to remember hearing about a pending promotion for him in a few weeks. A promotion that most likely won't happen anymore.

Bang!

Brent's face contorts with anger as he slams his fists on the glass door. The whole frame rattles, and I step back, fumbling with my phone. Fuck it. I'm calling Parker. I underestimated Brent. The guy has the common sense of a cucumber. He doesn't care about the cameras recording his every move.

"You think you can destroy my life, Piper? Not if I destroy you first!"

Brent's voice is muffled but no less menacing. Faking the courage I no longer feel, I meet his gaze head-on, not breaking eye contact even as I dial Parker's number.

But...

Dread pools in my stomach because it just rings and rings. And Ben is still nowhere near me.

God, what have I done? I am in so much trouble.

I'm still in an exceptional mood when I arrive in the lobby of Piper's building.

"Damn, Thor. You seeing this, buddy?" I whisper in awe, my eyes surveying my surroundings. The marble floor is so polished that Thor keeps slipping, so I just scoop him and carry him in one arm.

The reception desk is empty, but I spot the security guard on duty. He's a big, bald man with a bit of a paunch but still not someone anyone wants to mess with.

His forehead furrows, and he scowls at his phone before pulling his pants up and heading for the elevator. I jog toward him, and we both let out identical looks of frustration when we find that it's out of order.

Noticing me just now, he spins on his heel and faces me. His nameplate says, "Ben," so I throw him a smile. "Hi, sir. Good evening. I'm Parker Perry. My girlfriend is still working on the third floor. I was hoping to just go to her. I have my ID right here."

He looks distracted though, and his eyes glaze over when I keep talking. Ben just waves me off. "Who's your girlfriend? I'm on my way to the third floor right now."

"Perfect. Her name's Piper. She's a manager at the—"

His momentary confusion clears, and I see fire behind his eyes. What's happening?

"Good. Let's go."

We start toward the staircase, him gripping his baton until his knuckles are white. He's semi-sprinting, and I have to keep up with him while making sure I don't drop Thor, who's already squirming and letting out noises of disapproval.

"Your girlfriend called me a few minutes ago, asking me to check on her. I saw a man on the floor with her. I think his name's Barry or Bryan or Bert or something. Anyway, she has—"

I don't let him finish. Horror dawns on me. I thrust Thor to him and take the stairs two at a time. My pulse pounds in my temples, and an anger I've never felt before makes my stomach turn over. My blood freezes solid, and barbed wire coils in my gut.

As someone who's generally nonviolent, I can't wait to get my hands on that fucker. He's gonna realize how badly he's messed up this time. No one scares my girl like that and walks away unscathed. And now he's probably doubling down. Maybe I should've dragged him to the police station when I had the chance.

When I reach the third floor, he's banging his fists outside her door. Checking to see the CCTVs, I rush to him. He's so preoccupied with Piper that he fails to notice someone else with them.

I grab the back of his collar and slam him against the wall. He gets up on his feet and rears his arm back. His eyes are manic and crazed, and I'm not sure he's mentally here. I stand there while he throws a punch to my chest, not bothering to dodge or try to protect myself.

And here I thought he'd be stronger.

That attempt to hurt me is as lame as the guy himself.

"This is your best shot, buddy? Here. Let me show you how to actually do it."

His body posture loosens, and his eyebrows scrunch together. It's like he doesn't know what I'm talking about, so I show him.

It's the sound of his nose breaking that finally does it. He howls in pain, slumping to the floor and trying to stop the blood dripping from his nose. I faintly hear Ben's footsteps behind me, and the moment I turn, Piper throws herself into my arms.

My arms go around her to hold her close, and I bury my face in her golden locks. "It's all right now, baby. I'm here. I won't let anyone hurt you. I promise you."

She chokes on a sob and tightens her hold on me. I meet Ben's shocked gaze as he lowers Thor to the floor. He pulls out his radio and says something into it.

Piper lifts her face, eyes shining with unshed tears. It makes my chest crack open, so I cradle her face in my hands, grazing her cheek with my thumb.

She gives me a soft smile. "Please take me home."

MY EYES DON'T LEAVE Piper as she lies on the couch, fingers absentmindedly scratching Thor's back. She's been fairly quiet on the ride home and even after her shower.

Can't really blame her. That must have been scary and traumatic. I can still remember Brent's look on his face. That son of a bitch was determined to hurt her.

I squeeze a fair amount of caramel sauce over Piper's brewed coffee. This concoction is disgusting, and I will never drink it even if I'm dying of thirst, but it's her favorite.

I settle on the space between her and the armrest and set the cup on the table. She nuzzles into me, and I lay an arm on the backrest. "How are you feeling, baby?"

It takes her a while to answer, but she runs a finger near Thor's snout. "I don't know, to be honest. It feels unreal like I'm detached from what happened. As if I'm just a spectator watching that happen to someone else."

Piper breaks away and turns to pin me with an embarrassed look. "I did something stupid, too, so I'm not totally without fault. Brent came to apologize and asked me to withdraw my

HR complaint about what happened last Friday. I said no. He gave me a sob story about his bills and his brother's college fees. I told him he should've thought of that before harassing me."

"Which part of that is your fault?"

"The confrontation. You know me. I'm not exactly the type to mince words, so I did the opposite of how I behaved on Friday. Instead of shutting up and freezing, I gave him a piece of my mind. I lost it because he had the nerve to call me mean and a bitch and lay the blame on me even when I never said or did anything to make him think I was remotely attracted to him. He blamed me, and it pissed me off. I didn't stop to think we were alone on the floor. There are CCTVs, sure, and there's Ben, the security guard, but Brent could've still hurt me."

"Piper, none of this is your fault. None. Not what happened on Friday, not Brent's reaction to your complaint, and definitely not the truth you flung to his face. He has problems, not you. Please be kind to yourself. You've endured enough."

She rests her head on my chest while I run my fingers through her hair. I sigh and tell her, "My only issue is the fact that you didn't call me before the guard. When I felt my phone vibrate, I was already running to you. Although to be fair, you must've thought I was at home and the office security was the nearest. I mean, you had no idea I wanted to surprise you by picking you up."

"That's exactly what I thought." She splays her hand on my stomach and sighs. "Thank you, Parker, for arriving on time. It seems you have this habit of showing up exactly when I need you."

I smile and plant a kiss on her forehead. "Me and Thor."

"You and Thor," she agrees and pets Thor's head. He only grunts and closes his eyes.

God, I can still taste the fear on my tongue. I've never been so scared in my life. I knew Brent's type. I could've bashed his head to the floor and still managed to sleep soundly tonight.

That fucker deserved it.

Thor wiggles from Piper's lap and drops to the floor. Piper just folds her knees and snuggles closer to me, eyes closed, ignoring the cup of coffee, and breathing going steady.

It's time to calm myself down because I'm still running the scenes in my head. I need to stop. She's here with me. She's safe. No one's hurting her.

Besides, if there's one thing I learned tonight, it's the fact that I cannot live without her. I'd rather chop off my limb than spend another day without Piper by my side.

With that, an idea blooms in my head, casting a shadow over my worries and earlier dread.

This idea makes me smile.

I just need to make it official.

“Of course, Mrs. Wells.”

Our beautiful landlady, who says she’s 75 when she looks like she’s still in her early 60s, blushes and taps Parker’s bicep. “How many times do I have to tell you? Call me Olivia.”

Parker throws her his most charming smile. “I mean Olivia. I’ll let you know when I’m headed to the farmers market.”

“You don’t have to do that, you know.”

“I know I don’t have to, but I want to. Least I can do for the best landlady I’ve ever had.”

“Oh, hush.” Blush creeps on her face and neck, and she shyly rests both palms on her cheeks. “Go on, now. Your girlfriend is waiting for you.”

I wave at her awkwardly, and she waves back. Parker puts his ball cap back on and walks toward me, Thor at his side.

Looking behind him to check, I slide my arms through his and stand on my toes to whisper in his ear. “Parker, were you flirting with our landlady?”

He staggers back, his eyebrows almost reaching his hairline. “No! I was just being nice.”

Tapping my foot, I point an accusing finger at him and rest my other hand on my hip. “Is that why she let you keep Thor and refused my Fifi?”

Parker shoves his hands in his back pocket and gives me a smug smirk. “Maybe. Maybe not. Sometimes, Piper, it helps if you ask someone nicely and not demand things from them. Also helps if you’re as irresistible as me.”

I scoff. “I can resist you.”

“No, you can’t.”

“I can.”

“Wanna bet?” He backs me to a wall and braces one palm above me. I can smell his favorite shampoo and body spray, and it makes me heady with desire.

Parker uses his other hand to cup my jaw and tilt my face up. He brushes his lips over mine, and I close my eyes, already a goner. But before he can kiss me properly, Thor, whom I’m starting to like, lets out a high-pitched squeal.

Oh, the little traitor.

IT’S BEEN a long day at work.

It was chaos because of what happened a week ago. Not only was Brent behind bars, but several other women came forward to complain about his inappropriate behavior.

Ben also kept sharing with anyone who would listen about Parker and his pet pig and how he became the designated pet sitter as Parker sprinted up the stairs. So many of my coworkers refused to believe it until they saw the video of Parker doing just that and Ben being left shocked and confused with a pig in his beefy arms. It was all everyone could talk about, and I had to answer questions about Thor—the accidental superstar in all of these.

When I finally arrive on our apartment floor, I’m surprised to find Mrs. Wells beaming at me. She hands me a bouquet of red roses, and I’m so confused I feel like I stepped into another dimension. She wordlessly pats my back and slowly walks back down to her unit.

Wait. Is she humming a tune? What is going on?

And that's when I notice red rose petals on the floor. My heart is beating so loud I think it's gonna burst out of my chest. My feet feel heavy, and I have to drag myself toward my apartment because that's where the trail ends.

My hand shakes as I reach for the doorknob, and the cold metal against my skin somehow eases whatever nervousness I'm feeling. I have an idea about what I'll find inside, but that doesn't make me any less frightened because if I'm right, then this moment's about to change not just my life but also Parker's.

The door swings open, and despite already knowing what to expect, I'm still so stunned by the vision that greets me that my hands fly to my mouth, muffling a gasp.

I've only ever seen Parker in t-shirts and denim pants, except when he's naked, but this time, he's wearing a three-piece suit complete with a bow tie and dress shoes. His curly hair is slicked back, and my God, he's seriously the most gorgeous man alive.

He stands there with his hands clasped together behind his back, looking less than confident for the first time ever, uncertainty crossing his face. Sweeping his tongue along his bottom lip and laughing nervously, he cocks his head to the side. "Hi, baby."

"H-hi," I croak out. Something pulls my gaze to the floor, and I just realize I'm standing in the middle of a heart-shaped arrangement of petals. My body feels warm all over, and butterflies flutter in my belly.

Parker saunters to me, and when he's close enough, he tucks a loose strand of hair behind my ear. "God, I can never get over how beautiful you are."

Words get stuck in my throat, and I stare at him like an idiot.

He smiles that sweet smile of his and sinks to one knee. Watching him makes my heart beat faster than normal and my insides lurch. "Piper, you know I love you. I loved you from the moment I first laid eyes on you. I love you now. And I will love you until the day I die. Will you please let me make you

happy every single day of our lives? Will you marry this poor man and be his wife?"

Despite the sting behind my eyes, I blink slowly and nod. "Yes, Parker. Yes, of course, I'll marry you. And yes, I love you too."

He grins and calls out, "Thor."

Thor trots to us, and laughter bubbles within me when I see that he's wearing a matching tuxedo with a small velvet box tied to his back. Parker takes out the ring and slides it onto my finger. It fits perfectly, including the square mixed-cut diamond in the center.

Finally, I can't stop the tears from streaming down my cheeks anymore. Who would have thought my happily ever after was right beside me all along?

"Baby, I hope you're not crying because you find the ring ugly."

Pleasant fuzzy feelings erupt in my chest, and I giggle. "Are you gonna be this annoying until we're old and gray?"

Parker smirks. "You can count on it."

EPILOGUE

PIPER

Just like every day after work, I rush home.
Home.

I've lived in the apartment for more than a year, but it has never felt like that. Never. It was a place for me to rest, sleep, cook, and eat. Nothing more, nothing less.

But now, everything's different because of Parker.

I'm actually looking forward to going home to him every day.

Our wedding a year ago was intimate. We had a couple of people to witness the ceremony, and it was a fun-filled reception. Parker knew a lot of people in the wedding industry, so we didn't even need to hire an event organizer.

Thor was there, of course. He was the ring bearer, and all our guests howled in laughter as he trotted down the aisle, loving all eyes on him. Sadly, though, his owner took him back. Parker was heartbroken because he'd been a huge part of our love story.

We planned to rescue a pet, but for some reason, I simply asked my sister to bring Fifi to us. So far, Parker loves her.

So I guess it's not that much of a surprise to hear them 'talking' when I step inside.

"Hot stuff!" Fifi chirps.

My head whirls to Parker, who stands from his desk and ambles to me. "What have you been teaching her?"

He raises both palms and widens his eyes. “What? Nothing. Fifi’s just observant.”

“I don’t believe you.”

“Fifi’s a good girl, and she simply says what she sees.”

“Fifi mimics what we tell her.”

“Oh? Hmm.” He walks over to Fifi and pets her head gently.

“Good girl.”

“Hot stuff!”

“So you’re still gonna deny teaching her anything?” I move to them, crossing my arms in front of my chest.

Fifi turns her head to me, flaps her wings, and says, “Goodbye!”

I peer closer at her. “I’m gonna return you to my sister.”

“Goodbye!”

Straightening my spine, I face a grinning Parker. “I hate you.”

His smile only gets wider. “No, you don’t.”

“I do.”

“Nope.”

Without warning, he sweeps me into his arms and brings me to the kitchen countertop, settling me on top of it. “Tell me you hate me, Piper.”

His voice turns gravelly and hoarse, and I smirk. “I hate—”

The rest of my words are drowned out by his kiss. What I like to call the “welcome home” kiss. The kind of kiss that has my toe-curling and makes me forget about the day’s stresses.

God, I love this guy. I can convince myself that I hated him when we first met, but I didn’t. Not really. Did he get under my skin? Yep. But maybe, maybe it was entirely something else. Just as intense, but the complete opposite of hatred.

EXTENDED EPILOGUE

PARKER

“Daddy, Mommy showed me your wedding photos. Is it true a pig brought your wedding rings?” my five-year-old daughter, Missy, asks. She tucks her chin under her quilted blue-green Moana blanket.

She’s been obsessed with it for months, refusing to part with Moana even for just a day. Piper and I had to buy two more sets that looked exactly the same, just so we could wash the first one.

Leaning forward to sweep her bangs to the side, I smile and kiss her forehead. “Yep. But he’s not just any pig. His name was Thor, and he was there to witness our love grow.”

“Thor? Like the Avengers? The big guy with long, blonde hair who carries a hammer?”

“Yep.”

Her eyebrows pull together, and she pouts. “But a pig doesn’t look like a Thor. Who named him?”

My voice is low, like maybe I’m hoping she doesn’t hear. “I did.”

Missy gets into a sitting position to scowl at me. “Why?”

“Why what?”

“Why’d you name him Thor when you could’ve named him Piglet?”

“Piglet is so uncreative and unimaginative.”

“So is Thor.”

Ah. No one can humble me faster than this tiny girl who barely comes up to my waist. She stares at me with a mixture of confusion, disappointment, and curiosity. Her gaze is so intense that I have to stop myself from squirming.

God, I don't have the mental energy to argue with this kid. “Oh, look. It's bedtime. Lights off, Missy.”

“But...”

“No buts. You heard your mother. School starts early tomorrow.”

“Fine. Goodnight, Daddy.” She grabs the eye mask from her bedside table and slides it over her head.

“Goodnight, sweet.”

The door closes behind me with a click, and I sigh in relief. Missy definitely takes after Piper. She's stubborn and strong-willed. Our other child, three-year-old Addie, shows the beginnings of a carefree, fun streak. Here's hoping she'll be my exact carbon copy.

I reach our bedroom to find the entire floor covered with Piper's dresses. She's sitting on the edge of the mattress with her head hung low and shoulders slouched.

Alarm bells ring in my head, and I get to her in three long strides. I lower myself on my knees in front of her and hook a finger under her chin. “Baby, what's wrong?”

Her gaze is distant, her mouth turning downward. “Nothing fits.”

Ah. Understanding dawns on me, and my heart clenches. It breaks me to see her like this. She has always been the core of our family, and I can't stand watching her self-esteem and confidence wither in front of me. I won't have it.

“Baby,” I tell her. “You know you're the most beautiful, sexiest woman in the world, right?”

She scoffs and rolls her eyes.

“You don't believe me?”

Piper finally locks her gaze with mine, but her chin trembles. “I want to, but I can’t even wear any of these dresses.”

“Then, we’ll buy a new set of clothes.”

She sighs and busies her fingers with the collar of my shirt.

“That’s not the point.”

“What is? Enlighten me.”

“I feel like I don’t look as good as I did when we got married.”

“You look better, way better.”

She tries to scoff again, but I silence her with my stare. “You know what Missy told me the other day when I helped her fix her pigtails?”

Piper shakes her head, curiosity getting the better of her. With a smile, I skim her cheek with my knuckle. “She said she wishes she would grow up looking like her Mommy because she’s the most beautiful girl in the world.”

Piper blinks rapidly to stop her tears from falling, her lips quivering, and I kiss her lips softly. “You should see how we see you, baby. You’re perfect.”

“God, I love you, Parker.”

“I love you, too. Now, get up.”

“What? Why?”

I slump on the mattress behind her, my limbs splayed out, the cool, crisp sheets feeling good against my skin. Piper stands by the bed, a mask of confusion on her lovely face. “I’ll just clean up my mess.”

She turns to pick up the clothes, but I’m faster than her. I grab her wrist and pull her to me. She falls to the bed and yelps.

“Ride my face, Piper.”

She rears back and huffs out a laugh. “What? What’s gotten into you?”

“You feel conscious about your body, and when I tell you I love it and it’s perfect, you don’t believe me. Might as well show you.”

Piper's pupils dilate, and her jaw hangs open. "You're crazy."

"Am I? No. I just love my wife so much, and I need her to start loving herself again."

"Parker..." She swallows hard. "I might crush you."

This time, I let out a loud laugh. "That's cute, baby, but you won't. Even if you do, there's no other place I prefer to take my last breath than in my wife's pussy."

"You're crazy."

"That's why you love me. Come on, baby. I need my dessert."

Still with skepticism written all over her face, she climbs the bed and awkwardly positions herself on top of me. I guide her above my face and push her nightgown up. She has thin lace panties on, and I hook it to the side, smirking when I see it glistening with arousal already.

"Sit on me, Piper."

"Parker..."

"Do it, baby. Feed this hungry man."

And so she does. Piper lowers herself, and the moment her sweet cunt rests on my mouth, I groan. Now it's time to get to work and satisfy her.

With my hands on either side of her hips, I hold her still while I drag my tongue along her slit and flatten it on her sensitive button. She jolts like she's just been electrocuted, and I hum in approval.

It doesn't take long for Piper to find her rhythm, and she begins grinding on my face, riding my tongue with wild abandon. Her fingers dig into my scalp, and she tightens her thighs around me.

Amazing.

This woman is amazing, and she's mine. All mine.

I ravish my wife and remind her she's perfect. In every fucking way. Every time she forgets to love herself, I will remind her. I will keep on doing so until she realizes she'll

always, ALWAYS be perfect in my eyes. That goes without saying our two daughters find her perfect, too. We all do.

Forever just doesn't sound long enough whenever I think of spending it with Piper. My next-door neighbor turned wife.

The End. Thanks for reading!

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