



Undoing

THE GRUMPY GUY

THE MATCHMAKERS SERIES

LISA FREED

UNDOING THE GRUMPY GUY

Imperfect Heroes: The
Matchmakers Series

Lisa Freed

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DEDICATION

*To Happily Ever Afters and finding your perfectly
imperfect someone.*

*I met mine because it rained. He wasn't my type, and
I certainly wasn't looking, but here we are coming up
on 20 years of marriage.*

*Sometimes everything has to go wrong to end up
right.*

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Welcome to the Matchmakers Series!

At Honeysuckle Senior Center, retired seniors live out their golden years with bingo, birdwatching, knitting, and... matchmaking?

Fed up watching their grandkids blunder through failed relationships, ten determined grannies form The Matchmakers. Using their decades of keen observation, they devise the formula for perfect pairing and put it to the test.

Each book in the series features an imperfect hero that finds his happily ever after with the heroine that heals his heart.

Charming the Silent Guy

Undoing the Grumpy Guy

Wooing the Shy Guy

Nabbing the Nice Guy

Romancing the Rude Guy

REED

Tired of putting myself out there only to face rejection and heartache, I've given up. But I love my grandma, so I agree to a farfetched blind date with her friend's granddaughter. When I see her, a small ember of hope and something else flares within my cold, lonely heart. But I'm a defective male, and how could a woman so perfect want me?

WINNIE

When my beloved Mimi offers to set me up with her friend's handsome grandson that I've been crushing on, I feel like Cinderella. But there's no fairy tale happy ending in my future. I'm a shy little mouse and he's everything I've ever dreamed of. How could I ever hope to please a man like him?

Undoing the Grumpy Guy is a steamy and sweet, opposites attract, age gap romance. Each book in the series features an imperfect hero that finds his happily ever after with the heroine that heals his heart.

PROLOGUE

THE MATCHMAKERS

Silence fills the rec room of the Honeysuckle Senior Center as seven of the eight matchmakers stare in stunned shock at the flat screen TV dominating the rear wall.

Elliot's grin stretches from ear to ear as she clicks the TV off. "Wasn't Reed brilliant?" she comments, looking around at her fellow matchmakers.

"Oh my," Agnes mutters, picking at an invisible thread on her green cardigan.

Charlotte's bright pink lips open and close as if she's trying to say something, but the words just aren't coming.

Sandra's brown eyes are wide as she looks anywhere but at Elliot. It's the matchmakers' weekly meeting, and they were in the process of finalizing the plans on setting up her dear granddaughter Winnie with Elliot's grandson Reed when suddenly Elliot remembered that Reed was due to be on TV. Eagerly, they switched it on.

Except it wasn't some nice light piece showcasing Elliot's undeniably attractive grandson, who's a lawyer.

Oh no. Instead, the matchmakers got to watch as Reed reduced a reporter to a sputtering and incomprehensible mess who resorted to vulgarity and arm waving before he got dragged away, still screaming at Reed.

And Reed stood there watching impassively without a single twitch of his firm lips or a glimmer of sympathy in his frosty blue eyes.

Granted, maybe the man deserved it, but watching it unfold had affected them all.

Poor sweet Linda is clinging on to Margot and no doubt feels grateful that she doesn't have a granddaughter being offered up to that shark in an expensive suit.

Roberta's husky laughter breaks the unnatural silence right before her elbow bumps into Sandra's side. "Well! Looks like your granddaughter has her work cut out for her."

Several looks of pity get aimed Sandra's way and even she has to admit maybe her confidence in Winnie bringing this stern man around was a bit premature. Certainly, Winnie is an exceptional child and the looks she sends Reed's way whenever he's having lunch with his grandmother clearly state that Winnie has it bad for the handsome lawyer.

But now, after seeing the man's professional side, Sandra can't help wondering if perhaps a much nicer and gentler man wouldn't be more suitable for her only granddaughter.

"Linda, what score is your Henry?" she asks, trying not to cower under the sharp look that Elliot sends her way.

Poor Linda looks like she swallowed something particularly unpleasant as her gaze darts between Elliot and Sandra. "D12," she whispers, clearly unhappy being caught in the middle of things.

"Not even close to a match," Roberta puts in with a snort.

Elliot's blue eyes narrow. "We already determined that Reed is your granddaughter's match," she says, coming over to the table Sandra is sitting at and crossing her arms as she glares down at the other woman.

"Not that your grandson isn't lovely," Sandra begins, trying to gather up her courage and casting her gaze around the room in search of support. "It's just that his personality seems so..."

"Powerful?" Elliot supplies with a satisfied smirk.

"Well..."

Nodding, Elliot's grin grows. "Commanding."

Licking her lips, Sandra's already tiny figure seems to shrink even further. "Umm.. I was thinking more-"

"Brutish, domineering, and overbearing," Deborah snaps. "Plus, he's one of the oldest men in the bunch and poor Winnie is only..." She turns and looks at Sandra.

“Twenty-five,” Sandra supplies in a small voice.

Ever helpful, Margot quickly does the math. “That’s seventeen years.”

“It’s a big age gap even for a perfectly paired couple,” Deborah declares.

Several murmurs of agreement fill the room as some of the ladies nod their heads.

Elliot’s face screws up, her eyes practically spitting blue fire as her gaze sweeps around the room. “We already matched the more suitable girl for Reed to Agnes’s boy because Sandra said her granddaughter was in love with Reed. And now suddenly they aren’t a good match either?”

Sitting upright, Sandra plants her hands on the table and leans forward. “I didn’t say she was in love with him! Just that she had a crush on him.”

Waving her hand dismissively, Elliot rolls her eyes. “Same difference. Besides, even without their scores perfectly lining up, her having feelings for him already gives them an edge.”

The room is silent as Sandra mulls things over.

“Please,” Elliot says softly, covering Sandra’s hand with her own as her thin body sags and something like pain fills her watery eyes. “Reed’s lonely. I see the sadness in him and hear it in his voice. For whatever reason, he’s never married and over the years his girlfriends haven’t lasted long.”

“He is gorgeous,” Charlotte pipes up.

Sandra can’t argue that point.

“He’s a good man. Please, give him a chance,” Elliot implores.

Sighing, Sandra nods and pats at Elliot’s trembling hand covering hers. “It’s only right that I leave this up to Winnie to decide. She might say no.”

Surprised gasps fill the air, but Sandra’s voice doesn’t waver. “Just no hard feelings if they don’t end up working out.”

“Of course no hard feelings. I only hope Winnie realizes how special Reed is.”

“And I hope that Reed has a softer side that he’ll share with Winnie.”

“He’s a good man, you’ll see,” Elliot says with a small smile.

CHAPTER ONE

REED

Pinching the skin at the bridge of my nose, I remind myself once again that Elliot is the only grandparent I have left, and others would love to have theirs still alive. Then my gaze darts over to the flash of pink and purple in the dark green holly bushes where my current date is hiding, and I revise those thoughts.

Grandma or not, I'm going to let Elliot know I don't need her assistance in my love life. I can screw it up just fine on my own.

A perfect match! She'd thundered in my ear when I took her call four days ago. Even at eighty, her voice was still commanding, a long-held trait from her days as a district attorney, and one that made my back snap up straight like I was an errant schoolboy.

Soul mates, she just knew it, she claimed when I had lunch with her on Tuesday at her retirement home.

And because I not only respect but love my grandma, I agreed to this farfetched date instead of adamantly telling her no. The fact that a small ember of hope flared within my cold, lonely heart may have also played a part. I should have known better.

No, I do know better.

Yet here I am wasting a perfectly good workday sitting outdoors in the middle of Grantwood Gardens while my date does who knows what behind those blasted bushes!

Although... A sudden thought hits me. Perhaps this isn't my date at all, and I've been stood up.

Surprisingly, that thought doesn't make me any happier. Though it has happened in the past.

A date cowering from me? Now this is a first.

Even I'm not that bad.

At least women don't think so until they get to know me. This one hasn't even said hello.

With a barely muffled oath, I lurch to my feet. I don't have the time or the patience for this.

And that goes for dating as well.

I haven't dated in months, so why am I bothering to try now?

My displeasure continues to rise, but this time more self-directed. I'm getting far too old for this; I should just declare myself to be a grumpy bachelor for life and call it a day.

Bypassing the white and black do not step on the grass sign, I tread over the brilliant green and well-tended grass to the large bushes hiding my so-called soul mate. Rolling my tight shoulders, I let out a resigned sigh. I promised Elliot I would meet this woman and I'm going to honor that promise by seeing this date through. Then I can truthfully say that despite this less than auspicious start, I gave it a shot, and we were just incompatible.

It might still break the old girl's heart since she seems so set on this pairing. I'm not her only grandchild, so I don't understand what the big deal is about my unattached status. My cousin and his wife are expecting twins any day now, which will give her the title of great-grandmother, so she can tick that off her bucket list. So what matter is it that I'm unmarried and childless?

Who knows what truly goes through that still-sharp mind of hers? Elliot is the reason I pursued law and stayed here instead of going to Boston, New York, or any manner of large cities with better opportunities. She was my biggest cheerleader during a particularly rough second year of law school and it may sound crazy, but my grandma is also one of my closest friends.

What does that say about me?

I try not to dwell on that.

“Winifred?” I call out.

The bush rustles and I take that as an affirmative, that this is indeed my date.

Pulling at the sharp creases in my pants to preserve them, I crouch down until I’m almost at the same level as the woman hunched behind the bush. “Can you please come out, Winifred?” I ask and barely control my shudder.

Who would give such a horrid name to an innocent little baby girl? I would never saddle any child of mine with a hideous moniker like that.

A pair of large gray eyes peek out at me. “It’s Winnie, actually.”

Marginally better, I suppose, though it does bring to mind a certain childhood bear whose adventures my parents read to me at bedtime before I outgrew such nonsense.

Holding out my hand, I rise to my feet. “Winnie, will you come out, please?”

Small, narrow fingers clutch mine with a surprising amount of strength as she detaches herself from the bush. Stepping forward, a tiny fairy emerges out of the green leaves, and I feel like I’ve been yanked back in time to when I believed in fairies, talking bears and gloomy donkeys, and had the blind faith of youth that the good guy always won.

Those soft gray eyes blink up at me and a mess of honey blonde curls tumble about her shoulders, going almost down to her slender waist. She barely comes up to my chest, and the pink and purple fabric that gave away her location is a mishmash of textures and patterns. My breath catches and my hand curls around hers.

With a slight tug, her fingers slip through mine, and I’m tempted to snatch them back, already missing the feel of them in my much larger hand.

“Whatever were you doing in there?” I demand in a hoarse voice, not at all like the smooth cadence I’m known for.

Uneven but white teeth nibble down on a pink and plump lower lip as a blush of red stains her cheeks. “I got a bit shy,” she admits, plucking some bits of twig and stray leaves off her clothes.

Her movements draw my attention to her strange dress once again and I take notice of the body it covers.

Small high breasts push out the ruffled bodice and from my higher vantage point, I see the faint shadow of her cleavage lovingly displayed by the dipping material in front. Moving my eyes lower, I take in her waist and gently curving hips. An unexpected bit of desire snakes through me.

“Do you like it?”

Blinking, I drag my gaze from her slender figure artfully wrapped up in the mismatched layers of the dress to her adorable face once again. “What?” I ask, feeling not altogether like myself. Perhaps I have been stuck in the office too much lately and now the fresh air is affecting me.

“My dress. I see you staring at it.” She smooths her hands down it, seeming not to notice or care about the uneven seams or how the patterns don’t line up. “I made it.”

Like a bucket of cold water, that brings me back to my senses. Hmmm... odd and untalented. What the hell does this woman’s grandmother have on mine?!

My eyes narrow as I look Winnie over for signs of guilt.

It must be blackmail of some sort. But why drag me into it?

Because surely there’s no way Elliot really believes for a second that me and this woman could be compatible.

Ignoring the subject of her dress, I extend my hand. “Yes, well, Winnie, I’m Reed.”

A bright smile stretches across her face.

The entire world could stop, and I wouldn’t notice a thing as everything within me grinds to a halt.

I'd likened her to a fairy, although a somewhat plain one, when I first saw her. That smile coupled with the warmth in her smokey gray eyes has me reevaluating. Suddenly, I want nothing more than to keep her smiling. If she wants to go back to hiding in the bushes, then I'll happily join her.

She's still small and odd, yet those things don't seem to matter as much as finding out more about this unusual woman and pinpointing why exactly I want to spend my afternoon with her.

CHAPTER TWO

WINNIE

When he first stomps around the bushes, his pale blue eyes narrowed, with his mouth pinched tight, I want to rush up and hug him. Poor guy really looks like he needs one.

And not one of those wimpy, there-there hugs or a quick grab and dash one.

No, he needs a full-on power hug, the ones that you feel deep in your soul. The ones where the other person doesn't let go until all the magic of human touch has done what it needs to do and helps patch up whatever ache is troubling you at that moment.

Sadly, hugs really can't heal all things.

Oh, if they could, Mimi Sandra's would be in demand, and I might never feel her heavenly arms squeezing me tight as she rocked us slowly because the waiting list would be too long.

But while they can't heal, they certainly help, and I could sure use one of hers right now as my nervousness vibrates through me.

He doesn't remember me.

I certainly remember him, though I didn't know his name.

We tend to have lunches with our grandmas on the same day most weeks, and how could I not take notice of such a beautiful man?

I know you're not supposed to call men beautiful. They're handsome or manly or other less flowery terms. But Reed Jackson is beautiful.

And I've itched to sketch him.

Preferably in the nude.

It's a naughty thought that's brought a burning flood of blood to my cheeks numerous times and a tingle low in my

belly whenever I see him.

And that's why I'm here hiding behind the bushes, trying to get up the nerve to go say hello to him and praying every single one of my thoughts aren't plastered for all to see on my face.

When Mimi asked me to go on a date with one of her friend's lonely grandsons, I said yes. One, because I can't ever say no to my sweet Mimi, and two, because I understand being lonely all too well and felt that would immediately put me and my date on the same footing.

Two lonely people meeting up at the urgings of our dear, sweet grandmas. And who knows, maybe a bond would bloom between us, and we could ease each other's loneliness and true love would flourish.

All so perfectly romantic, I could almost swoon at the very thought.

I never would have guessed in a million years that the lonely grandson would be the man I've secretly crushed on for the past several months.

Him? Lonely?

HA!

I bet he has to beat women off! He's probably agreed to this date only to please his grandmother. There's absolutely no way a man like him is hurting for female attention.

"Winifred?"

My pulse shoots up at my name and I clutch at the fragile holly branches for support.

"Can you please come out, Winifred?" he asks gently.

Swallowing hard, my voice comes out a fast squeak. "It's Winnie, actually."

"Winnie, will you come out, please?" he asks, offering his large hand.

I feel like a princess taking the hand of the handsome prince as he draws me forward and I blink up at Reed. I never

knew his name before.

Which, honestly, is a good thing. If I knew the gorgeous man that I was crushing on was going to be my blind date, I'm not sure I would have found the courage to show up today.

As it is, once I saw him waiting on the bench, I had to take a hasty dive behind the bushes to give myself time to collect my thoughts. That and to message Mimi and ask her exactly who Reed, my date, was, because it still could be purely coincidental him showing up here and sitting on that bench.

But no. Reed is indeed MY date. I spent the next several minutes trying to fully absorb that and, well, taking the time to watch him. People watching is a favorite hobby of mine and he does make excellent eye candy.

I'm not quite sure how long I was planning to stall until I greeted him, but I'm rather relieved that he came over instead.

“Whatever were you doing in there?”

Chomping down on my lower lip, I gnaw at it as embarrassment burns in my cheeks. “I got a bit shy,” I admit, plucking some bits of twig and stray leaves off my dress while furtively peeking up at him.

Up close, he's even more attractive if that's possible. He's easily a foot taller than me, placing him somewhere around six-two or three. He must have come from work to meet me here because he's dressed in a dark suit, complete with tie. It makes me even more thankful that I finished this dress in time for today or I would have felt really underdressed.

His dark blue eyes move over me and the flush on my face burns even brighter at his slow perusal.

“Do you like it?” I blurt out.

Those eyes trail up over me and I feel the heated caress of them. My insides quiver as the need to get closer to him replaces my nervousness with something else. Something far hotter.

Long, dark eyelashes flutter down, blocking out his brilliant eyes, as he looks at me as if he's seeing me for the

first time. “What?”

“My dress. I see you staring at it.” I smooth my hands down the front, loving the different textures of the material I chose and the various shades of pink and purple. “I made it.”

Something flashes across his face and then he holds out his hand. “Yes, well, Winnie, I’m Reed.”

I smile, both at his formal tone and at the hand extended for a handshake. He’s so proper and handsome. A perfect prince.

A bit of my happiness deserts me. It’s a shame I’m not a princess, no matter how hard I want to pretend to be one.

But maybe for today I can pretend. That’s something I’m good at.

CHAPTER THREE

REED

I feel like a fool standing here with my hand out when she finally places hers in mine for the smallest of handshakes.

“And I’m Winnie, which you already know.”

Her smile grows even brighter, making me hyperaware of the strong smell of the holly bushes, the warm breeze that occasionally stirs her long curls, and even more so of the strength in the slender fingers grasping mine. Despite her small stature, Winnie isn’t weak.

Once again, I realize I’m staring and jerk my hand away. “Right. So, are we going to stand around the bushes all day, or are we going to walk around the gardens?”

Those enchanting gray eyes of hers widen as her smile slips slightly before coming back just as strongly. “Oh, walk. Definitely walk,” she says. “The bird of paradise flowers should be blooming, and we don’t want to miss them.”

We walk in the direction of whatever flower she wants to see, and our size difference becomes even more apparent as several times Winnie lags. Slowing down my stride isn’t something I’m used to. I’m a man who knows where he’s going and walks with a purpose, and those around me follow suit.

Not Winnie. She pauses and darts off the walkway to coo over this plant or exclaim over a certain vine that catches her fancy.

Not even bothering to hide my frown, I pause and glare at her, silently urging her to hurry.

The difference in our heights isn’t the only issue I have with my date. With her wild mane of curls that bounce and float around as if they have a life of their own and the homemade dress that looks like a stiff breeze would undo the haphazard stitches, I feel every one of my forty-two years and

wonder if this is how a parent feels waiting for their sluggish child to stop dawdling and catch up.

“How old are you?” I bark out, pausing again while she snaps a picture of a bunch of flowers that look exactly like the other dozen or more than we’ve passed so far in our quest to find these birds of paradise flowers.

“Twenty-five.”

Older than I would have guessed, but still young. My frown deepens. “I’m forty-two.”

“Okay.”

“Okay?” I repeat dubiously, as she angles her phone for another picture of the flowers, all while humming a snatch of melody that I know I’ve heard before yet can’t place.

Flashing me a dazzling smile, she nods.

“That doesn’t bother you?”

Winnie springs to her feet and dashes over to the white wooden trellis almost completely covered with colorful flowers of all sorts. “No, men are usually immature, no matter what their age.” She buries her nose in one of the large red blooms and inhales. “So an age gap doesn’t bother me at all.”

The idea of me being immature is ludicrous. “I’m an attorney,” I huff.

Drawing back, a smudge of yellow pollen dusts the tip of her short nose. “Are you?” she asks, while her gray eyes appraise my suit before moving up to my face.

I stand taller and push my shoulders back, which is plain ridiculous. I don’t need to impress her. Even approaching middle-age, I’m in excellent shape and take advantage of the gym at work most days. “I am.”

An impish grin curves her lips. “Don’t worry, I won’t hold that against you.”

It’s an old joke that usually makes me grit my teeth in annoyance, yet something like relief fills me. Our age

difference doesn't seem to bother her, and while many people are intimidated by my profession, Winnie seems unimpressed.

The urge to brag about my track record wells up, and I bite the inside of my cheek to stop myself.

Shaking my head, I decide it must be all the pollen in the air affecting me. I don't need to impress anyone, let alone a tiny fairy of a woman with pollen on her nose!

"What's your employment?" I ask, glaring down at her and trying to resist the urge to swipe my finger across her nose and get that annoying bit of yellow off. Because it's that, it's not that I want to see if her skin is as petal soft as it looks.

"Unemployed currently," she says, crinkling up her cute nose.

I can't take it any longer and reach out, rubbing the spot of yellow off. She freezes under my touch, her lips parting as her gray eyes go wide.

This is the perfect moment to swoop down and claim her pink lips. To see if she tastes as wild and wonderful as she looks.

It's impulsive, and I'm not that type of man. Everything I do is carefully calculated, and that includes dating and even fucking.

Yet, I'm tempted. Incredibly tempted.

Before I can act on the urge, Winnie steps back and a tiny giggle escapes her that has my gut and hands clenching.

"I'm a children's book author," she says, grinning up at me. "Unpublished, so that makes me unemployed, I guess. Or at least unpaid." Her narrow shoulders roll in a shrug, telling me she's not overly concerned about that.

I've had women date me for everything from the prestige of being with a top attorney, my looks, and absolutely my money and what it could buy them. Hell, my last girlfriend made no secret about that when she told me even the money wasn't worth it, and she ended things after eight months

together. So gold-diggers aren't something new or even unexpected.

I don't think Winnie is one of them. Not that she isn't dangerous in her own way. A way I've never experienced before and I'm uncertain I want to now. "Well, it's been lovely meeting you, Winnie, but I believe it's safe to say--"

"Oh look!" she cries out, seizing my hand and racing toward the left. She jerks me off my feet, surprising me again with the strength in her small body.

Stumbling slightly, I quickly find my footing and allow her to pull me along to some tall deep green plants with brilliant bits of orange, purple, and red.

"Aren't they lovely?" she exclaims, releasing my hand and pulling out her phone.

The plant is all sharp edges, reminding me of myself. "No," I say flatly.

Her pale eyebrows lift as her lips part and confusion fills her face. Her gaze darts between the odd plant and me. "You don't like flowers?" she finally asks.

"Not particularly."

She throws her arms wide. "Then why did we meet in the gardens?"

A smirk curls up my lips. "So you could hide in the bushes?"

Red as bright as the freshest strawberry floods her face, but it's the flash of pain in her stormy eyes that has my stomach sinking like I swallowed a lump of iron.

"I'm sorry," she whispers as her shoulders slump.

I've never thought of myself as a deliberately cruel man. Now I'm second guessing that assessment.

Inching closer, I reach out my hand and trail my fingers down her arm. When she doesn't move away, I tangle my fingers with hers. "Why are you apologizing?" I rasp. "I'm the one who was rude. I'm sorry."

Winnie's fingers tighten on mine as her gaze searches my face. "No, I was rude first. I was nervous, so I kept you waiting while I took the time to steady my nerves. It was silly to hide in the bushes like that."

"Why agree to the date if you were nervous?" This close to her, the clean sunshine scent of her reaches me and I inhale deeply, wanting nothing more than to keep her sweet smell with me always.

Her tongue swipes along her lower lip, so quickly I almost miss it. I don't miss the glow of heat in her eyes or the answering burn of desire flaring to life within me.

"I wasn't nervous about the date," she admits slowly, her eyes never leaving mine. "But I didn't realize it would be with you."

My eyebrows lift as I digest her statement. Searching my memory, I come up with nothing. "Have we met before?"

Those vibrant curls flare out and bob as she shakes her head. "No, we haven't met." A touch of pink fills her cheeks. "But I've seen you many times before."

That doesn't help. My job necessitates speaking to the press at times so she could have seen me in a news clip or even eating at my favorite restaurant. That's not it though, and something itches at the back of my brain.

Quickly my mind picks everything apart and pieces together where I've seen that honey-blond hair before. "Honeysuckle Senior Center."

The pink on her face deepens. "Yes. I have lunch with my Mimi weekly and have seen you there with your grandmother."

"Elliot, yes."

So it's what I originally thought. A pang of regret tugs at me. Her "Mimi" somehow coerced Elliot into setting up this date. The why evades me.

Just as fast, I reject that. She said she didn't realize the date would be with me. "I don't understand. Our grandmothers set

up this date, yet you didn't know it would be with me?"

"I've seen you there, but I never knew your name. Mimi just told me she wanted to set me up with one of her friend's grandsons whose name was Reed."

An ache forms like a hot ball of lava in my chest. "If you would have known the date was with me, you never would have accepted."

CHAPTER FOUR

WINNIE

A hardness settles over his features, making him appear as beautiful and unattainable as the marble statues of the Greek Gods.

Despite his amazing looks, he's not a god or a statue, he's a flesh and blood man and I think I just hurt him with my confession.

Unable to believe my boldness, I stroke the fingers of my free hand along his arm, feeling the strength of the concealed muscles under his suit. For an attorney, he's much more solid than I would have thought. Once again, the idea of sketching him pops into my head, but I shove that way to the back of my mind, just like I try not to dwell on his job or how unbelievably out of my league he is.

What in the world was Mimi thinking?!

"I might have had a little crush on you," I confess in a rush, not daring to meet his piercing blue eyes. "I mean, who wouldn't?" Letting out a strident laugh, I wish the words would stop pouring out, yet they keep on coming. "So to have my date turn out to be you, it messed with my head." Understatement of the year there.

Hard fingers grasp my chin, startling a gasp out of me as he urges my face upward. Our gazes collide and the tick of desire I've been fighting all afternoon rushes forward, making me almost sag against him.

"I'm sorry I never came over and introduced myself before," he says as those intense eyes roam my face.

"Me too," I squeak out and then immediately want to dissolve into a puddle of embarrassment. "I mean..."

Reed's lips part as he smiles, and I realize this is the first time I've seen this man truly smile. I've caught him grinning at his grandmother- Elliot? Is that really her name?-while they

had lunch together, but I've never seen this heart-stopping, panty-wetting smile.

And it's aimed at me.

"I know what you meant. Perhaps we could have gone out sooner if one of us had taken the time to say hello."

His voice turns husky, the fingers grasping my face trembling slightly. "Winnie, I would very much like to kiss you right now."

Is this really happening? Things like this don't happen to me. Not too shy, plain little Winifred Benton, who didn't even get her first kiss until she was twenty.

Those deep blue eyes of his loom closer, and I realize he's still waiting for my answer.

"Yes, please," I mumble, as anticipation rocks through me. When his firm lips press against mine, I can't help the sigh that slips from me as I welcome his kiss.

Reed is no novice to kissing. That much is obvious as his mouth moves over mine, coaxing a response from my trembling lips. His tongue dips within the slight parting of my lips as he deepens the kiss. Joyfully, I open wider, thrilling at the slick heat of his tongue.

The flame of desire becomes a raging forest fire within me, consuming everything and leaving me with the taste and feel of him alone. His mouth and tongue taste strongly of mint while the scent of his cologne, something wonderfully sharp and tartly male, invades my senses.

I'm still clutching his right hand while his left angles my face, keeping me a willing captive to his delicious kisses. The drag and swirl of his tongue steals my breath, leaving me feeling both light-headed and weak-in-the-knees. I never knew kissing could be like this.

After my first kiss, I went on to have many others and even had two serious boyfriends since then, but nothing has prepared me for the maelstrom of emotions Reed is drawing forth from my eager body.

The rub of my pebbled nipples against the thin material of my dress feels downright scandalous, as does the ache in my pussy. Reed's body is so hard that I can't help thinking about other hard parts of him.

A needy little whine escapes my lips and Reed's mouth pulls away. I grasp his jacket and arm, desperate to keep him close and bring his mouth back.

Regretfully, he puts some distance between us, dropping his hand from my face to clutch at my arm. The feel of his warm fingers against my bare skin sends ripples of pleasure through me, leaving me achy and wet.

I'm not one to jump into bed with a man on the first date, especially not one I barely know, but if we were at my place or his, I could see myself breaking that personal rule in a heartbeat.

Reed's chest rises and falls rapidly. The blue of his eyes is almost completely eclipsed by his black pupils, letting me know he isn't unaffected by our kisses. Not one bit.

Satisfaction makes me want to strut like a peacock. Guess I'm not so dull after all, if I can get a man like Reed worked up.

"That was..." he trails off, shaking his head as his gaze darts between my dewy, freshly kissed lips and my eyes.

"Great!" I chirp, eager for another taste of him.

A rumble of laughter shakes his wide chest. "I suppose that's one way of putting it. Is there anything else you wanted to see here?"

Disappointment chips away at some of my joy. "Oh, you're ready to go?"

His lips part and he looks on the verge of saying something but then shakes his head again before saying in a soft voice, "No, I was curious what else you wanted to see in the gardens."

For a lawyer, he's not a very good liar. Then again, if he doesn't like flowers, the gardens must be boring for him.

Though I don't understand how anyone can not like flowers. I'm so thankful for spring and nicer weather.

All winter long, I'm miserable because of the gloomy gray days and dealing with the ice and snow. If I had a man like Reed to cuddle with near the fire or snuggle with under a blanket on the couch, maybe I would think differently. I do have a hard time imagining him cleaning snow off my car, but I could live with doing that if I had him to warm me up afterward.

Picturing all the ways he could warm me up isn't helping the achy need still throbbing through my body. Remembering that he wants to leave does the trick even better than a dip in the frozen pond behind Mimi's old house would. "You don't have to stay if you don't want to."

His thin nostrils flare as he heaves a sigh. "I'm not going anywhere until you're ready to leave, Winnie."

The gardens are a favorite place of mine and I've seen everything dozens of times before, but I'm eager to experience them with Reed, so I rattle off several of my favorite spots.

Not only do I get a kiss after he walks me to my car, but I get his number as well.

To say I'm floating on air when I walk into my cozy little apartment doesn't even come close to the jubilation I'm brimming with. Grabbing my childhood teddy bear from his place of honor on my bed, I spin around the room with him.

"Oh, Bear, I met the most amazing man!"

I'm sure most twenty-five-year-olds don't talk to teddy bears or even still have their cherished stuffed animals from childhood. I feel bad for those people.

Bear was given to me by Mimi when I was two and I've had him ever since. He's seen me through various heartaches over the years as I grew and went through school and college and the real pain of losing my mom to a car accident six years ago. Sometimes it's nice just to have a friend that gives comfort instead of advice.

It's also nice to share my excitement over my date without fear of judgement.

I'm not naïve; someone like Reed getting serious about me is as far-fetched as Bear suddenly coming to life. Still, it's nice to dream and even if he never calls, I'll hold the magic of today in my heart for a long time to come.

CHAPTER FIVE

REED

I'm attracted to Winnie.

That much is clear, as I can't concentrate as my thoughts are filled with her. Her sweet smile, warm and sunny personality, and, of course, the feel of her lips under mine. Thankfully, nothing big is pending at work and I can afford to not be at the top of my game. I'd chalk everything up to exhaustion after the last case that was over three years in the making, but that victory filled me with nothing but satisfaction.

No, this is new and started after my date with Winnie four days ago.

Despite the sizzling kisses and exchanging numbers, I fully intend not to call or see her again.

Years of bad relationships have jaded me. I'm not the man I'm supposed to be, and it wears on the women I date and myself. A man's self-confidence can only take so much before it's best just to give up and save yourself the trouble and pain.

But with Winnie, I feel...

Hopeful.

She's so different from the women I've dated in the past. A stubborn part of me wants to believe that she could accept me the way I am, that she could look past my deficiency and love me.

I want to give a relationship with her a chance, despite knowing it will end like all the past ones have.

But honestly, opening myself up again scares the hell out of me.

Part of me wishes I had never met Winnie. Had never kissed her sweet lips or tasted her passion. She stirs feelings in me better left alone.

Over the past year, I've come to terms with the realization that I'm destined to remain alone. That's why what I feel for Winnie is such a double-edged sword.

My sad and pathetic desire to be loved means opening myself up and risking having my heart ripped from my chest and my dignity torn to shreds.

I don't know that I have it in me to chance that again.

Like a coward, I avoid having lunch with Elliot this week and now I'm being purposely vague in my replies to her text messages. My grandmother is sharp enough to know I'm being evasive. I might hide the truth from myself, but she'll get it out of me. She's made stronger men than me crack on the witness stand.

I blame disappointing Elliot on why I call Winnie. Which is a joke.

Every day that goes by without seeing her has driven my anxiety higher. I'm practically climbing out of my skin, fighting my desire to call her and hear her say my name again. To see her and claim her mouth and body like I ache to.

She claimed she had a small crush on me.

The tables have turned. I haven't had a crush in a long time. And what I feel for Winnie, I would never classify as a crush. It's more of an addiction. I want her fingers entwined with mine.

I want.

It's as simple and complicated as that.

I'm not a complicated man.

Nor am I one to run from trouble. The basis of my life is that at my core, I'm a problem solver. Only now I'm faced with a problem of my own.

I've been accused of being a hard man, a grumpy bastard, and any number of other things. And most of them are true.

What I've never been is a defeatist. It's not in my nature, and that's why I'm tossing and turning at night, plagued by my inability to move past my desire for her.

I want her. I want to know her and discover if what I feel is a mere attraction or something far deeper.

And that's why I call her.

Her voice is cool at first and I know that I haven't adhered to the so-called rules of dating. It's been over a week since our date and anything past four days signals disinterest. That's a strike against me and I feel sorrow at the upset I caused her.

I don't bother with excuses because that's exactly what they would be- excuses, and I have no doubt she would see right through them. Maybe someday I can confess how I warred with myself, but not now.

Instead, I ask her out.

The warmth in her acceptance makes me smile and I feel lighter than I have in days.

That feeling remains two days later when I knock on the door to her apartment, and she lets me in with a bright, beaming smile.

"Hi," she says, ushering me inside.

I'm far too busy gazing at her to take in much of her place. She's dressed in another odd outfit, tight brown corduroy pants and a pink velvet tank top. The sleeveless top shows off her long, slim arms, displaying the small hard knots of her biceps under a smooth layer of pale skin. My fingers itch to test the strength of those tantalizing muscles.

Her long, wild mane of hair has been contained. Twisted up into a knot on her head, I find I miss the flowing locks and the untamed beauty of them.

"I've missed you," I say, reaching out to run my fingers down her arm, stopping at her hand and giving it a gentle squeeze.

Gray eyes clash with my blue ones. "I wondered if you were going to call or not. I didn't see you at the senior center

on Tuesday, either.”

Remorse cramps my stomach. “I know. I owe both you and Elliot an apology.”

Disentangling her fingers from mine, she takes a step back, her gaze cool and appraising. “You didn’t have to call or see me again if you didn’t want to. I know we’re not exactly an even match.”

How correct she is makes my head hurt. She’s lovely, unique, and sweet and I’m... none of those things.

Releasing a slow sigh, Winnie attempts a grin and fails. “I don’t know what our grandmothers were thinking setting us up. If you’re here out of some sense of obligation, don’t worry about it. I’m not upset-”.

I cut her off. “Winnie, you’re right, we’re not a wonderful match. You’re someone I never would have agreed to a date with-”.

“No need to be rude about it!” She snaps, her features pinching tight with hurt. “Or to come here just to insult me.”

Shoving my fingers through my hair, I close my eyes and do a long, slow inhale and exhale. Talking with her is so different from presenting a case. My normal cool deserts me and my emotions, that I try so hard to keep in check, surge to the surface instead.

I open my eyes and plea my case. “I’m not trying to insult you. Far from it. Winnie, I’m here because I want to be, not because of some obligation to Elliot or anyone else.”

Grimly, I continue, basically giving her the win. “On the surface, we might not be a good match because honestly, you’re far too good for me, but I hope to persuade you that we could work.”

Winnie cocks her head, her stiff features relaxing slightly. “How am I too good for you? I’m a little nobody. You’re Reed Jackson.” She gestures with her hand at me. “You’re gorgeous and intelligent and...” she trails off. “And I’m me,” she finishes in a small voice.

I can't help smiling at her words, pleased that she finds me attractive. That's a step in the right direction. Though the fact that she thinks she's a nobody is baffling.

I claim her clenched fists in my hands and smooth my thumbs over her tight knuckles. "Yes, you're you. Not a nobody, but wonderfully, unabashedly you. And I spent every day since meeting you, thinking about you."

Her hands relax as the tension leaves her body. Tilting her face up, her eyes are bright as she breathes. "You did?"

Nodding, I smile. "I did. But Winnie, I'm older than you and my appearance might be pleasing- thank you for that by the way-".

She blushes, making my grin grow even wider.

"But I find you very pleasing, as well. More than pleasing, downright addictive." Coming closer, I lower my head until her large eyes are all I can see. "I'm desperate for another taste."

A low whimper escapes her and swooping in, I capture her soft pink lips in a kiss full of greedy need.

She tastes as good as I remember, like mint and something wild and sweet. Her lips part for my advancing tongue, letting me in to stroke and explore her silken mouth. Our hands remain clasped as our bodies strain together, lips, teeth, and tongues sucking, nipping, and caressing.

Winnie ends the kiss first, drawing back with a lovely flush on her face and a wild sparkle in her eyes. "Oh my, maybe our grandmothers were on to something."

Laughter shakes me and I draw her close once again, brushing my lips over the top of her head and inhaling her scent. "Elliot is wily, no doubt about that."

Drawing back, her pale eyebrows lift. "Why do you call your grandmother Elliot? Is that really her first name?"

"Elliot is actually her maiden name. When she married my grandfather, she insisted upon keeping it and started going by

that instead of Mrs. Jackson or even her first name, which is Helen.”

“Different,” Winnie muses.

Rubbing my cheek against her soft hair, my smile grows. “That she is. So, will you go out with me?”

Her forehead slams into my mouth as she jerks her head up. “Oh! Sorry!” She pats at my face.

Capturing her hand, I still her tapping fingers. “I’ll be fine. Was that a yes?”

“After almost knocking your teeth out, I’d say I owe you a date.”

I press a series of fast kisses to her fingers with my stinging lips. “I’m fine. Let’s go.”

CHAPTER SIX

WINNIE

Glancing around, cats of every color, breed, and size doze on fluffy cat beds, chairs, and shelves, while others play with a variety of brightly colored toys dangled by happy customers. Everywhere I look there are cats. One is even sitting in Reed's lap, and I watch as the big and handsome attorney strokes the cat's dark black and gray fur and observe his grin as he stares down at it.

Reed took me to a cat café. Definitely wouldn't have been my choice for a second date, but hey, he humored me with the gardens, so I suppose this is only fair.

I quickly cover my hot chocolate to avoid the clump of drifting pale fur that is floating through the air precariously close to my yummy drink and stuff a shortbread cookie in my mouth.

Chewing, I glance around the room so I don't gaze at Reed like a love-sick teen. Or worse, stare at him and drool.

Because the man is handsome, in and out of a suit. Today he dressed down. Or at least his version of it in a pair of dark slacks, a black belt, and a short-sleeve forest green polo shirt tucked in and showing off his lean waist and broad shoulders to perfection. When we entered the café, all female eyes went right to him and stayed there for several long minutes as we placed our order and found an empty table.

I swear I even heard a few gusty feminine sighs when he pulled out the bistro-style padded chair for me. And the estrogen levels positively shot through the roof when the tabby cat hopped into his lap, and he stroked it and started baby talking to it.

It's hard to avoid the gazes of envy and jealousy that my eyes occasionally collide with, so I turn my attention back to the plate of cookies and the man across from me.

When he called after I had given up on hearing from him again, I didn't know what to think. I've been attracted to him since I first spotted him at Mimi's retirement home, sitting with his grandmother. But that was purely physical attraction. After spending a few hours with him- okay, after those kisses, I was thoroughly smitten. And then crushed as the days went by without a single text or call from him.

If I were a braver woman, I would have called him and asked him out. After all, women do it all the time. So why not?

Why?

Because that's not me.

And that will never be me.

I can carefully plan things in my mind and then when the time comes, I do the exact opposite. Coming out of that bush was big for me. Kissing him? That's about as bold and daring as I get.

So calling him was out of the question.

Then he called me and, even better, he showed up at the appointed time for our date. Opening my apartment door to see him standing there all dark and handsome was like a fairy tale come true. Girls like me don't get the leading man in real life, yet here it was happening.

Until I opened my mouth and began to self-sabotage everything!

I actually tried to talk him out of this date and gave him an easy out. It was as if the dam holding back all my insecurities chose that precise moment to bust wide open and sweep my chance with Reed away.

It was like an out-of-body experience. I heard the words coming out of my mouth while the saner part of me was frantically yelling to shut up!

I was certain he was going to heave a big sigh of relief and race out of there so fast, off to do whatever it was that rich, attractive men did during their free time.

Instead, he told me he couldn't stop thinking about me and then kissed me senseless.

Now, I'm sitting in a cat café with him, and the entire thing feels so surreal that I'm wondering if I'm dreaming it all.

Just to be sure, I give my forearm a pinch and flinch at the sting.

“Are you okay?”

Reed's baritone is a smooth and delightful rumble that makes a shiver of pure need tingle down my spine.

Remember that lack of boldness? Yeah, that's coming back to bite me in the butt. If I would have had a twinge more confidence, we'd still be at my apartment right now and that sexy voice would be crooning sweet nothings in my ear as he made hot and glorious love to me.

A girl can dream.

“Winnie?”

Blinking, I come back to reality and the fact that I never answered him. “Oh, I'm good. How many cats do you have?”

“None.” His gaze drops to his new friend. “Growing up, we always had a few cats and dogs, but I never got around to getting any of my own.”

“That's strange. I would have thought you'd have at least one.”

Those bright eyes focus on me. “Why?”

Laughing, I point to the cat sprawled out in his lap and the small orange one weaving around his feet. “You brought me to a cat café!”

That beautiful mouth of his dips into a frown. “I thought you were the one that loved cats. I saw the cat bumper sticker when I walked you to your car.”

I can hardly breathe as my entire body shakes with the force of my giggles. “It was already on the car when I bought it!” I gasp out, thinking about the bright pink cat momma sticker on my car.

“So you don’t like cats?”

Wiping under my eyes and composing myself, I can’t stop the grin pulling my mouth wide. “I like cats. Just not as much as my car’s previous owner.” That sets me off into another round of giggles that Reed patiently waits out.

“Do you have any pets?” he asks when I get myself under control.

“I am the proud owner of a bright turquoise blue beta named Bert.”

Dark eyebrows swoop low. “Bert?”

“Sure, Bert the Beta.” Leaning forward, I prop my elbows on the table and rest my chin on my cupped palms. “What would you have named him?”

He shrugs. “I don’t know. Maybe Alexander, it has a noble ring to it.”

“Oh my! I guess for a fish that works. What about kids? Would you give your children names like that?”

A thought hits me. “Do you have children?” I blurt as my mind whirls. Reed is older than me. We’ve already acknowledged that. What I haven’t fully thought through is the fact that he’s old enough to have a child in their early twenties. Depending on if he started young enough, he could even have one my age!

“No, I don’t have children,” he says, picking the snuggling cat off his lap and placing them carefully on the floor.

“Do you want them?” It slips out before I can fully think it through, and my cheeks burn as I mumble to the table. “Sorry, that’s rather personal.”

I jerk my head up at his quiet chuckle. That panty-melting smile is back again along with real humor on his face as several laugh lines fan out from the corners of his eyes. “I thought that was the purpose of dating. To get personal and learn about the other person.”

The heat in his eyes makes my thighs clench.

Unable to speak, I nod and try not to think about all the ways we could get very personal.

“Yes, I would like children.” His smile turns slightly bitter. “If a relationship ever gets to that point.”

Questions tumble about in my head. Like why isn't he married, and are his pecs as firm as they look, stretching the front of his shirt out?

Thankfully I'm saved from blurting anything else out as the small orange cat at Reed's feet chooses that moment to spring up on the table and send the plate of cookies scattering and dumping the rest of my no longer so hot chocolate in my lap.

Reed is on his feet in an instant, pressing napkins into my hands and trying to stem the flow of brown liquid before it completely rolls off the table onto my pants.

“I'm fine. It wasn't hot, just messy.” Using the napkins, I try to sop up the worst of the mess. “Good thing my pants are already brown.”

Taking the sodden napkins from me, Reed finishes cleaning up the table and plops the whole mess onto the plate.

“Just leave it,” the cashier calls out, coming forward with a roll of paper towels and a bottle of spray cleaner.

Peeling a few bills out of his black wallet, Reed tosses them on his side of the table that remained unscathed and ushers me out.

My pants are sticking wetly to my thighs and butt, each step making me cringe, but I'm more painfully aware of the nice, spotless, tan seats in Reed's big Mercedes SUV.

“Your seats,” I say, gesturing to my pants and his vehicle.

“Hold on.” He goes around to the back and produces a green towel that he drapes over the seat. Once I'm safely inside, he closes the door and goes around to his side.

“Sorry,” I mumble while pinching the corduroy and trying to lift the tacky wet fabric off my legs.

“Whatever are you sorry for?”

Turning, I find his gaze on me along with a soft look I haven't seen him have before. “For ruining our afternoon.”

Snorting, Reed shakes his head. “You didn't ruin anything, so there's nothing to be sorry for. We'll go back to your apartment so you can clean up and change and if you still want, we can go somewhere else.” His lips quirk up in a charming and boyish grin. “Somewhere without cats, since you're not the cat momma I thought you were.”

My laughter joins his husky chuckles, and it feels good. I was so nervous around Reed on our first date, and honestly I worried I would always be slightly off or on edge around him. But I'm not.

This feels normal and I like that.

When we get back to my apartment, a flutter of nervousness hits me in the elevator, but for a far different reason. Earlier, I wished I could be bold and that I would have taken that kiss further.

Now's my chance and I'm going to go for it.

CHAPTER SEVEN

REED

At Winnie's apartment, she invites me into the living room while she goes to change.

Glancing around the room, this is pure Winnie. Everything is soft and inviting, full of various textures and colors, all of it putting me at ease and making me want to close my eyes as I sink into the faux-leather couch with its multitude of throw pillows and crocheted blankets.

To combat that, I pull out my phone and start playing Timber Masters, one of the popular app games that has sucked me and millions of others in. I'm one hundred points from leveling up and frustrated that I can't land on the necessary spot. I scroll over to the buy option and do a one tap purchase.

"That's cheating!" Winnie exclaims from behind me.

Fumbling my phone, I quickly exit out of the app.

"Reed, did you just buy those tokens?"

Whipping around, I start to defend myself when I take in what she's wearing, or rather what she's not. Gone is the corduroy pants and tank top, instead a shimmery pink pair of silk shorts sits low on her hips, exposing the long bare length of her legs while a flimsy camisole top covers her chest but does nothing to disguise the hard points of her nipples that draw my gaze.

Shifting on the couch, I can't take my eyes off of her. The crotch of my pants doesn't have enough give to accommodate my swelling erection, but the discomfort helps keep me from dragging her down.

"Winnie." My voice comes out as a husky croak that barely sounds human. Swallowing hard, I attempt to keep my gaze on her face and the long tumble of blonde hair now free from its earlier topknot and swirling around her, yet my damn eyes keep returning to her nipples.

“I thought we were going back out.” It’s an utterly foolish thing to say. The moment I walked through her door, and she left to go get changed, the thought that she might invite me into her bedroom buzzed in the back of my brain.

Stubbornly I tried not to dwell on that, but now here I am faced with a woman I’m very attracted to, and she looks ready to move our relationship to the next stage at a much faster pace than I was prepared for.

My sex life isn’t spontaneous. It hasn’t been for years.

My cock, which is rock hard at the moment, can’t be counted on to stay that way through the act of making love. Far too many times I’ve gone soft before or during the act, leaving both my partner and I frustrated and upset.

Sometimes they accuse me of not being attracted to them, because if I truly wanted them, I would be hard. It’s difficult to explain to a woman that it’s not them, it’s me.

Sadly, it’s all me and my inability to maintain an erection is because something is wrong with me. It has nothing to do with them or my libido.

I’ve been plagued with erectile dysfunction (ED) for years now. I’ve seen countless doctors, have undergone multiple physical exams and testing, and there is nothing wrong that they can find. I’m not overweight, I don’t smoke or do drugs, and my testosterone levels are fine.

Yet I can rarely stay hard without popping a pill.

A few years ago, one doctor offered me the option of surgery, but I’d rather take the occasional pill when needed than go that invasive and not always successful route.

Another doctor said it could be because of stress or anxiety. My job is high stress and outside of stepping back from taking active cases, which is not bloody likely, or retiring, that’s not about to change.

As far as anxiety goes, it’s pretty damn demoralizing that the very thing that makes me a male doesn’t work like it should and that I let my partner down.

I can please a woman with my mouth, tongue, and fingers, but I can't give her the hard cock that she craves.

I'm open to toys. And I'm fine with taking a pill so I can perform in bed. But it needs to be planned ahead of time, absolutely killing any spontaneity and ruining "the mood".

Countless relationships have failed because of my ED.

Oh, only a few women have come right out and admitted that. They haven't needed to.

The cheating tells the real story.

I've failed them as a man, so they sought someone who could deliver. Someone who didn't make them question their sexual appeal, someone who was hard the moment they needed them to be. No waiting around for a pill to take effect or getting bored with my fumbled attempts to stay hard naturally.

It didn't matter how much I gave in a relationship. The gifts, vacations, and dinners were meaningless when I couldn't give them what they truly wanted, a man with a normal functioning dick who could fuck them whenever and however they wanted.

People look at me and see a man with a solid career, a man to be envied for his position and wealth. They truly believe I have it all.

It's my greatest shame and why I'm so hesitant to try relationships anymore. It's far easier to have one-night stands, with no questions or worries. I pop my pill, hook up with an available woman, and we both leave satisfied.

But emotionally I'm not satisfied. I yearn for more.

I want the closeness of a relationship. I want marriage and children. I want to wake up with the same woman every day and spend the rest of my life with someone I love.

Looking up at the lovely woman standing in front of me, I question if I could be staring at her right now.

And I'm not about to ruin this moment due to my non-working dick!

Standing up, I go to her, taking her in my arms and gliding my fingers along the smooth, warm skin of her bare arms before cupping her shoulders and slanting my mouth across hers.

Winnie offers no protest as her lips part under my passionate onslaught, her body softening as she relaxes into my embrace.

Today, I'm going to make her come so many times she'll be dizzy and spent. My name will be the one she pants and screams. I'll bring her to the heights of ecstasy and all without my dick.

There will be time enough to talk about my condition later, but today I'm not going to let her down or give her a reason not to see me again. I want this with her. I want the chance to make something long lasting.

I can only pray she wants the same.

CHAPTER EIGHT

WINNIE

I was only teasing about the game. I've been tempted to buy extra tokens too when a level has stumped me for days. Sadly, it's not in my budget.

That's not an issue for Reed. What's a few bucks to a successful attorney?

And he is successful.

I couldn't resist doing a bit of light online searching and the hits were immediate.

Not always the most flattering, but not everyone likes a lawyer.

Now the photos- those were very favorable. I doubt the man could take a bad picture.

There were several articles from years ago with pictures and he's aged well. His dark hair has flecks of silver in it now, but it's still thick and lush. His eyes are the same, that piercing blue that sends a thrill straight through me whenever they are directed at me.

When he stands, those intense eyes flicker with emotion and hunger.

That same hunger fills me.

I knew what I wanted when I changed into these silky pajamas that I picked up on a whim last month. I wanted him. I wanted Reed Jackson's hands and mouth all over my body.

When he takes me into his strong arms, his hard mouth claiming mine in a kiss that steals any doubts I might still have, I know I'm going to get exactly what I want.

Reed tastes of coffee, spice, and man. The combination is intoxicating, fueling my rising desire. My nipples are hard points dragging against the silk of my camisole as his firm chest presses into my breasts.

Pulsating warmth fills my needy core with each delicious lick and swirl of his tongue in my mouth. I ache with my need for him.

My emotions are everywhere. I've never felt so sure and positive about anything before, and I barely know the man.

It's pure insanity, yet I don't question it.

When Reed sweeps me up, I throw my arms around his strong neck and press my face into his warm skin, breathing in his cool and crisp scent.

"Bedroom?" He murmurs into my hair, his hands tightening as he walks.

"Second door on the left." I nibble and lick his neck, tasting his skin and glorying in the feel of him as he carries me to bed.

Nudging the door open with his foot, he has no trouble finding the bed. My apartment might be small and cramped, but my bedroom is a perfect sanctuary for me.

I indulged, getting a king size bed that takes up most of the room. But that doesn't bother me in the slightest because it doesn't make the room crowded thanks to the large windows on two of the four walls. I have gossamer full length white drapes on them that allow maximum light to filter through, turning my room into a warm paradise of golden sunbeams most of the morning and afternoon.

In this light, I see Reed clearly, from the dark blue/black stubble lingering under his skin, to all the tiny lines that stretch from his nose to his mouth and the ones fanning out from his hooded eyes.

His silver hairs sparkle among the black and I can't resist releasing my hold on his neck and running a hand through his hair. Warm and thick, it slips through my fingers like silk.

Pausing, his dark eyelashes flutter down, blocking the brilliant blue of his eyes, as his chest rises and falls rapidly with his deep breaths.

“Winnie,” he groans, opening his eyes. His mouth descends and captures mine.

Molten heat pulses through my veins as our lips shift and mold. He edges towards the bed, the vibration of his feet and legs knocking into it startling a surprised gasp from me that his lips skillfully swallow down.

Sitting on the bed, Reed cradles me in his lap. My butt is directly on his groin, and I can’t help giving a little wiggle, feeling the hard dig of his erection. When his hand grips my breast, all my movements stop and now I’m the one shuddering and making little whimpering noises in the back of my throat as his fingers torment my pebbled nipple by plucking it and then smoothing it with gentle circles around my turgent peak.

I toss my head back when his lips leave mine to trail along my neck planting moist, heated kisses along it and the sensitive skin covering my collarbone.

“So warm and sweet,” he murmurs between kisses. “Winnie, you’re like a decadent dessert. I can’t get enough of you.”

Gripping his shoulders, I revel in his silken kisses and honeyed words. I’ve never had a man talk to me like this.

His hand on my hip splays across my middle. Panting, I widen my legs, inviting his touch lower.

Sharp teeth nip at my neck as his hand dives between my legs to cup my mound. The soaked fabric of the sleep shorts clings to my folds, teasing at my clit. The added pressure of his palm has me seeing stars behind my closed eyelids.

Shamelessly, I hump his hand. His fingers continue plucking and twisting my nipple as my inner walls clench desperately around nothing. “Reed,” I moan, as I hang suspended between frantic need and aching want.

Sliding his tongue up my neck, Reed’s lips slant across mine, his tongue filling my mouth at the same moment his fingers press sharply into the cloth, shallowly dipping into my opening.

With a cry, I come without even getting out of my clothes.

My channel flutters as my clit pulsates with the power of my orgasm. His fingers continue to press up into me through my sleep shorts.

With a hoarse growl, Reed flips us, and I find myself on my back with his large body hovering over me. My legs dangle off the edge of the mattress with his body between them.

“Winnie, I want to taste you,” Reed says, before shoving up my camisole. His lips suction to my nipple, drawing it into the hot heat of his mouth. I arch up, offering more of my breast as the aftershocks of my orgasm continue to rock through me. When his hard fingers tug at my shorts, I lift my hips to help him pull them down.

Switching to my other nipple, he rolls it with his tongue while his hand slips to my bare mound. Long fingers tease and caress my folds before dipping inside to stroke and circle my clit.

Panting, I stare up at the ceiling, unable to believe what is happening. Two weeks ago I could only stare at this man from across the room and sigh over him, and now he’s between my slick thighs with his fingers in my pussy and his mouth on my breast.

Releasing my nipple from the wet heat of his mouth, the cool air of the room tingles across my sensitive bud. His body slides down and I hear the dull thump of his knees hitting the carpet. Big hands grip my inner thighs, keeping me spread for him.

Oh my, he said he wanted to taste me.. and oh! His tongue wetly licks up my pussy, from my opening to the little nub of my clit. Again and again, his tongue explores my pink pussy. The wet sounds coming from between my legs are indecent and I can do nothing but arch and twist as he eats me out.

Clawing at the soft lavender blanket under me, my hips rock, seeking more of his naughty mouth. Gasping, my breath freezes in my chest when his tongue plunders my opening.

His tongue feels incredible as it strokes inside.

Pushing up on my elbows, I look down my body, marveling at Reed's face between my thighs. His eyes lock with mine as his tongue slides up and rubs around my clit.

My breaths pant loudly between my parted lips as I watch him swirl his tongue around the fleshy little button, his eyes never leaving mine.

"You taste like a dream." His warm breath puffs along my oversensitive pussy.

I clench my thighs, trying to hide from him.

His fingers deftly keep me held wide open. "Oh no, you're not going anywhere. You're going to come on my tongue for me, Winnie."

At his words, I slump back on the bed, unable to face him any longer.

With a husky laugh, Reed attacks my pussy again, slurping loudly on my folds and teasing my entrance with both his nose and tongue. I writhe and twist, fighting the growing tension that's building in my core.

"Touch your breasts," Reed commands, giving my pussy a long, swirling lap. "Circle your nipples and imagine it's my tongue. I love your little pink nipples, Winnie."

A moan shakes free of me as I follow his directions.

"Naughty girl," Reed teases, as his tongue circles my clit. "I know you weren't wearing a bra today."

My fingers don't feel nearly as good as his did as I pull and pinch my nipples. "My breasts aren't that big," I gasp as his tongue dives into my entrance. "I don't really need a bra."

"Your breasts are lovely. A sweet little mouthful."

The climax that thunders through me is even more powerful than the first. My inner walls squeeze and clench.

"That's it. Give me all your cream." His tongue laps at me, licking up every bit of my orgasm.

Utterly spent, I don't know how I'm going to summon the energy for sex.

Releasing my legs, they dangle wearily off the edge of the bed, as his lips ghost up my neck, leaving a trail of warmth and a quiver of anticipation tingling through me.

“You did amazing,” he says, pressing a kiss to the corner of my lips.

I can smell the tangy scent of me on his breath and mouth and surprisingly I feel a pull low down in my core.

Gently, Reed lifts me up as if I were a feather and I hear the swish as he sweeps the covers down a moment before he places me back on the bed. My head settles happily onto the softness of my cool pillow.

Two hollow thumps sound and then Reed is sliding into bed beside me, still fully clothed. The thumps must have been his shoes, I deduce sleepily as I curl to the side and burrow my back against his warm body.

His hand skims along my hip, dipping down to graze along the rounded cheek of my butt. Then his fingers go lower, and I feel them softly grazing the wet crease of my sex.

With a moan, I part my legs slightly, giving him room to dip his fingers into the still throbbing mouth of my sex. His fingertip circles my opening before lodging solidly inside. Gathering me even closer to him, his lips tease at my earlobe, his breath warm and quick against my skin.

His fingertip is joined by another, his two fingers working to gently stretch me as they slide inside. His thumb presses into my butt as he works his fingers in and out of my slippery pussy. The thick digit is close to my anus but not quite touching. I've never done anal and I'm not sure I ever want to, so I relax when he makes no move to touch me there.

His fingers glide slowly in and out of me, my juices gathering and easing the way. Reed burrows his arm under my body, his hand grasping my breast as his other hand shifts and a finger grazes my clit.

I push my butt back against him and let out a soft groan when his fingers pick up their pace, thrusting into me while his other finger slowly sweeps along my clit.

“Reed. Reed.” I chant his name as my channel tightens around his fingers, the smooth inner muscles rhythmically squeezing him as I find my release.

I ride his hand, his finger pressing deep on my clit, while I scream out my bliss as I shatter.

Floating down from my orgasm, I’m dimly aware of Reed slipping from the bed and the covers being pulled up and gently tucked around me.

“I’ll call you soon,” he whispers before feathering a kiss on my head.

My eyelids are far too heavy to keep open, so I let them close and release a soft sigh as I burrow deeper into the heavenly covers as my body hums with pleasure.

CHAPTER NINE

REED

Leaving Winnie's apartment with the scent of her on my face and her heady flavor dancing on my tongue, I'm already planning when I can see her again. And next time, I'll come prepared with one of my pills.

My erection came and went while I ate her, but when I arrive home I head into the shower and take my cock in hand, imagining it's her slim little hand stroking me. With constant stimulation, I remain hard and come even harder, bracing my arm against the shower wall while I groan out my release.

Drying briskly and then dressing, I check my calendar and the weather. Thankfully, shifting things around won't be much of a problem and I have a few days that I can work with if they fit her schedule.

She said she was unemployed, yet also mentioned she wrote children's books. I'll have to press her for more details about that. Because if she truly doesn't have a fixed work schedule, that will make working around mine much easier.

It's tempting to call her now so we can plan our next date, but remembering the tired happiness on her drowsing face, I hold off. She needs her rest.

A wicked grin curves up my lips and my mood remains good for the rest of the day.

Alas, there is no rest for the wicked, and the next day, I'm bogged down in meetings as well as going over a document that one of the newer paralegals royally screwed up. He's lucky my good mood from yesterday has carried over or I'd ream his ass out. Considering how pale and sweaty his face is when he takes the document full of red write-ups back, he knows he fucked up and is waiting for the ax to fall.

Locking up my office at four, several heads rise as I stride by. I usually work until six so leaving this early is uncharacteristic behavior for me.

Mitch Davies, a junior partner, is leaning against one of the administrative assistant's desks, probably heavily flirting despite the strong rules advising otherwise that my partner, Logan Cook, and I set up when we started this firm. Mitch jerks guiltily to a stand when I approach.

"Reed, something you needed?"

My gaze goes from his florid red face to the assistant, Sophia's rosy cheeks, and I try to temper my frown. As long as they're both agreeable, I don't care what they do during off hours, but right here at work out in the open? I should probably have a talk with him in my office.

Tomorrow.

"Nope, just heading out."

I ignore Mitch's incredulous stare and give him and Sophia a nod. "Have a good evening, you two."

I can't resist tacking that last part on and take great enjoyment knowing Mitch is going to sweat all night over what I might know and, even worse, what I might say about it.

Whistling, I walk through the underground parking garage to my vehicle and notice the towel still draped over the passenger seat. I should send a hefty donation to the cat café. I owe that little orange cat a lot for spilling Winnie's drink.

I grin and shake my head. I still can't believe I was wrong about her loving cats. I should have gathered more evidence to back that assumption up.

Chuckling, I drive out of the garage and give Winnie a call.

Just when I think the call will go to message, she picks up.

"Hello."

"Winnie, hello, this is Reed Jackson."

Her bright laughter washes over me, lifting my mood even higher. I wanted to see about taking her out on Wednesday, but the urge to see her tonight is so strong that I simply cannot wait. "Have you had dinner yet?"

“No, but I have plans tonight.”

Plans? With another man? Irrational jealousy clenches its dagger sharp talons into me, ripping at my tender ego.

Stopping at a red light, I try to shove those burning emotions to the side. “Tomorrow night?”

Her soft sigh has my heart rate increasing as my fingers dig into the cool leather of the steering wheel. Obviously, I was mistaken, and she didn’t enjoy herself as much as I thought yesterday.

Several strident horn blasts assault my eardrums and I look up to see the light has turned green. Slamming my foot down on the accelerator far harder than needed, the SUV shoots forward, the engine eagerly obliging my need for speed.

Before stopping at the next light, I change lanes, heading toward my home instead of the shopping district like I planned.

“Sorry, I’m busy tomorrow too.”

I know a brush-off when I hear one. I just didn’t imagine I’d be on the receiving end of one so soon.

Bitterness tightens my muscles. Can’t even blame this one on my cock this time.

“I’m sorry I bothered you,” I grit out between tense jaws.

Bright giggles stab at my heart. “You’re not bothering me. I’m looking forward to seeing you again, Reed.”

My throat closes and I can’t speak. This never happens. Only with Winnie does my mind turn to mush and I find myself incapable of simple articulation.

“I’m sorry I fell asleep on you yesterday.” Her voice dips low. “That was rude after what you did... I.. I wanted to return the favor.”

The thought of Winnie’s lips wrapped around my cock has a surge of blood going down to that troublesome body part. “I wasn’t expecting that,” I confess in a hoarse whisper. “Yesterday was all about making you feel good.”

Barely catching her low moan, the tiny throaty noise has me wishing I was with her right now. “Winnie, did you enjoy my mouth on you?” I ask, reaching down to adjust my straining cock to a more comfortable position.

“Yes.”

I squeeze my erection, lust pounding in my balls and brain. “Good. Because I can’t wait to taste you again.”

“Reed.” Her breath catches on my name, and I know we both feel the same desire running rampant through our budding connection.

“When can I see you again, Winnie?” I plead.

“I’m visiting my dad for a few days. We’re going through some of my mom’s things.”

The thread of grief in her voice instantly cools my lustful thoughts. “Oh, Winnie. I’m so sorry. When did she pass?”

“Six years ago. Dad feels like he’s finally ready to let go of things.”

“Can I do anything to help?”

“Reed, that’s so thoughtful, but no.” The smile is back in her voice, and I can almost picture her gray eyes shining. Perhaps she truly is a fairy, because I’m thoroughly enchanted by her.

“I should be back on Thursday. If you’re available-”

Cutting her off, the words trip off my tongue in my eagerness. “Thursday afternoon, I’ll pick you up.”

“Cat café?” she teases.

Smiling, I realize that I’ve been driving on autopilot and turned off on the wrong street and now must backtrack. “No, I have a different surprise in store for you.”

“Oh, I love surprises. Give me a hint!” she demands.

“Thursday, four in the evening.”

“You’re a rotten man, Reed Jackson.”

With a laugh, I agree. “Oh, I’ve been told that and much worse. But I don’t want to be bad with you, Winnie. I plan to be oh-so good.”

Silence greets that.

“Are you blushing, Winnie?”

She groans. “Yes! I’m not used to a man talking to me like this.”

Warm satisfaction fills me. “Good,” I purr. “Until Thursday, Winnie. But remember, if you need any help with your father, please call.”

“I.. I will. Thank you, Reed.”

Despite being unable to see her for several days, I’m in excellent spirits when I pull into the three-car garage of my home.

Before the housing boom, I picked up this four-bedroom house with the expectation that I would fall in love, get married and have a family. Since that hasn’t happened, the other three bedrooms have become informal guest rooms and places where I tend to store things instead of tossing them up in the attic. In the second guest room, I find what I’m searching for.

Years ago, at a fundraiser of some sort, I won this retro picnic basket, and it hasn’t seen the light of day since then. It’s still in the box it came in. Digging it out, I’m delighted to see that it comes equipped with plates, flatware, a corkscrew, and even a matching insulated bag to keep the food cool.

How convenient.

When I thought about where to take Winnie after the cat café fiasco, my mind went to dinner at a lovely little Italian place that I’m fond of in the city and then over to the Jangelo’s night club for dancing. Reservations are hard to get but not impossible and I’m not above name dropping if needed, especially with such short notice. I rarely take advantage of the perks of my position, but the chance to hold Winnie close, our bodies sensually moving to the music, is something that made me want to.

Those plans were derailed when I realized that one, Winnie's shyness meant she might not enjoy the nightclub and two, I wasn't quite ready to share her yet.

That's when I thought of the perfect place to share with her. The Atlantic Ocean is to the east and our state boasts all sorts of little hideaway beaches. A picnic dinner and a walk, just the two of us, the ideal way to spend time with her and get to know the lovely young woman who has taken my life by storm in such a short amount of time.

CHAPTER TEN

WINNIE

Spending two days with my dad was hard. He was ready, yet in so many ways, even after six years, he had difficulty letting go.

I didn't push. It wasn't my place.

Instead, I helped him haul things out of closets, then carefully pack it all back up and stack the boxes and bins back in those same closets. The pile for donation was smaller than we hoped, requiring a single trip in his SUV, but we had a lovely lunch at one of Mom's favorite spots and reminisced.

I missed my mom. Dad missed his other half.

The topic of him dating never came up. I doubt my father would ever move past the death of his high school sweetheart and wife of twenty years.

My parents had me young, making my father not much older than Reed. It was something I gave little thought to at first, but when Dad asked me if I was seeing anyone it smacked me in the face that Reed could be one of my father's friends; they were only four years apart in age.

Our relationship was so new that I didn't have to say anything to my dad about him, yet I couldn't help shyly mentioning how Mimi, my mom's mother, had set me up and the date had gone well.

"That's great, honey," Dad told me. "Maybe you can bring him around sometime? I could fire up the grill and we could barbeque."

The thought of Reed sitting in one of Dad's ancient and dirty canvas camp chairs was almost ludicrous. I doubt Reed had ever been camping once in his life or attended a real BBQ.

But you know what? There's a first time for everything. Plus, if I wanted to keep seeing Reed- and there were no ifs there, I smile just thinking about the man- then I'm sure that

means a lot of give and take on both our parts. I didn't know if I was suited to be an attorney's girlfriend, but I was willing to try.

When I parted with Dad early Thursday, he made me promise to visit again soon and bring my new boyfriend with me.

Reed wasn't my boyfriend.

But when he shows up at my apartment promptly at four, how much I've missed him hits me like a ton of bricks, and I realize just how fast I'm falling for him.

His blue eyes slide over me, taking in every detail as he gives me that amazing smile of his.

Before I know it, we are in each other's arms, our lips frantic as we kiss as if it has been years we've been separated instead of mere days.

Deft fingers weave into my loose braid as his mouth ravishes me. I wrap my arms around his trim middle, savoring the heat of his big, hard body and just having him here with me.

"Winnie, I've missed you," he says, his eyes full of tender emotion.

I once thought Reed was gorgeous like a marble statue, but I definitely prefer this version of him better. He's warm and real, and he's mine.

At least I want him to be.

"I've missed you too." Taking his hand, I tug him into the apartment, unable to believe I got so carried away that I was making out with him in the hallway where any of my neighbors could have seen.

Once inside, I take in Reed's appearance, and my jaw drops. He's in khaki shorts and an untucked blue T-shirt yet he still looks incredibly attractive and polished.

How is that possible?

Stick me in shorts and a t-shirt and I look like I'm twelve and lost a fight with a mud puddle.

I'm wearing one of my handmade dresses, this one a riot of pinks and blues, that took me a solid month to design, scour the stores for the materials, and then sew, but going by how he's dressed, I think I need to change.

"Where are we going? And don't say a surprise." I give his flat middle a poke and skip away with a giggle when he goes to grab me.

Laughing, Reed follows me around the small living room, catching me around the waist and pulling me back against the hard strength of his chest. "We could go into your bedroom." His voice lowers to a throaty caress. "I could lift this little dress and lick your pussy like I've been aching to."

This man is impossible!

The things he says and the fact that I know he's serious, I can't handle it, or him.

Heat burns in my face even while heat of another sort fills my core.

"Reed, stop saying things like that."

His nose nudges my neck, followed by his warm lips pressing heated kisses to my skin. "Why?" he growls.

"Because..." I trail off as he takes my earlobe between his lips and bathes it with the wet heat of his tongue. When his hand slides down my body, gathering the skirt of my dress up until my pink panties are bared, I don't protest.

Nor do I say a word when his fingers rub along my mound and brush over the outline of my slit. Panting, I widen my legs and give a little mew of excitement when his other hand squeezes my breast.

Working his fingers between my thigh and the leg hole of my underwear, soon the tips of his fingers are discovering just how wet and excited he's gotten me.

"Mmmm... Winnie, is this wet pussy for me?"

Grasping his muscular forearm, I cling to it as his hard fingers circle my clit. The scent of my arousal perfumes the air, and it should embarrass me how soaked I am.

I shouldn't let him do these things to me. I'm not one to sleep with a man until after we've been going out for weeks, sometimes even longer, and yet, with Reed all my inhibitions fly right out the window.

"More," I beg, arching my hips and trying to get his fingers where I desperately want them.

Lazily, his fingers continue their slow path around and around my clit.

"Please!" I whine, tossing my head and thrusting my breast into his palm while my hips pump against his teasing fingers.

Blindly, I reach behind me, my hand grazing his crotch, hoping to touch him as he's touching me.

Instead of giving me what I want, Reed pulls his fingers from me. Shocked, I stand there until his heavy hand guides me up against the wall.

Without a word, he tugs my panties down my legs and drops to his knees. Firm fingers grab my ass, spreading my cheeks as the hot heat of his tongue drags through my folds up to the tight pucker of my backdoor.

Twisting, I squirm in his grasp. "No," I protest.

"Shhh..." he soothes as his fingers knead and caress my ass cheeks. "We're not going to do anything you don't want." With that, his tongue laps at my inner lips before his mouth engulfs them.

Tumbling forward, my palms smack against the wall as I brace myself against it. Reed hungrily snacks on my pussy from behind, his tongue fluttering against my opening before darting forward to swipe around my clit. The orgasm he had me on the verge of earlier roars back and I rock my hips, catching my clit on that lapping tongue.

Leaning my head against the cool and solid wall, I'm grateful for its support as my legs shake and I'm in real danger

of collapsing. “Reed, I don’t think-”

“Don’t think,” he interrupts, his breath warm against my heated flesh. “Only feel.”

Reed’s hands squeeze my ass, then glide forward to cup my hips before snaking around to my front. One hand dives between my splayed thighs, his fingers pinching and rolling my clit all while he continues to lick and suck on my inner lips. His tongue thrusts into me suddenly, sending me over the edge.

I wail as I come, helplessly riding the waves of my orgasm, as Reed laps up my juices.

My entire body trembles and I rest my heated face against the wall. Never before in my life have I experienced the sexual tornado that is Reed eating me out.

Sliding from between my legs, he pulls up my underwear and smooths my dress down, giving my ass a squeeze. When his hands settle on my shoulders, a soft sigh eases out of me.

“Winnie, you are amazing,” he croons against my neck, his strong arms going around me and hugging my body against his.

A single sharp note of laughter escapes me. “Not hardly,” I gasp, still out of breath and coming down from that intense high. “You’re the one who’s amazing.”

Turning in his arms, I look up at him and place my hands on his firm chest, feeling the fast pounding of his heart. “Do you want to go into the bedroom?” I ask, sliding my hands lower.

When I reach the waistband of his shorts, he gathers my hands in his and brings them to his face, brushing his lips across my knuckles in gentle kisses. “No time, not if we’re going to have time to enjoy my surprise. Why don’t you go change into shorts and a top?”

A slight pout crosses my face. “You’re really not going to tell me?”

His crooked grin is full of mischief, giving me a glimpse of the young man he once was. “It wouldn’t be a surprise if I told you.”

“I don’t like surprises,” I mutter even as I break away from his arms and go into the bedroom. I’m digging in my dresser for a decent pair of shorts when a thought hits me and I pop my head out of the doorway, calling out, “No cheating at Timber Masters either!”

His head whips up from where he was staring down at his phone. “It’s not cheating!” he yells back. “They give you the options to buy tokens. I’m merely taking them up on it.”

“Unfair advantage,” I say rolling my eyes and going back into the bedroom.

Grabbing denim shorts and a hot pink top, I head into the bathroom to clean up and change while thinking that Reed has an unfair advantage in all things.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

WINNIE

I attempt to guess where we're going during the drive, but Reed remains tight-lipped.

So I try a different tactic. "Isn't it rare for attorneys not to work during the week?"

He's slipped on a pair of sunglasses which make him look like a movie star on the way to a shoot, but it also shields his eyes from me, and his face gives nothing away. "I took the afternoon off to spend with you."

I pick at a few stray threads on the edge of my cutoff shorts as warmth fills me from his words.

"Right now, nothing is urgent at work since we just finished up a major case. I won't always have this type of free time or flexibility, so I want to make the most of it and spend it with you."

I stop messing with my shorts. "Why?"

His chuckle is warm and full of humor. "Why? Because I like you, Winnie, and I enjoy your company."

"I'm boring," I protest.

Reed snorts. The noise is so unexpected coming from him that in response, I giggle and slap a palm over my mouth.

He turns my way, a gentle smile tilting up the corners of his firm lips. "Winnie, I doubt anything about you is boring. Our tastes are different. We're different and I like that."

"You do?"

His hand covers mine. "I do."

We drive in silence for a few minutes, the scenery flying by as we go down a back road that I'm unfamiliar with. The road is barely wide enough for two vehicles and the trees overhead block out the sun, giving this road an eerie feel. I've

never felt unsafe with Reed, and I don't now, but this road is giving me bad vibes. I am glad that I'm not back here driving alone.

"Tell me about your books."

At his request, I tear my eyes away from the heavy trees that seem to get closer and closer to the road with each mile that we drive.

"Well, I write children's books."

He laughs. "Yes, you told me that before. Tell me what they are about."

"Ugh, you just asked me something that all authors fear," I complain. "We don't enjoy talking about our work, and definitely not summarizing it."

He still has his hand covering mine, and he gives a slight squeeze. "Then don't summarize."

Turning his attention from the road, Reed flashes me a smile before facing forward again. "Tell me a story, Winnie. Here's one I just thought up. Once upon a time, there was a young woman with eyes of gray and hair the color of sunshine who weaved a spell around a man until he didn't know if he was coming or going. He didn't care about the spell as long as the beautiful woman continued to gift him with her smiles and sweet glances, and he was happy with her presence in his life."

His words steal my breath. I can only stare at his profile for several long beats of my heart trying to get my emotions in check. Finally, I begin, telling him the first story I wrote. I'm sure it's not perfectly verbatim, but it's as close as I can remember it.

When I finish, he's still smiling. "I bet that one will be a best seller."

Squirming in the seat, I gaze out the window. "I can hope. It's with a sixth publishing house currently and I should hear something soon." I cross the fingers on both hands and hold them up. "Well, I can hope I hear something."

“You will. As a child, I would have loved that story.” His hand squeezes mine again. “What about you? Do you want children someday?”

I’ve already asked him that, so fair is fair, yet it makes me feel shy again. I absolutely want children. And ever since I saw him months ago, I’ve been daydreaming about him giving me those children. Which is silly on my part, I know. “Yes,” I finally admit. “I do want children.”

The trees give way to long brown stalks of dune grass, telling me we’re close to the marshes. And then suddenly straight ahead the road gives way to sand.

“What?” I gasp, craning my neck unable to believe what I’m seeing.

Reed chuckles and takes his hand from my thigh to park the SUV tight to the edge of the sand-covered road. “Remarkable, isn’t it? Civilization just stops and nature begins.”

“This is where we’re going?” I ask, still unable to take my eyes away from the golden sand and the murky blue water that stretches out endlessly.

“Yes, surprise! A picnic dinner at the beach.”

Unable to stop myself, I unbuckle my seat belt and throw myself at Reed, clutching his shoulders and hugging him tight. “Thank you!”

His arms go around me and if it wasn’t for the console between us, I would climb into his lap and cover him with kisses.

“I’m glad you like it.”

Grinning, I pull back. “I love it! I haven’t been to a beach in years. I used to go with my mom and collect shells and pieces of driftwood.”

His features tense up. “This isn’t going to be painful for you, is it?”

It takes me a moment to realize what he’s talking about. Him being sensitive wasn’t what I was expecting. Just like I

wasn't expecting him to be so open and sweet about his attraction to me. That little story wrapped around my heart and refuses to let go.

There really is so much more to this man than his stunning looks. Once again, I wonder how I got so lucky to be here with him.

"No, it's not painful," I say slowly. "Losing my mom was tough, and I miss her." I place my hand over my heart. "But she's always here with me and I enjoy remembering the good memories I have of her. I'm sad there aren't more chances to make more memories, but I'm grateful and embrace those I have."

The tension in his face eases. "Then I'm happy to be a part of making these memories with you."

Tears sting my eyes and I have to turn away before I become a blubbering mess. I'm not ready for Reed to see me like that yet. Scrubbing at my eyes, I open the door and hop out of the SUV.

Reed's door opens and closes and then he's around the front of the vehicle standing by my side and staring out at the ocean with me.

"You said you brought food?" I ask.

"I did."

We go around to the back of the SUV, and he pulls out a brown wicker picnic basket, complete with a soft red checked blanket. I never would have dreamed Reed could be so romantic and sweet.

"You're perfect," I blurt out.

Abruptly, the happiness drains off his face, leaving his features cool and emotionless. "No, I'm not," he says with a sharp edge to his voice.

Tossing the blanket over his shoulder, he hefts the basket in one hand and then takes mine gently with the other and guides me through the choppy hills of sand to the smoother sand of the beach.

We walk in silence for several minutes before he releases my hand and shakes out the blanket. I help him smooth it down and then we sit and stare out at the waves. The cries of seagulls overhead take me back to the times my parents and I would feed the gulls French fries on the boardwalk, and I smile at the memory.

Reed sits beside me and when I turn I see he's staring at me, not at the ocean.

"I'm not perfect," he says.

There's a sadness in his eyes that makes me regret my impulsive words. Sometimes I forget that Mimi set me up with her friend's lonely grandson. When I realized it was Reed, I dismissed the lonely part, but now I'm realizing that it was true.

A small ember deep inside wonders if he was lonely simply because he hadn't met me yet.

Shifting my body until I'm reclining on the blanket on my side, I prop my head up with my hand and watch him. Reed lays down, taking up a similar position opposite of me.

"Reed, I didn't mean anything by it. It's just this is all so lovely, thank you."

His blue eyes are watchful. "I wanted to do something special for you since the cat café didn't go over that well."

Rolling my eyes, I snort. "Oh stop, it was cute. I like cats, I promise."

"Did the hot chocolate come out of your pants?"

Grinning, I nod. "It did, so no harm done."

Sitting up, Reed grabs the basket. "Do want to eat now or go for a walk first?"

I scan the beach and we're the only two souls around, so it's probably safe to leave our basket unattended. "Let's walk."

Setting off, he wastes no time in grabbing my hand and I chance a peek up at him. Despite what he said, he'll never convince me he's not perfect.

“Did you make that top too?”

At his question, my eyes drop to my hot pink shirt that I hand painted yellow and white daisies on. “I did.”

“Why children’s books and not fashion design?”

Letting go of his hand, I lean down and pick up a scalloped seashell, marveling over the lines and the delicate colors of yellow and orange. “I don’t think the clothing I design would have much mainstream appeal. Plus the pressure. When I make something for myself, I can take as long as I want, change my mind countless times, and just enjoy everything about the process.”

“They suit you,” he says softly.

Tucking the seashell in my pocket, I smile. “Thank you. Not everyone loves them, but I don’t dress for anyone but me.”

Chuckling, he grabs my hand again and we resume walking. “I must admit, when I first saw you, I wasn’t sure what to make of your outfit. You reminded me of a fairy.”

“A fairy?”

At his nod, I grin. “I am rather short.”

He tugs on my hand for me to stop and swings around to face me. “You’re lovely.” His hands cup my cheeks. “My lovely and sweet fairy.”

Staring up into his eyes, I faintly see myself reflected there. What I see isn’t a fairy, lovely or otherwise. I see a young woman with frizzy blonde hair escaping her sloppy braid and a too sharp chin who’s just realizing she’s falling in love with a man far too good to be true.

As his lips claim mine in a kiss, I can’t help closing my eyes and surrendering to the passion that’s rising up in me. It’s not Reed’s kisses that warm me from the inside out, it’s the fact that it’s him doing the kissing.

He’s such an easy man to love that I don’t have a hope of guarding my heart.

And I couldn't even if I wanted. My heart has been his for the taking from the moment I first saw him.

CHAPTER TWELVE

REED

When Winnie innocently tells me I'm perfect, something inside me shrivels up and weeps. I'm fairly certain it's my pride.

I'm not perfect. ED aside, I have my faults same as any other man. The difference is I wish I could be perfect for her.

The more time I spend with her the more thankful I become that Elliot set us up. It hurts me to realize that Winnie's been so close for months and I was too foolish and caught up in my life to notice.

Well, I'm noticing now. Taking in every single smile and sweet blush.

The picnic on the beach is a huge hit. We spend our time walking, collecting shells, and learning more about each other. We both grew up as only children, which means naturally we're headstrong and assertive about getting our own way. The difference is that Winnie is a much more go-with-the-flow type of artistic person, while I'm a bullishly confident my way is the correct way type A personality.

Okay, there's a little wiggle room in there.

We both enjoy our chosen careers and Winnie confesses she's not truly unemployed as she does coding and billing on the side to finance her dreams of being a published author. I never thought she was interested in my money, but I do approve of her drive and ambition and that she's not living with her head in the clouds and surviving on dreams alone. Plus knowing that she has a practical side under her unconventional clothing appeals to me.

Actually everything about her appeals to me, which is why I came fully prepared and pop a pill while packing up the blanket and basket in the trunk before driving us to her place.

At her apartment, Winnie turns shy in the elevator, and I need to remind her that we're not going to do anything she doesn't want to.

Gazing up at me with her ethereal gray eyes, a flush of pink blooms on her cheeks. "I want you, Reed. All of you."

My cock has been rock hard and aching since before we pulled into the parking lot, so I'm confident when I say, "You'll have me. Every part," before ducking down and ravishing her mouth.

Winnie throws her arms around my neck and it's all I can do not to take her here and now.

Somehow, we make it out of the elevator and with her wrapped around me, together we get the keys to her apartment out of her pocket and the door opened.

After that, everything is a blur of slamming doors and clothing falling to the floor. Finally, she's gloriously naked, spread out on the bed like an offering.

My cock stands up proudly between my legs, and I stroke it as my eyes caress every inch of her body. I've touched her, brought her to a shuddering climax repeatedly before, and now I'll finally claim Winnie fully.

Like a ravenous beast, I fall on her, my mouth licking and sucking every delicious part of her. She claims her breasts are small, and they are, but because they are hers, they're perfect and I worship them with my hands and tongue.

Winnie's short nails rake along my shoulders and back, her body twisting under mine, as the tangy scent of her arousal that I know so well rises between us. Sliding down her body, I kneel between her thighs and grip them as I haul her shaved pussy up to my mouth, needing to taste her.

Flattening my tongue, I lick along her folds, spreading her inner lips so I can get to the sweetness of her clit and opening. Pink and wet, glistening with her dew, her scent drives me wild. I feast on her wetness, licking her clean of it while my lips and tongue demand more from her.

When she shatters on my face, I groan and greedily drink her down. My cock throbs, wanting to be buried in her hot little pussy.

Gently letting her lower body drop to the mattress, I crawl up over her, my cock laying heavily on her mound as I stare down into her flushed face.

“You are so beautiful,” I breathe, reaching out to feel her silken curls drift through my fingers.

Her closed eyelids lift, gifting me with the brilliance of her gray eyes. I’ve never seen eyes like hers before. A blue so light that they appear a smokey gray. They’re unique, just like her.

Running her hands along my sides, her hips lift, rubbing her smooth mound over my cock.

“Tell me you’re mine, Winnie,” I beg, reaching down to rub the tip of my cock along her pussy. “Tell me you want me to fuck you.”

Winnie’s lips part, a tiny moan issuing from her. Her hands grip my sides. “I’m not on birth control, Reed,” she confesses in a low, strained voice.

I want kids and the idea of Winnie big and round with mine sends a rush of want straight to my dick.

Thankfully, a bit of sanity prevails, and I lift my tip away from her welcoming opening. “Let me get a condom,” I say, though it takes me a long moment to leave the sweetness of her embrace.

Even if she was on birth control, I should still wear a condom. I lost my head. Something that happens a lot when I’m around her.

I grab the condom from my wallet and quickly roll it down. Winnie watches me nervously from the bed and when I return to her, I brush my hands along her face, and over her slight breasts with their tight and proud pink nipples that my tongue tingles to be wrapped around.

Crawling between her legs, I settle over her, keeping my weight on my arms and kiss her lips. Hesitantly she opens to me, her tongue twining around mine as our kisses get more frantic and the passion that had cooled simmers between us once again.

When I leave her mouth, I take her nipples between my lips, alternating between the two.

Soon Winnie is arching and panting beneath me, and I can't wait any longer. Notching the head of my cock in her, I thrust my hips forward, feeling her hot inner muscles clenching around me as I work my way deep inside.

She's so hot and tight, her pussy gripping me like a fist. It's hard to resist the aching need to fuck her, hard and fast, to take my pleasure and relieve the ache in my balls.

But that would be doing us both a disservice. I'll fuck her later. Oh absolutely. I have plans to have her bent over the couch and to fill this sweet little pussy with my cock and have her screaming her head off as I pound into her from behind.

That will wait.

Right now, I want to make love to this delicious little fairy that I've somehow been blessed to be welcomed into both her bed and body.

Slowly I pull my cock from her clinging channel until only the tip remains in her tight clutches before, with a long thrust, I fill her up. My pace is steady as I work myself in and out of her. Her legs lift and wrap around my hips, her panting breath like music in my ears as I bring us both to the edge of release.

The tighter she grips me, the more my fragile control slips. When her nails dig into my shoulders and she moans, "More," my control snaps completely and I fuck her hard into the mattress, my hips pounding into the cradle of her pelvis as her pussy swallows my cock down.

Ripples caress my length as her pussy shudders around my shaft. Her orgasm sends me over and then I'm right there with her, groaning my release as I come.

My hips continue their wild pace until I'm spent. With a groan, I pull my sensitive cock from her wetness and collapse next to her. Pulling her to me, I bury my face in her hair, as my pounding heart and racing lungs work to get everything under control again.

Winnie's little sigh drifts over my chest as her fingers stroke along my arm. I feel her lips pressing tiny kisses to my neck and smile.

I'll need to leave before either of us falls asleep. I can't even trust my morning wood to get the job done and don't want to deal with any embarrassment over that, but for now, I can't tear myself away from her.

Pressing a kiss to her hair, I tighten my arms around her and bask in the peaceful afterglow.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

WINNIE

I was disappointed Reed didn't spend the night, but our relationship is so new, and no doubt he has to be at work early this morning, so it makes sense for him to leave.

Still, I would have loved to wake up with him in bed with me. The sheets smell faintly of him and of sex, which makes me grin like a fool.

It's crazy feeling this way, I'm all giddy and excited and all from some truly amazing sex.

Okay, more than just the sex. Everything about Reed makes me feel giddy.

When my doorbell buzzes before ten, I suspiciously peek through the door's tiny peephole and see a delivery lady holding an enormous flower arrangement.

Opening the door, I'm prepared for her to have the wrong apartment. That's happened countless times in the two years I've lived here. It's not a big deal tracking down the rightful owner of flowers, takeout, and mail, though many times it leaves me envious.

Except she's not at the wrong apartment, and this gorgeous arrangement of daisies and pink and lavender roses is for me!

Thanking her profusely, I waddle inside with the heavy vase of flowers clutched to my chest. Once I set the vase down on my kitchen counter, I tear into the enclosed note.

Winnie,

I wish I could be there when you receive these but know that I'm thinking of you and smiling. Have dinner with me tonight?

Reed

The flowers are so beautiful, but the note and the knowledge that he's feeling the same undeniable something

more is what makes me teary. Like everyone I always dreamed I would get my happily ever after, but never could I have imagined it would be with a man like Reed.

Quickly, I pull out my phone and text him thank you and yes to dinner. He doesn't respond, but I know he's a busy man.

Eyeing up the huge collection of flowers, I start randomly plucking some out and pull one of my own, far plainer, plastic vases out from under my sink. Flowers like this should be shared and I know just the person.

Mimi's face lights up when she opens the door to her room and sees me standing there with the vase of flowers. I brightened the plain vase up with a big purple bow that I made with some velvet fabric I had left over from one of my dresses and I think it really completes the look.

"Winnie! It's not Tuesday." Her eyes go to the flowers. "Oh, how lovely. Who are they for?"

"For you, silly!" I say, coming into her spacious room at the senior home. It's not as nice as her house in the country was, but Mimi has lived here for five years now, and she's assured me multiple times that she loves not having to do any landscaping, housekeeping, or laundry. Especially the laundry. It leaves her free to have fun with her friends, she told me once with a wink.

I place the vase on the low table next to the window overlooking the extensive gardens at the rear of the building. Standing back, I smile as she rearranges the flowers into a more aesthetically pleasing arrangement.

"Oh, look at me here fussing when I haven't even hugged you yet," she exclaims, whirling around and opening up her arms.

I step into her warm and fragrant embrace with a blissful sigh. Mimi always smells like lilacs and sunshine, even in the dead of winter. Her hugs are like coming home. No matter how I feel going into a hug, I always feel better afterwards.

And since I'm already in such a good mood, her hug intensifies that, and I can't contain my joy.

“Reed is amazing!”

Pulling back, her brown eyes twinkle merrily as she eyes me up. “Oh, my! Tell me all the details.” Laughing, she pats at my arm and shakes her head, a small smile playing around her lips. “On second thought, maybe not all the details, that satisfied smile tells me enough.”

My grandmother knowing I’m having sex makes me cringe in embarrassment and I quickly shove that knowledge to the back of my mind. “Well, those flowers are just a few from the huge bouquet he sent me.”

Mimi presses her hands to her cheeks. “Oh, what a sweet man. Most men don’t send flowers anymore. I’m glad to see that some are still romantics.”

Hugging my arms around my waist to stop myself from twirling around, I sigh. “Oh he is! He took me to the beach yesterday for a picnic dinner and we walked and saw the sunset over the water.”

“Winnie, I’m so happy it’s all working out.” Reaching out, Mimi brushes some wayward of my curls away my face. “I’ll admit I had my doubts and was hesitant to set you up with him.”

Flabbergasted, my arms drop to my sides. “But Mimi, why? He’s so perfect.”

She laughs. “Well, I don’t know about all that, but I’m glad you think so. I worried he might be a bit much for you, but in the end, Elliot, that’s Reed’s grandmother, convinced me.”

Thank goodness for that! I owe Reed’s grandmother a big thanks.

“Really? How?” I press.

Mimi ignores me and grabs her cane from where it’s leaning against her recliner. “Why don’t we go get some tea and you can tell me about your new man? Have you seen Anthony lately?” she asks, holding open the door for me.

My Dad has gone by Tony his entire life, and as far as I know Mimi is the only one that calls him Anthony. Even my

Grandma Katherine, his mom, calls him Tony.

“I just came back from visiting him yesterday,” I say, tucking my arm through hers as we slowly head down to the cafeteria to grab two cups of tea.

Mimi takes a seat at one of the little tables for two while I fetch two mugs of tea, heavy on the lemon and honey for her and with a splash of milk for me.

Bringing the white mug up to her face, Mimi inhales and smiles, just holding it between her hands. “How is your father doing?”

“He’s about the same.”

Her pink lips pinch up. “Still living in that the crowded townhome?”

After Mom died, Mimi offered to help sort through her belongings, but Dad wouldn’t hear of it. When Mimi moved out of her house in the country, she had me come and get anything of hers that I wanted and then she sold or donated the rest.

She’s a firm believer in an uncluttered life and not holding on to things for mere sentimental reasons. She doesn’t think it’s healthy for Dad to hold on to so much and I can’t help agreeing with her. Still, it’s not my place to decide that for him.

At my silence, she nods and takes a long sip of her tea. “Tell me about you and Reed,” she says, obviously done with the topic of her son-in-law’s grief.

Carefully censoring some of the details, I give her a rundown of the dates we’ve had so far. Mimi laughs at the cat café and sighs over the beach walk and flowers.

“I still can’t believe you weren’t going to set us up.” I can’t resist bringing that up again.

“I went back and forth on it.” She sighs. “Elliot warned us that her grandson had a strong personality, and I know you’re one tough cookie, but oh, Winnie.” Stopping, she pats at my hand. “We saw him on the TV and strong was an

understatement.” Her brown eyes widened as she gives a little shudder. “I worried he might not be a good man for you.”

“But then you changed your mind,” I say.

Mimi’s frizzy gray curls bob around her face as she nods. “I found out that underneath that tough exterior, he was a good man, and you deserve a good man.”

Cocking my head, I lean closer. “Good? How?”

Setting down her mug, she gives a soft smile. “Honeysuckle Senior Center is wonderful. Clean, comfortable, good food and staff, but it’s not cheap, Winnie.”

That I already knew. Dad hoped that the sale of Mimi Sandra’s house and investments would be enough to cover her expenses until the end of her life. But he put aside a portion of Mom’s life insurance policy money just in case because he knew Mom would have wanted him to care for her mother in her absence. That remains a secret between the two of us and I’ve never breathed a word of it to Mimi.

The rest of the insurance money went toward my college costs. The tiny bit remaining I’ve used to supplement my medical coder income to help cover my bills as I work on becoming a published children’s author.

At my nod, Mimi continues. “Reed pays for his grandmother Elliot to live here. Instead of the money coming out of her account, it comes from his. It’s all done in secret because he doesn’t want her to be upset over her dwindling finances or to find out how badly his father mismanaged her and her late husband’s investments.”

My mouth drops open. “If it’s a secret, how do you know?”

“Because Elliot told me!” Laughing, Mimi grabs her mug and grins down into it. “Nothing is a secret from her.”

Still chortling, Mimi’s wise brown eyes fix on something behind me. “Speaking of, there’s your young man now.”

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

WINNIE

With a start, I turn to see Reed's tall figure entering the cafeteria, accompanied by a tiny woman with snow white hair and tons of dazzling jewelry. Despite her size, the woman's spine is ramrod straight and when she spies us she marches over, leaving Reed to catch up with her.

Hopping up, I scamper over to him, barely stopping myself from throwing my arms around him. "Hi."

"Hello, Winnie." The way his voice twists my name into something naughty and sexy turns my insides to pudding.

"I didn't expect to see you here today," I say, tucking some curls behind my ear.

"I wasn't expecting that either. I thought I'd have to wait until tonight to see you. Did you like the flowers?"

"You sent flowers? What about jewelry?" a stern voice intones from behind us.

Guiltily, I look over at Reed's grandmother and my Mimi. In my excitement at seeing Reed, I almost forgot about them.

"The flowers were lovely," Mimi speaks up. "Daisies and roses, a beautiful and meaningful combination."

A bit of color spots Reed's pale cheeks. "Oh, I didn't realize that. I just knew Winnie liked daisies and roses seemed natural to send as well." His blue eyes catch and hold on mine as we share a smile.

"Daisies for new beginnings and roses for love and passion," Mimi supplies.

"Guess you did well, after all, Reed," his grandmother states with a satisfied smirk on her thin lips. The multitude of glittering charms on her bracelets jiggle as she gestures to an

empty table for four. “We were coming for some tea. Sandra, you and your granddaughter should join us.”

It might be a suggestion or possibly a command; the way it’s delivered makes it hard to tell.

Looking over at Mimi, she gives me a quick smile and grabs her cane. Hurrying over, I get our mugs of tea and transfer them to the new table.

Reed’s grandmother Elliot takes her seat and waits for both me and Mimi to sit before she shoos Reed away with a wave of her hand. “Get a few cookies as well. Can’t have tea without cookies.”

The moment Reed turns his back, Elliot leans over to Mimi. “I knew it would all work out!” she proclaims in a delighted voice. “Reed is thoroughly smitten. What about your granddaughter?”

Mimi’s brown eyes widen and helplessly roll my way. I suppress a laugh and take a quick gulp of the now cold tea. “I like him too.”

Elliot’s finely arched brown brows shoot up as her bright blue eyes, so similar to Reed’s, narrow in on me. “Like him? Why aren’t you in love with him?” she demands.

Mimi and I both gasp in surprise, though she recovers first. “Elliot! They’ve just begun to date; these things take time.”

Ignoring her friend, Elliot glares at me. “Do you know what a catch my grandson is? Dozens of women would love to be in your position.”

“Then where are these women at?” Mimi snaps. “Show me these hypothetical women. Because it seems to me your grandson is an old bachelor and lucky to have a beautiful young woman like my Winnie agreeing to give him a chance.”

My mouth drops open as my eyes volley back and forth between the two glowering seniors. I’ve never heard my Mimi raise her voice, let alone snap at another person! Not even her old neighbor when he demolished her mailbox with his snowplow.

A tray with four steaming mugs and a plate heaping with cookies upon it settles onto the table and then familiar hands land on my shoulders, giving a reassuring squeeze.

Reed's deep voice breaks the strained silence at the table. "I know I got the better of the deal when Winnie agreed to go out with me. And I'm thankful to you both for setting us up."

Both grandmothers beam at Reed, but his gaze is for me alone.

Sitting beside me, Reed holds my hand cradled in his throughout the visit. I'm certain my face is bright pink the entire twenty minutes we sit there and chat. Or rather, as Elliot chats. She does most of the talking, throwing out tidbits from some of Reed's past cases and then reminiscing about her own days as a district attorney.

I have a hard time picturing this tiny woman as a ball-busting lawyer, but the sharp edge to her voice reminds me that she wasn't always a white-haired grandmother.

Elliot insists Reed walks me out and with Mimi beaming and waving me on, we give our grandmothers hugs and goodbyes and head out to the parking lot.

At my car, Reed's hands cup my face, his thumbs skimming along my cheeks. "I was counting down the hours until I could see you again and here you are," he murmurs.

"You never answered my text."

Leaning down, his nose bumps against mine. "I did. I guess you just didn't see it yet."

"Oh." Angling my head, I brush my lips against his, sighing softly when his lips part.

Slowly, I swept my tongue into his mouth. Normally, he's been the one to initiate our kisses. I rather like the fact that he's currently letting me take the lead and go at my own pace.

Stroking the inside of his mouth, I explore, tasting the tea and cookies along with the mint that usually flavors his kisses.

Reed's fingers tighten briefly on my face as he shifts his big body. My hands, which had been clutching his sides, roam

over the softness of his fine dress-shirt, feeling the muscles the material conceals.

I grow daring and my hand darts down to the front of his pants. Finding the outline of his dick, I rub and stroke my fingers along it. I'm surprised to find him soft, because just his nearness is turning me on, but I continue to caress him.

With a growl, Reed's hand seizes mine and yanks it away from his crotch.

"What's wrong?"

Hard blue eyes glare down at me as he releases my hand. "Knock that off! They have cameras all around."

I look around the parking lot, not seeing anything that remotely looks like a camera. I'm not doubting him. Most places have cameras, but I'm not sure they would even be able to catch what I was doing.

"Sorry."

"You can't do those types of things in public," he snaps, running an agitated hand through his hair and glaring at me like feeling up the man I'm dating is a heinous offense. "We're not teenagers, so act like an adult!"

I recoil, feeling like I've been struck. *What in the world has gotten into Reed?!*

"And you weren't the man kissing me like crazy in the hallway at my apartment?" I retort, feeling more hurt than angry.

The harsh lines on his face soften and he tries to draw me near, but I shrug off his hands. "Look, I'm sorry if I snapped. I'll be over to get you for dinner at five."

Pinching my lips, I take a step away from him. "No, I don't think so."

"Winnie, don't be like that."

"Like what? You accuse me of acting like a teenager, so here I am acting like a moody teenager." I dig in the pocket of

my dress for my keys and stomp around my car to the driver's side.

Reed hurries after me, slamming his hand on the door.

I glare at his hand, refusing to look at him.

With a huff, he takes his hand off the door. "I'm sorry, please don't leave like this," he pleads.

Tightening my lips, I grit out, "Move it, Reed."

I continue to stare at my car until he takes a few stumbling steps back and then I open up my door and slam it shut after I slide inside. My engine starts up with a quiet rumble and briefly I meet his troubled eyes before I hit reverse, throw it in drive, and tear out of there.

My thoughts are a jumble as I drive, and I can't help wondering what it is that I did so wrong. I don't like being snapped at like that. But I'm also not proud of the way I left either. Once I have some time to cool down and can think clearly, I'll have to call him.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

REED

Standing there, watching Winnie drive away, shame fills me. My image has always been that of a professional, a man who is calm and collected, impassive and, at times unemotional. I'm not one to lash out, and yet with Winnie, I did just that. I lost my cool and allowed my emotions to reign supreme.

While it's true I can't be caught in a compromising position like getting a hand job in the parking lot of my grandmother, a former district attorney's, nursing home, I could have handled things with a lot more decorum. There was no need to fly off the handle like I did, other than embarrassment over my condition, and that's still not a reason for what I did.

I'd been more concerned over her reaction to my flaccid dick and what she would infer if I failed to get hard, than I was over the careless words that left my mouth.

I'm not careless. In my profession, I can't afford to be.

Yet I was.

Shit!

Scrubbing at my face, I weigh my options. Clearly, I need to speak with her and apologize profusely.

The hurt in her clear eyes as she drove away was enough to bring me to my knees.

I need to make this right and beg her for another chance. I can't lose her now that I've found her. If I do, I'll never be truly whole, as she carries my heart in her small and capable hands.

I'm grateful to see her small sedan in her building's parking lot. I'm unsure what I would have done if she hadn't come right home. Probably camped out in front of her apartment.

Knocking on her door, I realize I should have brought flowers, chocolates, or even lunch. Showing up like this with only my pathetic self is a testament to how frazzled my brain is over the very real potential that I've driven her away.

The door creeps open and Winnie's face presses into the tiny space between the door and the wall. "Reed, what are you doing here?"

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry for how I acted and the things I said. I couldn't go a second longer knowing I upset you."

Lovely gray eyes the color of a foggy spring morning gaze up at me. The door swings open as she steps aside to allow me in.

Before the door is even fully shut, I'm grabbing her hands and holding them to my chest where my heart thuds painfully. "Please forgive me, Winnie. I'm a jerk."

"You're not a jerk, but you sure acted like one." Peering up at me, her face is full of sadness. "I'm sorry I got carried away like I did. You're right that it definitely wasn't the time or the place. I just don't understand why you reacted that way."

This is my opening to bare myself completely to her. To tell her everything and let her decide where we go from here.

It's wrong and selfish of me to keep this from her as this will affect our entire relationship, however long that is.

But I can't. I just can't.

"I'm sorry," I whisper.

Her smile soothes the wounded spots on my heart, and I tell myself that it's just for a little longer and that soon I'll come clean about everything.

"And I'm sorry too," she says softly. "And now that you're here, why don't you let me show you how sorry I am?"

"Only if you let me do the same," I breathe, dipping my mouth down to press a small kiss on her soft lips.

I take a quick detour to the bathroom and take the pill I have secreted away in my wallet. Then I let Winnie lead me

into her bedroom, where I worship her small body and bring her to the heights of pleasure again and again.

Once the pill takes effect, I put on a condom and make love to Winnie, glorying in the satisfaction and bliss that we share.

Later, snuggling in bed, her hand trails along the muscles of my chest and drops lower to fondle my cock, which is quick to rise again even after I came only minutes ago. One of the benefits of the pill is my shorter recovery time.

“Oh, my.” Tilting her chin up, her gaze darts from my face down to my growing erection then back again. “Didn’t you...” she trails off.

Winnie is sweetly shy even after all the intimacies that we’ve shared. “Came? Is that the word you’re looking for? Got off? Filled you full of cum?” I tease, loving the blush of pink that extends from her shoulders all the way to the tips of her tiny round ears.

“Actually, I guess I filled the condom, not you.”

“I’ll get on birth control so we can do away with the condoms.”

Laughing, I snuggle her closer, my hand unable to resist cupping her ass and giving it an appreciative squeeze. “That wasn’t me hinting. I was just being silly. You don’t need to go on birth control if you don’t want.”

Pumping my cock into the loose fist of her hand, I groan. “Though the thought of going in you bare is exciting.”

She rubs her thumb across my wet tip as a steady dribble of clear pre-cum bubbles up.

“Winnie, grab another condom please,” I gasp, unable to believe how close to coming I am already.

With a grin, she wiggles away and rolls over to the nightstand where a new box lays in wait. Handing me one, she kneels and watches as I roll it down on my straining erection.

Seeing the lustful look in her eyes has my cock jerking with the desire to be buried deep in her warm and snug pussy.

“Ride me,” I beg, shoving up against the headboard until I’m in a relaxed sitting position with a pillow wedged between my back and the hard wood.

Hesitantly, Winnie straddles me, her fingers digging into my shoulders as she rocks her wet folds along my cock. Cupping her pert ass, I help raise her up and adjust her over me. She reaches between us to aim my cock at her entrance and then slides down, working my shaft into her until our bodies are flush.

This position allows me to lick and suck her nipples while she rides me.

As turned on as I am, I don’t last long and slip my fingers down to rub her hard clit as she continues to rock over me, ensuring that she gets off, too.

Her bathroom is like the rest of her apartment, small and efficient and the same holds true for her shower. It doesn’t matter to me that I bang my elbows and that the stream of water hits me mid-chest. All that I care about is that I’m here with Winnie as we scrub off the evidence of our midday romp.

I toss on my same clothes, a pair of slacks and a long-sleeved shirt as I was originally planning to head into work after visiting Elliot, while Winnie puts on another of her whimsical dresses. This one reminds me of a wedding cake, full of fluffy layers and lace, and making her look utterly adorable and delicious.

Sadly, I only had one pill on me, and my cock is now soft and spent.

We go out for a late lunch and when we return to her apartment, she suggests a movie and as I’m not ready to part with her yet, I settle down on the couch and try not to worry about what will happen if she wants another round in the bedroom.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

WINNIE

Looking up at Reed, contentment fills me. He didn't hold my childish running away earlier against me and I don't hold his snappish mood against him. We're both human and allowed to not be perfect.

I was doing him a disservice constantly thinking of him as perfect before and he even tried to tell me that yesterday at the beach.

Now I understand how wrong that thinking was and that I was setting us both up for disappointment. While I'm not thrilled about how everything went down in the parking lot, I'm glad we're moving past it.

And I'm more than glad he's here with me now. I couldn't imagine a better way to spend a lazy Friday than making love, enjoying a tasty lunch at the sub shop down the road from my apartment, and now being here snuggled up on the couch with him.

My gaze settles on his crotch, and I teasingly run my fingers along his firm thigh, working my way closer and closer to the thick budge at the apex of his legs.

A naughty thought pops into my head. He's constantly going down on and pleasuring me; I should return the favor. I don't have a ton of experience doing that, but I want to put my mouth on him and lick and kiss his dick and bring him the same pleasure that he gives me.

I drop my hand to the warm triangle of fabric and slowly rub my hand along him, feeling his soft dick and running my thumb along the defined ridge of his tip.

I feel as well as hear the breath he sucks in. Then his hand covers mine and tugs it away. "Winnie, what are you doing?"

Tossing my head to get the hair off my face, I grin. "What do you think I'm doing?" I move from around him and lower

to the floor at his feet, walking on my knees to the space in between his legs. I nudge at his thighs to get him to spread them wider and then lean over and blow against his covered crotch. “You’re always tasting me, Reed. Now I want to taste you.”

Emotions flicker over his face and in the end he doesn’t look as happy as I thought he would be, even as he spreads his legs wider, giving me access to his zipper.

Trying to be confident and sexy, I hold his gaze as I undo his pants and lower the zipper, reaching inside to draw his soft cock out of his boxers. Grasping it in my hand, I run my tongue along the fat tip, getting a feel for the texture and taste of his skin.

His clean smell fills my scents as I suck the head of his dick into my mouth. Moaning, his fingers slip into my hair, running along my scalp as I draw more of him between my lips. He’s still rather soft though he’s firming up.

Hollowing my cheeks, I suck on him and tease my tongue down along his thick shaft to the springy hairs at his base. I squeeze and stroke him as I lick and suck. He’s still not fully hard.

“What can I do differently?” I ask, staring up at him. “Am I doing something wrong?”

Deep blue eyes stare into mine, as something like pain flashes in them. “Nothing,” he says with a harsh exhale. “You’re doing nothing wrong, Winnie. Your mouth feels amazing. You are amazing.”

My doubting gaze drops to his cock, which is barely half-erect in my hand. “Then what is it?”

Sighing, Reed runs his fingers through my hair before dropping his hands into his lap and gently taking his cock from me and tucking it back into his pants.

“Reed?”

“Winnie, come up here, please.” He pats the space on the couch next to him.

Rubbing the excess moisture off my lips, I get to my feet and sit down, worry throbbing through me.

The serious and sad look on his face isn't helping.

"It's me, Winnie." He gestures to his crotch where his pants still lay flayed open, showing the black of his boxers and the soft bulge of his dick within them. "I'm the problem. It's nothing you're doing or have done. I have erectile dysfunction."

"Erectile Dysfunction? But we've had sex." It sounds silly to say that, but it's true.

Reed nods. "Yes, when I take a pill beforehand, I can have sex. But there's no spontaneity. Everything has to be planned."

"Then you took a pill earlier?"

A soft sigh flares his narrow nostrils. "Yes."

It suddenly dawns on me that's what he must have been doing in the bathroom and why he didn't take off his boxers until after he had already gotten me off two times. "Oh, okay."

"Okay?" he repeats, the dark slashes of his brows lowering as he regards me. "That's it? Okay?"

Shrugging, I smile, glad that this wasn't anything super serious. "Sure, why wouldn't it be?"

A harsh laugh escapes him as he gets off the couch and closes his pants. "I don't think you fully understand, Winnie. This means without taking a pill, we can never just suddenly decide to have sex. I could be hard one minute and then go soft before I even enter you. I need almost constant stimulation to maintain an erection and even with that, I might not last long."

"Well, we already know you're good with your fingers and tongue, so I don't think getting me off will be a problem."

Reed stares at me for a long moment and then shakes his head. "You'll tire of that and will wonder why I'm not able to get hard for you."

He's been through this before, I realize with a pang of sympathy.

Pushing up off the couch, I go to him and carefully reach out and place my hand on his arm, feeling the tight bunch of muscles under my palm quivering. "Reed, I like being with you. Sure, the sex is amazing, but so are you."

The tension leaves his body and relief fills me that my words are getting through to him until I see his face and the grimace that twists his handsome features into a mask of pain.

Wounded blue eyes hold mine as a sad smile lifts the corners of his lips. "I know you mean every word you say, Winnie. But I've been through this before. I'll never have a regular sex life, so any woman foolish enough to settle for me will be stuck being unsatisfied and hurt until she leaves me."

The level of his pain hits me, and I want to cry that he's been hurt in the past. "Sex isn't everything. Companionship, respect, and love are what matters in a relationship."

"Being in love won't magically fix me, Winnie."

"Someone in love won't care about that," I say softly. "Reed, you're more than your dick. Behind your hard exterior I know a tender heart beats. You're caring, kind, and sweet."

Hope flares in his face as his eyes search mine. "Do you mean that?"

Scraping my teeth along my lower lip, I decide that Mimi and Elliot wouldn't mind me spilling this secret. "A man who pays for his grandmother's care and tries to hide it to spare her pride is a man worthy of love."

"Winnie." His hands reach for me, cupping my face in his warm palms.

"So enough of this leaving you talk. I don't know that you can get rid of me at this point."

His laughter washes over me and when his lips claim mine, I kiss him back with everything in me, hoping he can feel how much I care and how much I love him.

I came close to confessing my feelings just now, but I don't think either of us is ready for that yet.

But with a secret this big, I don't know how long I can hide it for.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

REED

Our relationship doesn't falter when my ED is revealed. It flourishes without that hanging over my head. I feel free to love Winnie with everything in me as we learn more and more about each other.

Nights are spent at her place, as I actually prefer her snug little apartment over my own empty house.

Most mornings she laughs when she finds me singing in the shower and then she joins me. No longer am I putting in long hours at work, preferring to delegate more and more responsibilities to the paralegals and junior partners in the firm. That's why they're here, to learn and work, so why deny them this chance?

My law partner, Logan, tips me a wink whenever he happens to be around and Winnie, looking adorable in her colorful outfits, pops by the firm to have lunch with me. One evening, we even run into Mitch and Sophia out at the cat café. I don't know whose eyes were bigger, Mitch's or Sophia's. Guess I'm not allowed to be human or a man in love.

We go to my house so infrequently that Winnie brings it up one night when we're sitting on her couch enjoying a late dinner of homemade pizza.

"I enjoy being here with you," I assure her.

"But your house is so big and nice. And you got better water pressure than my dinky shower has."

She's right about the water pressure, but wrong about the rest. Dropping the crust on my plate, that I refuse to eat, I wipe at my hands and mouth before saying, "I like your apartment. It's cozy and sweet like you are."

Winnie's tongue darts out to clean off the dab of red sauce clinging to the corner of her mouth while her gaze narrows on me. "Like me? I'm small and cramped?"

"When you're full of me, you are." I waggle my eyebrows and blow her a kiss. It's so easy to be playful around Winnie. My mood is always light. We've tried sex without my pill and even when I go soft she never pouts or makes a big deal out of it. I'm starting to halfway believe that it really isn't an issue for her.

"You're so bad," she says, grabbing my crust and nibbling at it.

"You like me when I'm bad."

Her gray eyes roll as she laughs. "Cheesy too. Honestly, Reed, when we met, I never thought you would be so corny."

Reaching out, I smooth away the sauce on her lip that she missed. "First, I'm cheesy and now I'm corny? Should I be zesty too? How about a ham? A good balanced meal is important."

Laughing, she pelts me with the rest of the crust. "Stop!"

"Never," I declare with a grin and then tackle her to the couch, where I kiss her senseless.

We'll sell my house, I decide suddenly one morning four weeks into dating. And together we'll buy a different home, one that Winnie can put her personal stamp on. But first, I want my family's ring on her finger.

Later that morning, I put a call in to Elliot asking if I could go over some legal documents with her. Crafty sly woman that she is, she catches on immediately.

"Why don't we just meet at the bank so we can get the ring out of the safe deposit box together?"

Chuckling, I don't even try to argue, and we agree to meet at the bank in an hour.

The ring is a solitaire in a platinum setting that was Elliot's that she passed down to her oldest son, my Uncle Sterling, when he proposed to his wife, Rachael. Rachael decided that

she preferred the ten-carat rock that he gifted her after the birth of their son and returned the ring to Elliot, who's been safeguarding it for me all these years.

I don't understand the logic behind the when or the why she decided that I would be the one to need the ring, but when I think about proposing to Winnie, I know that's the ring I want to do it with.

After meeting Elliot at the bank and promising her I'll let her know the moment after I propose and Winnie accepts, I take the ring to one of the local jewelers to get it inspected and cleaned. It hasn't been out of that safe deposit box for at least twenty years, and I want to make certain it's looking its best when I propose.

Mr. Martin, the owner, assures me it's as flawless as the day it was crafted and whisks it away to clean. I'm killing time on my phone when a familiar voice has me lifting my head.

A heavily pregnant redhead is yanking on her finger, trying to get off her ring while one of Mr. Martin's assistants is attempting to calm her down. The assistant leaves to get something and at that moment the redhead turns and I'm staring at Christina, one of my exes that cheated on me.

"Oh, Reed," she exclaims, coming over and smiling up at me. "How are you?"

A polite professional smile pinches up my lips. "I'm well, Christina. You?"

Laughing, she pats at her large, distended stomach. "Oh, been busy."

"Congratulations," I say stiffly.

Not seeming to notice or care about my lack of genuine interest, she lets out a high-pitched giggle. "It was a surprise, to be sure. But a good one!" Her long lashes flutter as her green eyes trail over me. "Besides, after the week Grant and I had, I would have been shocked if I wasn't pregnant when we got back from Europe."

Mockingly, she puts a hand to her cheek and gives a little pout. "Oh sorry, Reed. Didn't mean to bring up any hard-

oops, I mean difficult subjects.”

“You didn’t.”

“Your ring is ready, Reed,” Mr. Martin says from behind me. Christina’s eyes widen as they land on the open ring box in the jeweler’s hand, the shine from the brilliant solitaire sending a prism of sparkles dancing around.

“Thank you.” I accept the box from him and give Christina a tight nod.

My shoulders are stiff as I exit the store and drive home instead of going to Winnie’s, like I’d planned. I’m pulling into the driveway when Winnie calls.

Pushing aside the sick feeling that’s been in my gut since my run-in with Christina, I answer the phone. “Hello, Winnie.”

“Reed! Garfield Ink wants my book!”

I no longer have to force my voice to sound cheerful as I congratulate her. “Winnie, that’s wonderful! Did they send over a contract? As your attorney, I’m more than happy to look it over for you before you sign.”

Her happy giggles make my chest constrict and my gaze goes to the ring box sitting on the passenger seat beside me.

“They did! I’m sure it’s a pretty standard contract, but if you would look it over, that would be great. I don’t understand half the legal jargon on there.”

“Oh, Winnie, I knew you could do it.”

“Thank you, Reed.” The line goes silent for a few beats and then she says, “I’m sorry to be bothering you at work. Thank you for answering.”

“You never bother me,” I force out. “In fact, why don’t you put on something as gorgeous as you and we go out to dinner to celebrate?”

“Or after work, you could come here, and we could both get naked to celebrate.”

My throat goes dry at the image her words paint, but my cock doesn't even twitch. Swallowing hard, I unclench my hands from the steering wheel. "Why don't we try dinner first?"

"Whatever you want, handsome, I'll see you after five."

"Yes, I'll see you then."

Staring straight ahead at the open door of my empty garage, I slowly pull in and then sit in my SUV for a long time after the door smoothly shuts behind me.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

WINNIE

When Reed arrives, I can't contain my excitement and leap into his arms, planting my lips on his and kissing him as I wind my legs and arms around him.

He's stiff for a moment before his mouth softens and then he's kissing me back, his tongue licking hotly at mine.

When I got the news about my book being accepted, I screamed and then immediately reached for the phone. He was the first person I thought to share my news with.

Not my dad, not Mimi, or even any of my handful of friends or my online writer buddies. It was Reed.

And that's when I realize I'm done hiding the truth of my feelings. I love him. And maybe he isn't there yet, but surely he has to feel something for me.

The smell of roses drift around me and that's when the slightly scratchy sensation at my back registers that it's from the bouquet of roses still clutched in Reed's hand.

"You got me flowers," I sigh happily, running my nose along the underside of his jaw, loving the scrape of his whiskers against my skin. He'll shave first thing in the morning, but by evening his beard has already popped through and I don't know why, but I find it so sexy.

Actually, I find everything about this man sexy. "Let's skip dinner," I say, nipping at his neck as the scent of his cologne invades my nose.

With a growl, Reed carries me into the bedroom. I'm wiggling in his arms and tossing my top as we go. By the time he lowers me to the bed, my bra is undone and I'm flinging it to the side and shimmying out of my skirt and bright blue panties.

Reed's blue eyes practically glow as his gaze roams over my naked body. He drops the flowers, his fingers trembling as he works to remove his clothes.

Standing, I go to him, making quick work of the small buttons of his shirt. Pushing the fine material of his blue shirt off his shoulders, I run my hands along his tight undershirt, feeling his muscles twitching under my caress.

I flick my tongue along the harden point of his nipple pressing through his undershirt and reach for his belt. Heat flares in my core as I undo his leather belt and open his pants. Slipping my hand inside his pants and boxers, his warm cock expands at my touch. My fingers grab his growing girth and rub along its familiar contours.

I'm no expert when it comes to dicks, but Reed has a very nice one. Something I've been too shy to vocalize, though I think my moans as he fucks me might give him a hint.

Crouching, I pull his smooth length out of the opening in his boxers and kiss the thick crown before running my tongue along it. He's not fully hard yet, but I know we can get him there with the right amount of licking and sucking.

I take him in my mouth and hum at the warm male taste of him. In the weeks we've been together, I've gotten quite good at giving him head and I love what I can do to him.

Having this man at my mercy turns me on in ways I never dreamed it could. My thighs are slick with my excitement as I take him to the back of my throat and hold him there while my tongue licks around the underside of his shaft.

Reed slides his fingers through my curls as he holds my head in place and slowly pumps his cock into my mouth. His throaty groan sends an answering whine of need throbbing through me, and I suck harder, trying to draw his salty-sweet release out.

"On the bed," he croaks out, letting go of my head and pulling his cock out of my mouth.

I jump on the bed and get on all fours, arching my back and widening my legs, presenting my slick pussy to him. Reed

goes over to the nightstand where I keep our supply of condoms and quickly puts one on. The mattress dips as he kneels behind me, the blunt head of his cock rubbing around my opening before he pushes inside.

His large body moves over me as his cock smoothly enters me, filling and stretching me in the way I love. His rhythm is hard and fast as he takes me. Thrusting back against him, I'm lost to the sensations in my throbbing center as my inner walls pulsate around him.

Reed's warm lips kiss my back, shoulders, and nape as he ruts into me. I love this position as the angle of his dick hits all the right spots inside. Even better when his hand goes to my clit, and he rolls it as his cock fills me from behind.

The pressure inside me builds to a fevered pitch, but my orgasm is just out of reach. Rocking on all fours, I hold back a moan when I feel his erection soften. On his next withdraw, he pops out and he curses.

Turning around, I reach for his dick, but Reed moves away, ripping off the condom and flinging it towards the small waste can near the wall.

With a growl, he shoves his cock back in his pants and grabs his shirt off the ground. He yanks it on as he walks out of the bedroom, stepping on some of the flowers as he goes.

In shock, it takes me a minute to respond, and I spring off the bed and grab my silk robe hanging off the doorknob, tugging it on as I race after him.

"You're leaving?" I gasp.

Whirling around, he pauses in buttoning up his shirt. "I shouldn't even be here. Winnie, you deserve a real man."

"And you're not?"

His broad shoulders slump. "It's always going to be like that. A few good times where I stay hard and then, boom, I lose my erection."

"Reed, you're the one letting your dick define you! Do you hear me complaining?"

Frowning, he gives up on his buttons. “Not yet. But how long do I have Winnie until you decide you’ve had enough and leave me?”

Panicky laughter escapes me. “Leave you? I love you!”

Incredulous blue eyes meet mine. “Winnie, I love you, too,” he groans, reaching for me.

Defly, I evade his hands even as my heart pounds faster at his words. “If you love me, then why are you walking out that door?”

“Because if I don’t leave now, I’ll never be able to. You deserve so much, Winnie, and I’m terrified that I won’t be able to give it to you.”

His eyes glisten like the ocean when the last rays of daylight hit the waves as he fights back his emotions.

My big, beautiful attorney isn’t perfect, and he’s scared. Scared of losing me.

Something in me cracks wide open and for one of the first times in my life I’m not nervous, instead confidence flows through me.

“If you’re so worried that a limp dick is all I care about, then it’s best that you go,” I say, crossing my arms and glaring at him. “You must not know me that well if you think I’m that shallow of a person. Or perhaps your love is that superficial that you believe anyone okay with your ED is the one for you.”

Reed’s lips tremble as he stares. “You’re the least shallow person that I’ve ever met.”

Taking slow, careful steps, he approaches me until he’s within hugging distance and I’m forced to lift my chin to meet his teary eyes.

“I don’t love you because you accept my ED,” he whispers. “I love you because you are the most gorgeous person inside and out that I’ve ever known. Your smile lights up a room and your eyes tell a million tales and when I’m with you, there’s nowhere else in the world I want to be.”

Sparkling tears cling to his eyelashes as he smiles. “When we’re apart, I’m happy knowing that it’s only a matter of time until I see you again.”

Slowly and carefully, as if he’s afraid I’ll run, his hands lift to my face, hovering there before gently cupping my jaw. His head lowers and the endless blue of his eyes fills my vision. “When I’m with you, I don’t feel like half a man. I feel like your man.”

My own tears splash down my face as I grab his wrists and go up on tiptoe to slam my mouth into his.

We kiss until we’re panting for breath and then we kiss some more.

Sweeping me up in his arms, Reed goes over to the couch and sits down, keeping me wrapped in his arms and snuggled on his lap.

“I still don’t think I deserve you, but I’m not letting you go,” he says.

“Good. Because I’m not letting you go either, you stubborn man!” I declare, hugging my arms around his neck.

Pressing his forehead to mine, he sighs. “I got a ring back at my house and I had all sorts of wonderful and romantic plans but screw it. Winnie, will you marry me?”

“With a proposal like that, how can I say no?” I laugh and press a kiss to his firm lips. “Yes,” I say softly. “A million times, yes.”

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE MATCHMAKERS

Elliot strides into the rec room, smug in the knowledge that all eyes are on her. “Well, ladies, we can now add Reed and Winnie to our list of perfect matches!”

Sandra’s cane clatters to the floor. “He proposed already?!” she gasps. “You just gave him the ring yesterday!”

“I was expecting a grander proposal as well, but apparently he’s quite eager to marry her and couldn’t wait.”

Pulling out her phone, Sandra’s brown eyes go wide. “Oh my, I missed a call from Winnie and several messages.” Her smile sweeps across her entire face. “Look!” she holds out her phone showing off a picture of the happy couple and the huge sparkling diamond on Winnie’s finger.

“How adorably sweet,” Brooke, the newest member of the matchmakers coos. “This makes me even more eager to get my granddaughter Alice matched up.”

Linda sighs as well. “I know. This is so exciting! Our system works!”

Roberta holds up her hands and goes around collecting high fives. “Two out of two, not too shabby at all!” she hoots.

“Or is it four out of four?” Margot asks, her gaze darting around. “I mean, because we’ve successfully matched up four people now.”

“Well, two couples,” Deborah puts in. “So my vote is for two out of two.”

“Oh, who cares,” Elliot says, tossing her hands up and setting the dozens of charms on her bracelets jangling. “All I care about is that Reed is in love and getting married.”

Sandra gets to her feet and gives Elliot a hug, handing the other woman a tissue for her unexpectedly teary eyes.

“Agreed, our grandkids are getting their happily ever afters, like they deserve.” She wipes at her own eyes and smiles.

“Here, here!” Agnes calls out, still in a wonderful mood since her grandson Seth was successfully matched to Charlotte’s granddaughter Ember almost two months ago. Apparently that relationship is full speed ahead with the two of them practically joined at the hip and talking about moving in together.

Charlotte waves around Agnes’s box of chocolates that Seth and Ember bring without fail every week. “Let’s celebrate,” she says.

Everyone crowds around and selects a few chocolates. Soon the box is empty, and the ladies are riding high on sugar and the success of their second matchup.

“Can my granddaughter be next?” Brooke asks, gazing around hopefully at the other ladies.

Margot shakes her head. “That’s not how our system works. Did you do the paperwork we gave you?”

“Oh, yes.” Looking down, Brooke rubs her thumb along a smear of chocolate on the top paper. “Whoops.”

“But we haven’t recruited the final tenth member needed,” Roberta says.

Staunchly Charlotte nods. “That’s true. What if we get a new member and their granddaughter’s score works best with one of the grandsons,” pausing she smiles at Linda, “or nephew. We don’t want to get tripped up here.”

Slowly, Margot’s hand rises. Quite out of character for her she shyly gets to her feet and glances around nervously. “I do have a single granddaughter too, not just my grandson.”

“Why didn’t you include her from the start?” Roberta calls out.

“Quickly fill out a form for her and let’s know her score!” Sandra suggests.

“She is newly single, which is why I didn’t include her before.” Margot lets out a soft sigh. “Honestly, I don’t even know if she’s ready for a new relationship yet.”

Elliot knocks on the table, the hollow vibration of the wood getting everyone’s attention. “Who wouldn’t be thrilled to have their perfect match handed to them. My vote is for Margot to fill out the forms and get her granddaughter’s score. All in agreement say aye.”

Several ayes sound.

“All opposed do the same.”

Not a single sound is heard as Margot refrains from voting, leaving things to majority rule.

Elliot nods and grins. “Everyone meet back here in two days to go over all the results and get our next couple lined up.”

“So exciting,” Linda gushes, giving Brooke’s shoulders a squeeze.

“Don’t forget to print this picture out,” Agnes says, tapping at Sandra’s phone. “We’ll add it to our collection.”

Lifting her eyes from the image of the happy couple, Sandra smiles. “Oh, absolutely. I’ll bring it to the next meeting. And hopefully then I’ll have all the details about the proposal since Elliot was skimpy with them.”

Agnes laughs and makes her way out of the rec room.

The room empties quickly, leaving just Sandra and Elliot behind.

Elliot pauses beside her. “Feel like having some tea?”

Smiling, Sandra nods. “Yes, let’s. After all we have some celebrating to do. Turns out your grandson is a good man.”

Nodding, Elliot lets her face relax into a warm smile. “Yes, and your granddaughter is indeed special. She won his heart and he claimed hers.”

Slowly the two walk to the cafeteria.

“Do you think the next match will be as successful?”
Sandra asks.

“I have no doubts,” Elliot replies. “Not with the
matchmakers in charge of their happily ever after.”

EPILOGUE

WINNIE

ONE YEAR LATER

I shift in the chair as my baby gleefully kicks at my bladder. I didn't want to find out what we were having, but now I'm wishing I did simply so I could scold them by name.

We have names picked out already. Christopher for a boy and Anne for a girl. I was one hundred percent certain of my choice for a girl and Reed came around to the idea once I explain that Anne of Green Gables was one of my favorite series of books growing up. Christopher was a harder decision as the literary world is filled with so many amazing male names. It was only when Reed shyly mentioned loving the stories of a certain stuffed bear and his friends that we hit upon Christopher.

I'm secretly rooting for a little girl, but Reed says he'll be delighted with either.

Before I became pregnant, I thought I wanted half a dozen children at least, but now that I'm thirty-eight weeks along, I'm thinking maybe there's a reason both Reed and I are only children.

Pregnancy is no joke. My poor body has been through the wringer. This baby is already a handful, and they haven't even been born yet.

Reed only agreed to this book signing because it was close to home, and I promised I would sit the entire time. But as our baby continues to beat me up from the inside, I'm now wishing I was up and walking. That seems to help.

Mimi waves to me from the middle of the line and I cheerfully wave back. She and a few of her friends from the senior home drove here to cheer me on. Even Reed's grandmother Elliot has several copies of my first published book, *Tales of the Lace Dragon*, in her arms to be autographed.

Another book is placed down in front of me by a smiling woman. Her eyes go from me to Reed, who is standing at my back, smiling proudly.

I've already overheard several not so quiet whispers wondering who that handsome man is. I should probably get a sign made. Meet the author and her gorgeous husband. He could sign the books too.

Holding in a snicker, I try to keep my face composed. "Who should I make it out to?"

"To Lily, please. I read this book to her every night. It's her favorite."

Warmth fills me at her words.

Both Reed and I already read to the baby, but I'm looking forward to the day when we can read to our unexpected little one and see the look of wonder and joy on their face.

I never got around to getting on birth control because by the time I went in for my appointment I was already pregnant. We're starting a family earlier than we might have planned, but as we're both learning so many of the best things in life happen when least expected. Our entire relationship is a perfect example of that.

Our crazy blind date setup, Reed's proposal, my pregnancy, even finding our dream home on the beach was unexpected. One of lawyers at Reed's firm mentioned that his uncle was selling his beach house to move to Florida. That night Reed casually mentioned it to me, we set up an appointment to see it and made an offer that same day.

Signing the book with a flourish, I hand it back. "Thank you and your daughter."

"You're welcome. Congrats on your upcoming baby."

My smile grows. "Thank you."

Reed's hand drops to my shoulder and then his warm breath caresses my ear, stirring up the wild wisps of hair that sprang free from my braid. "Are you feeling okay? Do you need a break?"

I can't help rolling my eyes. I love my husband but he's such a worrywart sometimes. I'd blame it on pregnancy hormones, but unless they jumped ship from me, it's just him not liking that he can't be in total control.

"I'm sitting on my butt and your kid is playing soccer with my insides. I'm as good as I'm going to be."

Turning, my nose bumps into his and we both smile.

"Soon," he whispers, his gaze bright with happiness.

"Soon," I echo and give his nose a quick peck.

Several gusty sighs fill the area and I think I cleared up the question about who Reed is.

Eventually Mimi and her crew make it to the front of the line, and everyone is tossing their congrats our way and giving Reed tips on keeping me happy. He nods and smiles.

We owe a lot to our matchmakers.

Some days it still feels like a dream to me that the man I used to stare at across the room is now my husband and we're expecting a child basically any day now. I thought he was perfect. Turns out he is perfectly imperfect and best of all- Loves me completely.

He helps me break out of my comfort zone when it comes to being shy and meeting new people. I never would have been able to make it through a book signing before him. He cheers me on every time I finish a new book. And even helps me find a quiet corner when I simply can't cope with another function which, as his wife, I need to show up at showing my support for my brilliant husband.

And I was wrong. He doesn't look out of place at all, sitting on an old canvas camp chair in my dad's miniscule backyard, chewing on a smoked rib with a beer in his other hand. He looks pretty dang perfect to me.

Grabbing his hand, I give his fingers a squeeze, smiling when he squeezes right back. Our gazes lock and the rest of the world goes silent as I stare at the man I love.

My stomach does a slow flip as he stares right back. Except it's not my stomach flipping, but another contraction. I've been having them steadily over the past hour.

But with only thirty minutes left of the book signing, I'll keep this to myself and then surprise Reed on our way home by suggesting a slight detour to the hospital might be in order.

It's good to keep my husband on his toes.

"What's that smile for?" he asks, leaning closer, uncaring of the audience of seniors grinning broadly at us.

"I love you," I whisper.

"I love you too, Winnie," he whispers back. "I'll call the hospital to let them know we're coming."

My eyes widen and Mimi, whose hearing is far too good for a woman her age, gives a whoop and spreads the word.

Before I know it, everyone is helping to pack us up and send us on our way.

Seven hours later, Christopher Elliot Jackson makes his grand entrance into the world with a head full of blond fuzz and a cry loud enough to rival our cats, Stevie and Bill's, cries for wet food every morning.

This new addition is going to turn our whole lives upside down, but there is no other person I'd rather go through this adventure with than Reed. I couldn't have penned a better happily ever after than the one I'm living.

THE END

Want more Reed and Winnie? For a steamy bonus chapter sign up for Lisa's newsletter! [Undoing the Grumpy Guy: Bonus Chapter](#)

Excited for the matchmakers to set up the next couple? The next book is [Wooing the Shy Guy](#), where you'll meet Dylan and Tracy.

Thank you so much for reading! I hope you enjoyed Reed and Winnie's story. Please leave a review as I love hearing what my readers think.

This story touched on a rather sensitive subject that affects millions of men each year. Not only does this issue often have underlying health concerns but the mental aspect takes a toll as well. Including, but not limited to, low self-esteem, embarrassment, feelings of being undesirable, unattractive, or unworthy. There are options out there, but having a loving, supportive partner can help alleviate the feelings of shame many men experience.

Undoing the Grumpy Guy was a tricky story for me to write, but I hope I treated Reed's condition with care and respect and you're ready for the next imperfect hero.

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And as always lovely readers, read on!