



WHAT
WAS
MEANT
TO BE

Q.B. TYLER

BLURRED LINES SERIES

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PLAYLIST

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- “After the Storm”—Kali Uchis
- “Save Your Tears”—The Weeknd
- “I’m Still in Love With You”—Al Green
- “Ordinary People”—John Legend
- “Love in the Dark”—Jessie Reyez
- “You’ve Got the Love”—Florence + the Machine
- “Woman”—Doja Cat
- “Make You Feel My Love”—Adele
- “I Want To Know What Love Is”—Foreigner
- “Earned It”—The Weeknd
- “It’s All Coming Back To Me Now”—Celine Dion
- “A Sunday Kind of Love”—Etta James
- “Love on the Brain”—Rihanna
- “By Your Side”—Sade
- “Leave the Door Open”—Bruno Mars, Anderson Paak & Silk Sonic
- “A Thousand Years”—Christina Perri

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To anyone and everyone that reached out to me these past six months.

To all of you that kept me going.

Thank you for being there in my darkest hours.

I hope each and every one of you know how much I appreciate you.

As I said in a different book, everyone needs a home team.

Thank you for being mine.

PROLOGUE

Jacob

“She’s getting fucking married?” The words come out harsher than I intended, leaving my mouth through gritted teeth. I have one hand gripping the phone tightly and in the other, the engagement party invitation that I want to rip to shreds. Seeing the names *Whitney Monroe and Parker Anderson* printed in gold script makes me fucking enraged. I clench my fist, damaging the crisp white paper in the process before I toss it towards my desk. I can’t bear the sight of the words another second.

“Together with their families.”

Whitney’s family. My family. The thought of watching her get married sends a wave of sadness through me. Followed by a wave of anger. Then regret.

How can she be getting married?

“You said she wasn’t dating anyone seriously.”

“I said I wasn’t sure but that things with this guy didn’t *seem* serious,” my younger brother, Trey, corrects.

“I told you to keep an eye on her. Don’t you think that this is something that I would have wanted to know? Before she had a Goddamn ring on her finger?” I’m pacing the length of my small office, trying my best to keep my voice down with the thin walls separating all of the doctors on the floor.

“You *asked* me to keep her safe,” he retorts. “You didn’t say anything about cock blocking her or interfering in her dating life or whatever the fuck. I do have a life of my own, you know. And what difference does it even make? You broke it off with *her*. So, you’re subscribing to the belief now that if you can’t have her, nobody can?”

That's exactly how it is. Whitney Monroe belonged to me regardless of our current relationship status. I don't know who this guy is, but there's no way in hell she's walking down that aisle with him.

"That's exactly what the fuck I'm saying." I decide to tell him the truth because I told Trey everything. Even about the intense two-year long relationship I found myself in with my best friend's daughter. The relationship that left her broken-hearted when I ended things and me with regret, raging self-loathing and anger at myself for letting things get so far. I hadn't ended things to be cruel or because I didn't love her, I ended it because I felt we didn't have a future. I was not only her parents' best friend but her godfather which meant according to every rule in life, she should have been off limits to me. I'd been there the day she was born and through all of her milestones, all of her birthdays and even helped teach her to drive. I'd been there with her father threatening the boys with what would happen if any of them ever hurt her.

The irony that I also taught her to fuck and ended up hurting her way worse than any of those boys is not lost on me.

It all happened so fast. The summer she turned eighteen somehow coincided with the summer I lost my mind when the girl I'd known for eighteen years became a woman right before my eyes. A woman that suddenly had all my attention and we found ourselves unable to keep our hands off of each other and sneaking around behind everyone's back. At my office, my car, my house on weekends, there was no chance her parents would drop by unannounced *and if they did, we always had contingency plans* and practically every Four Seasons Hotel in the State of California.

I don't know how no one caught on to be honest.

Our affair was intense, bordering on a burning obsession with each other. I hadn't felt that way about anyone maybe ever. I woke up consumed with her. I went to sleep with her on my mind if she wasn't curled up in bed next to me. If I was away from her for more than a few hours, my hands itched with the need to touch her. My mouth desperate to kiss her, taste her skin or the wet flesh between her legs. I was enamored with her. I was in love in a way that I'd never felt before and it hit me hard and fast.

I had been engaged once before breaking it off a few weeks before the big day at which point, I vowed never to get serious with anyone again and I had a series of flings and short-term relationships throughout my thirties.

Enter legal-aged Whitney Monroe.

I'd learned that she'd been infatuated with me for years, praying for the moment she turned eighteen and that I'd maybe reciprocate her feelings. "*Or at very least one night of sex.*"

That one night of sex where I took her virginity turned into another night and another until it was almost every night and some days. Weekends away. Secret vacations where she'd told her parents she was away with friends. Sneaking out in the middle of the night *because she still lived at home at the time* so we could fuck in my car.

The sneaking around was fun and the thrill of the forbidden kept us both coming back for more but it grew to be more than that.

There were *I love you's* and talks of the future together. There were nights when we were drunk on tequila and each other as we whispered our vows of devotion. We'd been together two years and her parents still didn't know. The only people she had told were friends at school that weren't as familiar with our family dynamic and her cousin Chloe who almost lost her shit when she found out. And that was only because Trey had accidentally slipped up and told her during their pillow talk or whatever.

I'd gone so far down this road with her that I didn't know how to explain it to my best friends who just happened to be her parents. *How could I have let things go on this long without telling them? How did I let things get so far? How did I let myself fall in love with the one person I knew I couldn't have? Shouldn't want?*

I went back and forth for weeks, wondering what was the worst thing they could do. They could forbid me from seeing her. But Whitney wouldn't listen and suddenly there would be this irreparable rift in their family that I would have caused. Uncomfortable holidays and family functions, heated arguments, and tension so thick and able to divide a family. Not to mention, on top of all of that, I'd lose my best friends.

It wasn't until Doctors Without Borders needed me on another team, this time in Mexico to help when COVID-19 hit that I decided it was time for Whitney and me to have a talk about us. The look on her face still haunts me when I told her the news that I was leaving and that it would be best to use this as the ending point of our relationship.

Three Years Ago:

“I can’t come with you...?” Her brown eyes are brimming with unshed tears, realization dawning on her that I wasn’t telling her to pack a suitcase. “Doctors are supposed to just up and leave their families?”

“Technically yes. If it’s your first time, you’re not allowed to bring family at all.” I wince, wishing I’d left out that part, knowing she’ll have a rebuttal for it.

Her brows furrow and I can see the wheels turning in her head. “But it’s not your first time. You opened that hospital in Mexico years ago...” She bites her bottom lip and under normal circumstances that visual would have prompted my mouth between her legs. “JP, I don’t want to be without you for eighteen months or possibly even longer.” She crosses her arms and curls her lips into a pout which is a look I’d been on the receiving end of many times and always ended with me giving her whatever she wanted. I flinch at her calling me “JP,” the nickname she’s had for me for years. She’d stopped calling me that when we first started this, opting to call me by my first name instead in an attempt to shift the dynamic of our relationship. She’d only called me that when she was feeling extra vulnerable or at times in bed when we’d tapped into her daddy kink.

“Whitney, sweetheart, you have school and a whole life ahead of you where you have to decide what you want to do. And furthermore, how would you explain being in Mexico with me? Do you think your parents would want you traipsing off to another country while the world is in such chaos? I don’t even know what I’m walking into.”

“Classes are going to be virtual anyway next semester. But I can also take some time off. My parents would be fine if I was with you. They know you’d take care of me and maybe this is the sign we need to tell them about us. I mean, we’ve been hiding this for almost two years now. Maybe it’s time they know?” She lists off the exact counter arguments I knew she’d use. Ones that made sense in a perfect world. But our world wasn’t perfect. It was messy and intertwined with so many other players that would be less than pleased about the news of our relationship.

The idea of telling my two best friends that I’m head over heels in love with their daughter and have been sleeping with her regularly for two years has the anxiety slithering up my spine.

Kevin and Michelle Monroe have been my best friends since freshman year of college. I was roommates with Kevin that first year and Michelle lived across the hall. It was love at first sight for Kevin and Michelle and

before long, the three of us were inseparable. I'd even dated her roommate for a while making the four of us annoying co-dependent assholes. I'd been the best man at their wedding, godfather to both Whitney and her older brother Mason and had been a part of every memorable date of their lives until now.

How was I supposed to tell them this? I'd lose the two most important people in my life outside of those I was blood related to, the two constants I'd had for almost twenty years.

But the trade-off was losing Whitney, and I didn't love that either.

"Whitney..." I take a deep breath preparing to say the words that will undoubtedly break her heart. "It's just not a good idea."

"Wh-what isn't?"

"Any of it. You coming to Mexico. Telling your parents. It's going to destroy them, Whitney. Your relationship with them. My relationship with them."

"But... what about your relationship with me?" The unshed tears from earlier are now cascading down her cheeks at full speed. Her heart clearly communicating to her tear ducts what was about to happen. She takes a deep breath and closes her eyes before opening them again. "Are you breaking up with me?"

My heart thumps painfully at the thought of not being with her. Not being with the most amazing, brilliant, kind, unbelievably gorgeous woman that I'd ever met. Be strong, Jacob. She needs this. She's young and she needs to experience life. "I just don't see how it can work, Whitney." My words are quiet and soft. The tone I use when I'm making love to her. I swallow. "It was never supposed to get this far... I wasn't... we weren't..."

"You weren't supposed to fall in love with me? Is that where you were going with that?" she says, her tone harsh and more biting than it had been before. "Or was this all just a fucking game to you?" I can see the pain she's trying to hide beneath the anger but I won't have her thinking that this wasn't real.

"It was never a game and you know that. Sometimes things just don't work out no matter how bad we want them to." In its most basic terms, that is what this comes down to. We want to be together but it isn't that simple. Our life isn't that simple.

She stands, wrapping her arms around herself. "I don't get a say in this at all? You've just made up your mind about this without a care in the world

about my feelings? Let me guess, ‘when I’m older I’ll understand?’” The sarcasm drips from her voice, even though I believe that there’s some truth to her statement whether she thinks it or not.

“I do think time and some worldly experience will give you some perspective, baby.” The word slips out and I chastise myself when I see the anger fall from her face at the one word leaving my lips.

“You don’t want this.” She moves into my arms and wraps hers around me. “I know you love me.”

“I do,” I tell her honestly. I wasn’t about to lie to her after all we’d been through and I wasn’t about to let her think that this wasn’t going to be hard on me as well. “I do love you. But sometimes, love isn’t enough. Sometimes loving someone means letting them go.”

“I don’t believe that.” She squeezes me tighter and wipes her tears on my shirt. I rub her back as her shoulders begin to shake. “Please don’t let me go.” Her voice wobbles and I wish I could take her pain away. “I can’t do this without you. I need you.”

Her words cause a painful thump in my chest because in this moment, I don’t know how to move forward without her either. But, one of us has to be strong. “Please don’t do this,” I beg, knowing that she has the power to break me if I don’t shut this down.

“I love you,” she murmurs. “Please.” She sniffles.

I rest my chin on top of her head trying to keep the tears of my own at bay at the thought of it being over between us. “I’m sorry.”

“I can’t believe this is the end.”

“Neither can I.”

I’m well aware that I haven’t said anything to Trey in a few minutes as the particular trip down memory lane that I’ve avoided for the past three years comes at me in full force. I clear my throat and the words are out of my mouth before I can stop them.

“I’ll be home in two days.”

CHAPTER ONE

Jacob

“I cannot believe you’re fuckin’ here,” Trey says as he gets out of his truck in the pickup line at LAX airport. “You haven’t been home in three years.”

“A lot of people haven’t done a lot of shit in three years,” I remind him. It was nearing the end of 2022 and things were finally starting to get back to a bit of normalcy. But it was crazy that I hadn’t seen my brother in almost three years after years of living not only in the same city but the same neighborhood. The time had been good to him, giving him a bit more muscle after he’d turned one of his rooms into his home office slash gym and taking his Zoom calls from his treadmill. He looked at least ten pounds lighter with dark brown hair after probably one too many women told him that no serious adult man had blonde hair. We looked more alike now more than ever despite our four-year age difference. I was just a few inches taller and now I’m much tanner due to my time in Mexico and his time indoors staring at a computer screen.

“How were you able to get home so fast anyway? Doctors Without Borders just lets you come and go as you please now?” he says as we load my suitcases into the back of his truck. “Hey, watch the paint. I just got it detailed.” He points at where I dragged the suitcase *barely* against the bumper before putting it in the trunk of his Range Rover.

I ignore my younger brother’s neuroses about his truck and answer his question. “My obligatory eighteen months has been up, I just stayed to help out. There is still a lot of work to be done. Besides...” I shrug as I get into the car. “I didn’t have a reason to be here.”

“Just your family.”

I roll my eyes. “Okay, Mom. You guys are all grown. I’m unmarried with no children. Given the current state of the world, I think you guys can forgive my absence on a few holidays.” I snort, already preparing myself for the guilt trip I’m going to get from my mother, I’m sure.

“You know how Mom is, especially after Dad died. She likes to have us all here. She’s thrilled you’re home, though I can’t see why. It’s not like her favorite child hasn’t been around.”

“Keep telling yourself you’re the favorite.” I scratch my beard, that I’d finally gotten around to shaving to an appropriate length. I’d let it grow a little rampant while I was in Mexico, letting it grow for weeks at a time before trimming it. Now that it’s back to the stubble I used to have, my face feels fucking strange without the extra hair.

I stare out the window as we haven’t moved yet with all the midday LAX traffic and note a man and woman seemingly reunite for the first time. She drops her luggage and launches herself into his arms, wrapping her legs around his waist and I notice her shoulders move up and down and I wonder if she’s crying. She pulls away and then their lips connect and my heart begins to pound in my chest at the thought of having a similar reunion with Whitney.

She’s fucking engaged. I ball my hands into fists. *How did this happen? What the fuck do Kev and Miche think?* I think to myself.

“So, we’re just ignoring the elephant in the room?” I don’t respond because frankly I’m tired from traveling and don’t feel like dealing with Trey’s relentless line of questioning. “That the only reason you’re even home is because you got your panties in a twist about Whitney getting married? You’re not going to do anything stupid, right? I called Chloe and she says Whitney is excited.”

I raise an eyebrow, knowing that this is a sure way to get the heat off me for now. “I didn’t know you were still talking to Chloe.” Chloe Monroe, Whitney’s older cousin, and my brother, had a relationship as complicated as mine and Whitney’s. Of course, it wasn’t a huge deal to anyone with there being only a nine-year age difference between them versus mine and Whitney’s over twenty year difference. *Not to mention, no one was anyone’s parental figure so that fucking helps.* They’d met at one of Michelle and Kevin’s holiday parties and proceeded to spend the next year and a half fucking without any kind of label which led to the age-old question from Chloe of “what are we?” to which my fuckboy of a brother at the time could

not provide an answer.

So, in typical fashion, she'd moved on and now it seems he's still pining over her although claims he's over it. *Tale as old as time.*

"We talk from time to time but I called her yesterday when you got all territorial and possessive on the phone about Whitney to figure out if you guys were still talking and you just hadn't told me."

"You fucking told her you talked to me?" I groan, knowing that it's definitely gotten back to Whitney by now that I was asking about her.

"No, dick," he says as he merges onto the freeway after getting through the last of the airport traffic. "I kept it nonchalant. I said the same thing I said to you. I didn't realize it was that serious. Apparently, no one did and the guy proposing was kind of a shock to everyone, including Whitney." I feel his gaze trying to read my expression, but I try my best to appear unfazed by the news. "I can hear your thoughts bro, she's *happy*. It took her a year to get over you."

"And then somehow met someone and is engaged two years later?" My anger rises again at the thought of anyone touching her. Kissing her. *Fuck*. I pinch the bridge of my nose, willing the headache away that I feel coming on and wishing I hadn't had two Scotch on the rocks on the plane. "I need to see for *myself* that she's happy."

I stare out the window as my thoughts drift back to the last time I returned home after being gone for a little over a year. The first time I saw Whitney since she turned eighteen and the first time, I saw her as a woman.

Five Years Ago:

After stopping by to see my mother, I went straight to Kevin and Michelle's for dinner. Michelle was easily the best cook I knew and she always prepared one of my favorite meals whenever I returned. I walk into the house without so much as a knock and I'm hit with the smell of lasagna. *Fuck*. Yes.

"*Oh my gosh, oh my gosh!*" Michelle comes bounding down the stairs and tackles me and wraps her arms around me tightly. "We missed you so much! How are you? You've lost weight." She pinches my arm. "Were you not eating enough? I'll send more food next time. You look good though! Except this hair. You need a haircut." She pulls at my hair as she's firing off her questions and comments a mile a minute in true Michelle Monroe

fashion. “KEVIN!” she screeches before pushing her glasses up into her blonde hair. “Mason and Whitney aren’t here yet but they should be home shortly,” she informs me.

“Mason is coming home?” Their oldest child, Mason was in his final semester at UCLA and from what I’ve seen from social media and more than a few panicked texts regarding a flavor of the week’s missed period, I know that he’s had more than his share of fun so I am surprised that he’d miss out on one of his last weekends at college just to come home to see me.

“Of course. Well, I think just for tonight and he’s driving back in the morning. Whitney is at graduation practice but she should be home soon.” That was one of the reasons I’d opted to come home now, because both of my godchildren were graduating from college and high school and I wouldn’t have missed either for the world.

“You left your mom’s house like an hour ago. What, did you walk here?” Kevin says as he moves up the stairs from his mancave in the basement. It’s crazy that it looks as if Michelle hasn’t aged and yet Kevin looks older every time I see him. “You can thank Whitney Monroe for that.” I remember him saying when I’d made a joke about starting to dye his hair. “Every single one of my gray hairs comes from having a daughter.”

“I stopped at home first, give me a break.” I chuckle as he pulls me in for a hug.

“After all this time, he’s still clingier with you than he is with me.” Michelle rolls her eyes and walks toward the kitchen leaving me with my best friend.

About an hour after I’d arrived, I hear the front door open and the sound of heels against the hardwood floors of the foyer. I smile, preparing for Whitney to make her entrance and I stand to give her a hug.

“I would know that car in the driveway anywhere,” I hear her familiar voice and then she enters the room.

I mean, I think it’s Whitney.

My eyes widen and for a second, I wonder if this is a friend of Whitney’s because unlike the voice, this face and body are not familiar. “JP!!” she squeals, and it takes less than a second until she’s in my arms. “I can’t believe you’re here! I’ve missed you so much!”

I am glad that Kevin and Michelle aren’t in the room at the moment because I’m unable to hide my absolute shock that this woman currently pressed up against me is my goddaughter. I pull back and I am at a loss for

words. Her braces are gone, leaving perfect blindingly white teeth. Her strawberry blonde hair that she used to keep pin straight was full of volume that fell around her shoulders in dark mahogany luscious waves. Her waist was slim but her hips were full and just below her shoulders sat the perkiest, full breasts I'd ever seen on a woman. I take a step back, dropping my hands from her shoulder as if I've been burned. I mean, maybe I had; I have to be in hell for looking at Whitney this way. For even noticing her breasts or the slope of her hips or picturing what she'd look like from behind.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" Her head tilts to the side and if I didn't know any better, I'd say she knew exactly what I was thinking at this very moment and why I was looking at her with a look of complete and utter shock and maybe... intrigue.

"You... you just look so grown up." I try my best to come up with something more eloquent but the words get caught in my throat. I'm struggling to find words other than: "Where did those come from?" as I point at her chest.

She bites her bottom lip and scrunches her nose in a way I'm sure I've seen her do a thousand times and yet this time makes my blood begin to heat in my veins. Heat... and rush south. FUCK. "A lot can happen in a year." She lets out a sigh before tucking a hair behind her ear. "I mean, I am eighteen now." She winks, actually fucking winks at me before turning around and calling for her mother leaving me with a scent that I could only equate with pure sex.

I shift in my seat, trying my best to keep my cock from rising as I remember sitting through the most painfully awkward dinner with Kevin, Michelle, Mason and the innocent girl who used to be my goddaughter. I was hyper aware of every move she made, every time she spoke, every time those bright brown eyes found mine across the dinner table.

"This is going to be a fucking shitshow," Trey mumbles under his breath breaking my thoughts of that night I decided to blow up my entire life. "Am I taking you home first? Or we going to Mom's?"

CHAPTER TWO

Whitney

I stare down at the text message from my older brother, Mason wishing that the words would morph into something else. Literally anything else. Once upon a time they were my favorite words and ones I looked forward to hearing but now it just gave me a feeling that a tornado was about to rip apart my life.

Mason: Mom just called, Jacob just showed up at the house. They want us to come over tonight for a small get together.

Mason: Did you know he was coming?

Now I realize why Mom called me earlier. I didn't answer because I've had to limit her to two phone calls a day because ever since I got engaged, she's felt the need to call me every hour on the hour with ideas for the wedding.

Me: Not a clue.

Mason: I guess your good news travels fast.

Me: Fuck off.

Mason was four years older than me and yet we were still pretty close growing up and I'd probably call him my best friend now. We rarely argued even when we were younger and he's always been one person I knew I could always depend on. He was never judgmental and only offered his opinions when they were solicited. He was overprotective without being overbearing and was easily the one person I'd call if I ever needed help burying a body.

I might just have to call in that favor tonight.

When Jacob ended things and left for Mexico, I tried my best to keep it in, but after two weeks, one night I broke down and called Mason hysterically after too much tequila and confessed everything.

His response? “I knew it.” He then proceeded to let me cry for the next four and a half hours. *Okay, weeks.*

Fine, months. Whatever.

My phone begins to ring in my hand and I know it’s him without even looking. “I’m not going,” I say as I answer the phone. I lean against the island in Parker’s pristine all white kitchen wondering if I should fix myself a drink to calm my nerves.

“So, you’re just going to avoid him... forever?”

“No, but it’s going to be on my terms how I decide to see him and it’s not going to be alone and without Parker.” My fiancé was currently out of town on business in New York and wouldn’t be back for almost a week. Normally, I would go with him but I was in my first year of law school and it just so happened to be my midterms this week and jet setting across the country with my fiancé wasn’t exactly an excuse to get me out of my exams plus I had a paper due Monday.

“Why? Do you not trust yourself?” Mason asks and part of me thinks he’s being a smartass, but the rational part of me knows that he’s genuinely curious if the feelings are still there. If there was still a spike in my heart rate at the thought of seeing him tonight. If I wasn’t already going through my closet to find the sexiest dress I had that didn’t appear that I was trying too hard, but actually that I didn’t give a fuck. *The opposite of love isn’t hate, it’s indifference. The opposite of love isn’t hate, it’s indifference.* I begin chanting to myself.

Clearly the answer is no to all of these questions.

“It’s not that, I just... it’s going to be awkward.” I hadn’t seen or talked to him since I left his house the day he broke up with me. He’d left for Mexico the next day and this was the first time he’d been home in three years. I’d texted him a few times and called him even more during the first month post breakup when I’d had too much to drink but he never answered.

“That’s fair. Do you really think he’s here because he heard about you and Parker?” It’s hard to say. I got engaged a month ago and the engagement party invitations went out earlier this week. But there is no way that my parents would have waited until he got the invitation to tell him. I would be surprised if they hadn’t called him the night I got engaged. My dad and JP

told each other literally everything. Their bromance is actually kind of cute even after all these years.

“Part of me thinks yes, but do you really think Mom and Dad didn’t tell him before now? If that were the case, wouldn’t he have come home a month ago?” I know he’s not on social media anymore, I remember the exact day he deleted everything about two months after we’d broken up. I spiraled even further after that. I liked having a little bit of a connection to him and he severed that without so much as a reason or warning. One day he had a Facebook and Instagram and the next both were gone. I’d been stalking him almost hourly at that point, so I guess he’d done me a favor but it had hurt like hell to just be completely cut off from him. The only things I learned was through my parents here and there when they’d mention that they had talked to him and it took everything out of me not to go crazy with questioning whenever his name came up.

“Maybe it’s best if you just rip the Band-Aid off. What can really happen with Mom and Dad around and whoever the fuck else they invited over. Probably half the neighborhood. You’ll be safe from any awkward interactions or conversations,” he says and I make my way out of the kitchen and up the stairs to the bedroom I share with my fiancé. Parker was eight years older than me and there were definitely times that I felt our age gap. Like the fact that he owns his own house, invests in the stock market and knows the difference between an IRA and a 401k. (I think he has both.) He was in a much different phase in his life but I never felt like he treated me like I was that much younger. There could be an air of condescension in age gap relationships sometimes without even trying to and I never felt that with Parker.

Unlike with Jacob who told me that I’d understand why we couldn’t be together when I got older.

As if love was something I didn’t understand at nineteen.

I push those thoughts out of my head as I stare into my closet wondering what I should wear tonight knowing that I was going to see Jacob Price tonight for the first time since I was sobbing into his arms begging him not to break us. *Break me.* The humiliation washes over me for the millionth time.

“Fine. But you better not leave my side, Mase, I mean it.” I’m not sure if Jacob knows that Mason knows about our affair, but I do know that Mason could become a little less polite about Jacob’s presence and his intentions especially after a few drinks.

“I got you. Mom says be there around eight.”



I’m just getting out of the shower when my doorbell begins ringing nonstop like someone is pressing it over and over again. “What the fuck?” I yell, wondering who in God’s name is showing up to my house unannounced and ringing my doorbell like it’s an emergency. I look down at my phone and roll my eyes when I see I have three missed calls from Chloe. I move swiftly down the stairs, keeping the towel wrapped around me tightly before I open the door. “Seriously?”

“Jesus, can’t you hear?” Chloe steps in with a bottle of champagne in one hand and her leather jacket and clutch tucked under her other arm.

Her shoulder-length blonde hair had that sexy tousled look like she’d just rolled out of bed and as usual she had on a full face of makeup complete with lashes and bright red lipstick. She was wearing a two-piece cropped black short-sleeved top and a black skirt that fell to just below her knees with her favorite open toe Givenchy heels that wrap around the ankle. Which leads me to believe that her and Mason are probably trying to go into the city later. *Count me in. The less I’m around Jacob the better.*

“I was in the shower and you didn’t tell me you were coming over.” I narrow my eyes and close the door behind her as she makes her way into the kitchen. “Pour me a glass, I’m going to go put on a bra and some underwear,” I say as I run up the stairs. I pull on a pair of white panties and a matching strapless lace bra before pulling my hair out of the towel. I plan to let it air dry a little before diffusing it to give my hair some natural beach waves so I part my hair and let it fall around my shoulders.

My hair is longer than the last time he saw me. I wonder if he’ll notice. The wayward thought sneaks into my head and I shake it, trying my best to rid it from my brain.

No. I let out a breath. Whitney, no. Get this out of your head. You’re with Parker. You’re happy. He’s kind and sweet and takes care of you. He fixed what Jacob broke. You cannot do this.

Do not let “The Notebook” romanticize it. Allie was still a cheater and

her fiancé deserved better.

“I thought you might need a little liquid courage for this.” Chloe hands me the champagne flute full of bubbles and I resist the urge to down it all in one gulp knowing that if I’m drunk when I get to my parents’ house, it will make this situation worse. “Did you honestly think you were going to be able to avoid JP forever?”

“Jacob,” I respond without thinking. I was the only person that called him JP and I used to be very territorial about that nickname. *Evidently, I still am.*

She rolls her eyes. “Yes, I forgot that’s your special name but you know what I’m saying, Whit. You knew this was inevitable. You’re getting *married* and he’s your parent’s best friend.”

I shut my eyes and let out an exasperated sigh. “I know, and I did expect it. I guess I wasn’t expecting it this soon and while Parker was out of town.”

She cocks an eyebrow at me and gives me a wicked grin. “Are you worried something might... like happen between you two?”

My eyes widen. “No!” I shriek.

“Okay ow.” She winces. “And liar.” She blinks her eyes several times before sitting her drink down on my nightstand and hopping on my bed.

“He broke up with me.”

“Two years ago, and he hasn’t seen you since. Maybe he’s been having regrets this whole time and now he’s back to fix that mistake.” She smirks.

“What does that even mean, Chloe?” I ask her as I come out of the walk-in closet in the white lace backless jumpsuit that I’d bought among a million other white pieces of clothing when Parker and I got engaged. “Also, you’re not helping.”

“It means that maybe you’re so worried that with Parker not being here you run the risk of you and Daddy JP falling back into old patterns.” She refills her glass and tops mine off too. “That Jacob will take one look at you and rip that jumpsuit off of you before you even have a chance to blink. That he’ll drop to his knees and confess that these past three years have been miserable AF and he misses you and loves you and to hell with Aunt Michelle and Uncle Kev; he’ll be damned if you marry another man that isn’t him,” she says dramatically, placing a hand across her heart and then over her forehead.

My mouth drops open because if I was being honest with myself, that thought *had* crossed my mind. I didn’t necessarily want him to but I did think there was a possibility. “You read too many romance novels,” I tell her

before moving toward my dresser to grab the Cartier watch that Parker had gotten me for my birthday last year as well as my engagement ring.

“I sense deniiiiial,” she sings.

I ignore her as I move into my bathroom to finish my hair. I stand in front of the mirror at my sink staring at myself in the mirror. The bathroom has *his* and *hers* sinks and it’s extremely obvious which is which. My curling iron, bobby pins, Q-Tips, makeup wipes and face wash line my sink as well as my Chanel perfume that I’ve been wearing for years. I plug in my blow dryer and flip my head over and begin diffusing my hair. “He wants you back.” I hear from the entrance to my bathroom and I immediately flip it over and stare at my cousin with wide eyes.

“No, he doesn’t. I mean... he does? Who said that? Did you talk to Trey? Who said he wants me back?” My heart begins pounding in my chest and adrenaline rushes through my veins at the thought.

Chloe leans against the doorjamb. “I said, *what if* he wants you back?” She blinks her eyes rapidly. “But I think I just got my answer.”



“I love you and I wish you were here,” I say into the phone as I stand in front of my parent’s house. Chloe and I had decided to take an Uber because I was already anticipating drinking too much, especially since I was already feeling a slight buzz from the champagne. Now I have a feeling in the pit of my stomach that I can’t decide if it’s nerves, anxiety, excitement or maybe a combination of the three. Regardless, the feeling is trying to convince me that another drink will calm whatever it is coursing through me. Chloe had already left to go inside when I decided to call Parker. I wanted to hear his voice. Wanted to hear him tell me that he missed me and wished he was here too. Instead, he’s given me a hard time ever since we’ve gotten on the phone.

“You know how you get when you and Chloe drink too much. I can already hear it in your voice,” he responded without even an acknowledgment to what I said. “And your parents wait until I leave town to throw you some sort of engagement party? Without your fiancé?”

“It’s not an engagement party, Parker. Our engagement party is next

month. They are just having their friends over.”

He sighs. “I shouldn’t even be surprised; your parents hate me.” I brace myself for the conversation we’d had at least a dozen times before.

“They don’t hate you, Parker.” And they didn’t. Kevin and Michelle Monroe don’t hate anyone. My mother is practically a direct descendant of Mother Teresa and my father is like a giant teddy bear. They just don’t know Parker very well and struggle understanding him at times because Parker can come off... aloof. My parents are loud and exuberant and will ask you a million questions in an effort to get to know you and keep you involved in the conversation and that overwhelms and intimidates my introverted fiancé a bit. Therefore, he comes off standoffish which makes my parents try harder to get him to open up.

It’s a vicious cycle.

“Fine Whitney. I just don’t think it’s a good idea for you to go out later.” I’d made the mistake of telling him Chloe and I took an Uber and now he thinks we planned to get hammered. *Though after a night of being around JP, I just might.*

“With Chloe and Mason? Come on Parker, you can’t be serious.”

“I am serious. Mason won’t look out for you once he sets his eyes on the first thing in a skirt and Chloe will do the same the second, she decides who she’s going home with.”

“Ouch, Parker, tell me how you really feel.”

“I believe I just did and you know it’s true.”

“Babe, I called you because I miss you and I wanted to talk to you. Not to get in a fight. Can’t you just tell me you love me and you miss me and can’t wait to see me?”

“You know I feel all of those things.”

“You’re acting like you don’t trust me and I’ve never given you a reason not to.”

“It’s not that. It’s just if I’m not there to look out for you, who will?” I can remember having this conversation with another man once before and somehow it feels different now. Maybe I really was naïve with JP because I can remember him telling me he wanted to put me over his knee and spank my little ass pink after going out and getting drunk with Chloe one night.

The difference was that was hot and he fucked you senseless with a red handprint still fresh on your ass.

Nope. Shut that shit down, Whitney.

“You’re right,” I tell him. “But you can’t tell me I can’t go out. Just trust that I’ll be careful, alright?”

“Whatever, do what you want, Whitney.” His voice drips with passive aggression.

“You want me to just sit in the house and wait for you to come home? That’s what you want?” Silence. “That’s what you want, isn’t it?”

He sighs and I can imagine him running a hand through his hair and bouncing his leg like he always does when he’s agitated. “I just don’t want you out being reckless when I’m not there. Sorry for being worried.”

I begin walking up the walkway and up the stairs to my front door. “I appreciate that. I think it’s cute that you worry.”

“Just call me when you get in later, alright?”

“Time difference?” I remind him. Knowing that I probably won’t get home until around two a.m. if we go out, which puts the time at five a.m. on the East Coast where Parker is now.

“Don’t care. I want to hear your voice and know you got home safe.”

“Yes, sir.” I giggle and I hear him clear his throat on the other end.

“Don’t start with that,” he says but I can hear the smile in his voice. It was odd, Parker was a little more dominant in our relationship *except* in the bedroom which actually kind of pissed me off. The place I want to be bossed around and told what to do and he’s actually quite passive. Whereas in our day-to-day life, he took control. Sometimes I didn’t mind it but other times it felt like I didn’t have a say in my own life.

“Okay, well, I love you.” I turn away from the door when I hear someone coming up the stairs and I almost drop the phone when I see JP walking up the stairs looking like he just stepped out of a fucking GQ magazine. He’s wearing a pair of black jeans that shows his trim waist and a white button-down that emphasizes his olive skin that’s even more tan from his time in Mexico. I briefly wonder if he was doing hard labor or something between surgeries because he’s a little more muscular than I remembered. His dark brown hair is a little longer and curls slightly at the ends spurring vivid memories of pulling on it while his mouth was between my legs. Speaking of which, he licks his lips drawing my attention to his mouth before finding his eyes that are still roaming shamelessly all over my body.

Of course, he looks even better than he did three years ago. Bastard.

“I love you too,” Parker tells me back, but my brain barely registers that before I hang up the phone.

“Hi Jacob.”

He cocks his head to the side and narrows his eyes and I can almost hear his thoughts. *Jacob, huh? So that's how we're playing it?* “Hi beautiful,” he responds, and after three years of not hearing his voice, I almost melt at just those two words.

Fuck. Where is Chloe? We discussed that I shouldn't be alone with him for this exact reason. She probably just assumed we were fine for now because he wasn't here yet.

He's still on the stairs so he climbs the final two and then he's moving closer to me. I take a step back and he takes another step closer. I take another and he does the same and I immediately begin to panic. I don't want him in my space. I don't want him to hug me and I don't want to be close enough to smell his cologne. I put a hand out to stop him from coming closer. He frowns and I shake my head.

“I'm engaged.”

His eyes darken and I see a flash of annoyance cross his face. *Fuck.* “So, I've heard.”

“So... no.”

“No, what?” He gives me that cocky smile that used to make my panties wet. The one where he revealed one dimple but none of his teeth and I am trying to ignore the fact that there is a tingling between my legs.

“You know what.”

“I'm simply saying hello and acknowledging the fact that you're beautiful. Any person with eyes can see that.” He nods when I don't respond because I'm actually holding my breath until I can move out of his space. “Congratulations, by the way.”

I let out the breath I'm holding because this seems safe. Talking about my engagement implies he's accepted that I've moved on. Maybe he really is just here to celebrate or maybe for closure. “Thank you.” I smile. “Parker is great. You'll really like him.”

“I wouldn't go that far.” My smile fades as he holds out his hand. “Let me see the ring.”

I hold it out for him to see and just as I begin to pray that he won't grab my hand, warm skin presses against mine. He rubs his thumb over my knuckles and the ring on my finger. “Hmmm, not what I would have picked for you.” My heart begins to pound and goose bumps betray me by popping up everywhere. *Fuck fuck fuck.*

“Jacob,” I plead, because I really couldn’t continue down this road with him. He’d said less than one hundred words to me in three years and I feel like I’m regressing back to the day he left me.

“Whitney,” he responds, holding my gaze and as much as I want to, I can’t pull away. There’s heat in his eyes and I feel my knees weakening under his piercing blue orbs. I bite my bottom lip on instinct but I immediately release it when I hear the sharp intake of air and the exhale through his nose.

“I—” I start when the door opens behind me. *Yes! Finally.* I let out a breath, grateful for the intrusion though Jacob looks like he’s about to rip the head off of whoever has interrupted us.

“THERE HE IS!” The voice of my father booms throughout the entire neighborhood and then he whisks past me and pulls him into a hug. “I fucking missed you.” I hear him. My mom comes running out behind me and I chuckle at both of them passing me to hug Jacob like he’s the prodigal son returning.

“Oh my God, you can’t leave me alone with him for three years ever again,” my mom says as she hugs him and gives him a peck on his cheek. “Mexico was good to you. You must have been beating the women off with a stick down there.” Her gaze shifts and her eyes widen. “Whit! OH, my goodness, hi honey!” She pulls me into a hug and kisses my cheek.

“It’s okay Mom, you see me all the time and I know JP was your and Dad’s first child.” I roll my eyes before moving into the house, grateful to be able to escape the awkward tension mounting between me and Jacob. I immediately find Chloe talking to Mason in a corner and I approach them both with a glare. “Not curious as to where I’ve been?”

“I thought you were still talking to Parker?” Chloe says. “Why are you all hyper?” she asks as she brings her glass of sangria to her lips and takes a healthy sip.

“Because JP is here. He arrived while I was still on the phone with my fiancé.” I say through gritted teeth.

Chloe chokes on her drink and begins coughing. “You’re shittin’ me. The man always did know how to make an entrance.” She giggles and I shoot her a look. “Well how did it—holy fuuuuuck,” Chloe whispers under her breath. I turn around when I hear my father announcing who was back from Mexico and when I turn back to look at Chloe her eyes are wide. “He looks goood.” She takes another sip and thankfully the room is full of people talking so I’m

sure no one heard her. “Yeah, you’re fucked. He looks like a man that came here to play zero games.”

“You’re not helping, Chloe,” Mason says as he takes a sip of what I assume to be whiskey. “Maybe I should go have a little chat with him.”

“Mase...”

“No, he doesn’t get to come in and make you so uncomfortable in your own Goddamn house,” he snaps and I see the fury in his eyes already.

“Just leave it. He hasn’t done anything.” I plead.

“He’s here and it’s messing with your head and your heart and while Parker isn’t necessarily *my* favorite person, he’s one of yours and I respect him as the man that loves you.”

Chloe rolls her eyes. “Since when are you so holier than thou when you drink.”

“The guy broke her heart, Chlo.”

“And her showing up here, looking like this,” she says, waving her hand over me. “With a ring on her finger is the *best* revenge. Let him pine over her. She’s moved on.”

Mason looks at me and I give him a weak smile, wishing I had as much confidence as Chloe thinks I have. “Let’s just go out on the patio and decide where we’re going when we get out of here.”

CHAPTER THREE

Jacob

My eyes scan the room just like they've done over a hundred times over the past hour. It's how it always was, whenever we were in the room together in mixed company my eyes were always looking for her. My eyes would find her for no more than a second before moving on. It was just enough time to know exactly what she was thinking, what she needed or if she needed *me*. Over half of the time, her eyes would meet mine. Sometimes she'd smile, sometimes she'd wink if she knew it was safe and sometimes, she'd bite her lip which was code for: *get me naked now*.

I stare at her through the blinds, my hands flexing into fists with the need to touch her. Her hair is longer than the last time I saw her and visions of seeing it wrapped around my wrist as I pound into her from behind infiltrate my brain.

Her, Chloe, and Mason went to the patio as soon as I entered the house and have been out there since. One of them has been by her side all night leading me to believe that one or both of them know about what happened between us.

They're protecting her from me.

I wince at the sting that causes. I hurt her so deeply that she can't even be around without a layer of protection around her heart. *Or she still has feelings for you and she doesn't trust herself around you.*

More than likely it was a combination of the two. Either way, Mason and Chloe weren't going to be easy and they weren't going to back down. I down the rest of my gin and tonic before deciding that I'd had enough. There were at least thirty people here and though I'm sure Kevin and Michelle wanted to

spend the night talking to me, they were polite hosts and had left me to tend to some of their other guests leaving me free to try to get Whitney alone.

I get up from the chair where I'm seated and open the door to the patio and make my way outside. The backyard looks different than I remember it. The stones on the terrace were different and there was a fountain that flowed into the pool now. There was also a hot tub in the corner that I didn't remember being there. Kevin and Michelle were always going somewhere during the summer, whether it be cruises or European vacations especially tacked onto Kevin's trips for work. During the time Whitney and I were together, there were more than a few times I stayed with her while Kevin and Michelle were gone and we had fucked numerous times in this pool so I know if there had been a hot tub then we would have defiled that too.

I make my way over to them and I'm grateful there's at least ten people out here so I don't have to worry about Mason or Chloe getting loud if my suspicions are correct.

"Mason." I nod at my oldest godchild as I approach the table where they're all seated. There's a fourth chair available but I don't make an effort to sit. *Yet.*

I remember Mason's birth like it was yesterday. Kevin was scared shitless and almost passed out but the second he was out of Michelle, he was in love. His firstborn. A son. I'm fairly certain the second he turned two, Michelle rarely even saw Mason. He was attached to Kevin and me and went wherever we went. We even had him on the golf course when he was just three years old *just in case*, we had another Tiger Woods on our hands *minus the sex scandals of course.*

"Uncle J." He nods back and I know now that he knows about me and Whitney because he usually has the same reaction to seeing me as his father does. I do actually see the war in his eyes about wanting to hug me but also being angry at me and protecting his sister. "How was Mexico?"

"Hot." I chuckle. "But it was good. I feel great about the work we did there. I missed home though."

"I am suuuure you did." Chloe snorts and I shoot her a fake grin.

"Miss Chloe." I lean down and place a kiss on her cheek. "It's good to see you. How have you been?"

"Good," Chloe says without offering any more information. "Thriving," she exaggerates and I wonder if she's hoping I'll share that with my brother.

I meet Mason's gaze and he stares at me over his glass as he brings it to

his lips, and I feel like he's daring me to say something.

"Let's take a walk, Uncle J," Mason speaks up. "I want to hear about Mexico."

"Mase..." Whitney starts and just hearing her voice again makes me want to drag her into the closest room with a bed.

"What? Maybe you guys want to tiptoe around this bullshit but I'm not. We are all adults and frankly too old for it," Mason snaps angrily and I'm sure it's brought on by the alcohol swirling around his glass.

"Some older than others," Chloe murmurs, and I give her a deadpanned look over her obvious dig at my age.

"Sure, Mason," I agree, turning my attention away from their sassy ass cousin. "Let's go talk." Whitney's eyes widen in what looks like pure terror. Mason stands just as I hear Michelle's voice coming toward us.

"This is the first time we've been together in years, we have to take a picture!" Michelle squeals. With anyone else, I'd say that they'd probably had too much to drink, but Michelle is just a bundle of energy by nature. *She is sucking down that sangria like it's water though and Michelle doesn't know how to make a weak drink.*

She makes us all stand as she holds her arm out and snaps a selfie of the five of us. "Can you believe our baby is getting married?" Michelle asks me as she squeezes Whitney's shoulders. "I remember her being born, don't you?" She tears up. "You were the second person in the world to hold her because Kevin actually did pass out that time."

Chloe chokes on her drink and begins coughing my guess in shock over hearing Michelle's comment.

"Did... you know that, Whitney?" She blinks several times and to anyone that doesn't know the situation, it just sounds like a funny anecdote.

"Yes," Whitney says through gritted teeth and I can see the fire in her eyes.

"I just... didn't know that fun fact." She shoots me a smug grin. "Love that for you," she says before turning to Michelle. "Let's go grab a drink, Whit. Aunt Michelle, take a shot with us."

"Oh my gosh, I haven't taken shots in years," she says and I almost interject that I know for a fact that's untrue when Chloe beats me to it.

"We literally did shots last weekend at my parent's house." The three of them walk away but I don't miss the way Whitney keeps looking back at me and Mason.

“I’m going to cut to the chase, J.” We move away from the crowds and out of earshot. “You need to stay away from Whitney.”

I’m impressed by his approach and while I respect him as her older brother, there’s no way in hell anyone can keep me away from her and certainly not a kid I helped raise.

“Don’t you think that should be her decision?”

“The fuck? J, she’s engaged. He asked her to marry him, she said yes, that is her decision.”

I don’t think Mason has ever talked to me like that. I never gave a fuck if he swore, but it’s never been directed at me. “Mason, I will still kick your ass. Watch yourself.”

“You can’t exactly be Uncle J after breaking her heart and you can’t be JP either for that matter. Too much has happened. You can’t go back to how things were before. Things are awkward and weird and we see you differently now. Obviously, she does but me... man, I idolized you. But you destroyed my little sister which means you’re not really someone I can look up to anymore.”

Hearing that is a tough pill to swallow. Mason was like the son I never had and it kills me that I destroyed my relationship with not only Whitney but with him as well. “It’s not what you think, Mason.”

“No, J, it’s exactly what I think. You were too much of a pussy to come clean to my parents, and then you just up and left. Broke her heart and then took off for three years.”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about and I would advise you not to speak on things you don’t. It wasn’t that black and white. It wasn’t just sex; I wasn’t using her. I fell in love with her.”

“But then you left.” He repeats.

“She wasn’t the only person who got hurt, Mason. But you’re right, I’ll give you one thing. As much as I don’t want to admit it, I was scared to tell your parents. Scared to lose them. Lose you. Lose a group of people that mean the world to me. I handled it all wrong.” I cross my arms and look out onto the land behind their house. “I fucked up and now she’s getting married.”

“Exactly, so don’t fuck with her head. Haven’t you put her through enough?”

“She deserves to know the truth so she can make an informed decision.”

He looks at me and shakes his head. “That’s the most selfish thing I’ve

ever heard, J. Wow. What happened to not wanting to ruin our family? Nothing's changed. Her parents are still your best friends. They'll still be mad. Only now there will be the added bonus of you keeping it from them for this long. And another person who believes he's going to marry the love of his life."

"I'll deal with them. I'll tell them. Now." I want to add that I don't give a fuck about this other guy and there's no way she can be the love of his life while she's still the love of mine and if my instincts are correct, that I'm still the love of hers.

He grabs my arm as I prepare to walk away. "Fuck no, are you insane? Now? Here?"

"Yes, Mason. I am insane. I let the woman I love slip right through my fingers. I want her back and I want her back *now*." I don't wait for his response, I just start moving toward the house. I'm not actually going to tell them now with a house full of people. But I did want to talk to Whitney alone and I was tired of Mason's big brother spiel. It was nothing I didn't know or suspect and I wanted to talk to Whitney before she got more intoxicated. I find Chloe and Whitney in the kitchen in the middle of taking a shot and I wonder if they took one with Michelle as well.

"How many of those have you had?" I ask Whitney just as she pulls the glass away from her lips.

She pins me with a hard glare. "Why?"

"Because I want to know, obviously."

She chuckles and I can see her eyes beginning to get slightly hazy. "You don't have the right to ask that question anymore. It's really not your business. I'm literally in my parent's home. Something tells me I'll be fine."

"Not if you and Chloe go out tonight."

"Who cares if we are? I'm not nineteen anymore. I'm actually of the legal drinking age and in my first year of law school, thank you very much."

"So, I've heard. Your dad has been singing your praises since I got here. That's amazing Whitney. I'm really proud of you."

Her eyes glisten for a moment before she blinks them away. "Really?"

"Uh uh," Chloe interrupts. "None of that. Keep it clean." She points at me. "Don't get all cute."

Irritation washes over me and I feel myself about to snap. "Can I talk to Whitney alone please, Chloe?"

"Nope." She links her arm with Whitney. "Where she goes, I go," Chloe

says as she pulls her away from me and in this moment, I feel like I'm about to lose my shit if I can't get a minute alone with her.

I realize that maybe I need some reinforcements that could help with Chloe. I do feel a little guilty pulling this card but she left me no choice. I pull out my phone and text the one person that might just throw Chloe off her game.

CHAPTER FOUR

Whitney

“What the actual fuck is Trey doing here?!” Chloe exclaims as she pulls me into one of the bathrooms upstairs and out of earshot. “I’m going to kill your boyfriend.”

“CHLOE! He’s not my boyfriend, and please do not say that in front of him! That’s the last thing I need him thinking.”

I watch as she applies more lipstick to her lips and touches up her mascara, leading me to believe she’s not too upset that Trey crashed this party.

“Your parents have been throwing parties for the past year and he never showed up and now all of a sudden, he’s here! Fucking Jacob called him!” Her voice is a higher than usual, brought on by the shots and the exasperation of her ex showing up unexpectedly.

“Well, I’m sure him being here is his excuse for showing up and he is sort of friends with my parents too. He just stayed away because of you,” I tell her. I knew the second Trey walked in why he was there and I’ll admit that I’m annoyed too. Jacob undoubtedly told him to come so Chloe would become slightly distracted and he could potentially be alone with me. *Well played, Price.*

“Okay, well he can continue to stay away.” She stomps her foot as she shakes her hair and begins fussing with it.

“Why don’t we just leave?” I shrug. It was getting late, and while I wasn’t ready to go into the city yet, we could easily Irish goodbye and go back to my house until it was time to go out.

Chloe looks away from the mirror and cocks her head. “You want to go?”

“You don’t?” I shoot her a look that I hope she can read as *‘I’m not buying your outrage over Trey being here.’*

“Well, it’s just...”

“You want to stay and toy with Trey. So, what was all of this?” I joke as I refer to her previous hysteria over him showing up.

“NO. I am mad! But he’s here, and I look like this,” she says, pointing down at herself. “And... he has great head game.”

“Chlo!” I shriek in annoyance.

She slaps a hand across her forehead. “I knew that last shot was a mistake.”

“Don’t go back down that road with him again. He doesn’t want more and you do!”

“No no! I’m totally over it,” she says, trying her best to convince me but I’m not buying it. She was in love with Trey once upon a time, and while I believe he was in love with her too, he was never able to admit it and that was the problem. “It can just be sex.”

“Until he puts his mouth between your legs and then you’re back to trying to come up with your future children’s names! Chloe, if it’s just about sex, it *cannot* be with Trey!”

“But he knows what I like, Whitney! And I haven’t had sex in months!”

“Because Trey Price fucked you up!” I whisper shout and she stomps her foot again in response.

“FINE!” she screams and I put a hand over her mouth, wishing like hell I hadn’t done that because she just applied lipstick.

I roll my eyes and pull my hand away and am shocked when I don’t see much. “That’s a great matte, what brand is that?” I say, looking at her mouth and then back at my hand. “Wow, that barely moved.”

“I’m trying out *Mac* lip stains again. Still dry as hell, but it’s the best,” Chloe says, looking back in the mirror. “So yeah, we should just go. If I go home with someone tonight, and he fucking sucks in bed, I’m going to kill you.” She points at me.

We open the door and while a part of me isn’t surprised at who’s standing on the other side, I wish just once the universe could be on my side tonight.

“Oh, fuck me,” I mutter under my breath when I see Trey standing on the other side. He’s leaned against the wall, his hands tucked into his jeans with a guilty smile on his face. Like he knows the reason he’s here is to make my life fucking hard.

“The bathroom downstairs had a line and Kev told me just to find one up here,” Trey answers my unanswered question that I’m sure is written all over my face.

“I’m sure he did.” I roll my eyes because even if he hadn’t, the Prices were family, and had free rein of the rooms in my house. I can even remember Trey blacking out one night and passing out in my parents’ bed.

“Hey Chlo.” He smiles at her and without even looking at her, I know her resolve is weakening.

“Your brother is so cheap for this; you know that right?” I scowl at him and he turns his gaze from Chloe and gives me a sad nod.

“Yeah, but... I did want to see you,” he says, turning his eyes back to my cousin. “I was hoping we could talk?”

“Talk about what?” I shriek. “No.” I look at Chloe who’s engaging in some pretty intense eye contact with the man she absolutely shouldn’t be. “No!”

“Whitney, I’m fine.” She turns to me and implores me with her eyes.

“You’re about three shots of tequila past *fine*,” I argue. “We were just leaving,” I tell Trey.

“We’re going to her house and then we’re going downtown,” Chloe offers.

I snap my neck toward her. “Oh, you’re just a lost cause. I give up.” I look at Trey. “Aside from this.” I point my finger back and forth between them. “It’s good to see you.” I give him a hug before moving between them back down the hall. What I did know is that when Chloe makes up her mind about something, she’s going to do it. And drunk Chloe was even more stubborn. I guess she can deal with the fallout of it tomorrow.

I move into my old bedroom to call an Uber, knowing this is probably one of the few places I’m safe. I can just go straight from here to the car. My parents are probably too drunk to care at this point and I’ll just text them from the car. *Great plan*. I’m opening up my Uber app when the sound of my door opening breaks my concentration. I dart my eyes toward the door praying that it’s just my mom or Mason when Jacob walks through the door and closes it quietly behind him. *I cannot be alone in here with him*.

Fuck.

My eyes rove over him like I’m not engaged to another man. *He’s so Goddamn fine*.

My brain, which seems to be operating a few moments behind everything

else finally catches up. *No. No. No!*

I shake my head and point toward the door, indicating he needs to exit the same way he entered. “You have got to be fucking kidding me. Get out, Jacob.”

“Whitney.”

“No.” I stand my ground, not moving even as he gets closer. “You cannot be in here with me. I don’t want to see you or talk to you. So, you wasted all of your efforts distracting Chloe which was a dick move by the way. She’s not some fucking collateral damage in your pursuit for me or whatever your intentions are. Dangling Trey in front of her for the night is fucked up.” I was already mad that he was here but dragging Chloe into this mess was bullshit.

His gaze darkens as he crosses his arms in front of his chest. “First of all, watch your tone.”

My eyes shoot to my hairline and I blink my eyes several times. “Are you kidding?” I chuckle at the audacity of this man. For trying to scold me and potentially tap into my submissive headspace that we used to play in. “Get the entire fuck out of here.”

He takes a step toward me and he rolls his sleeves up which used to be the signal that I was about to go over his knee and then fucked very hard. *Do not react. Do not react.* “You have about one more fuck, Whitney Jade.”

“My middle name, really? You can’t manipulate me, Jacob.” My pussy seems to disagree with that as it’s already on fire from just the few words he’s spoken.

“I’m not trying to, but you’re like a bull ready to charge—”

“Can you blame me?”

“No,” he says and I’m actually surprised I didn’t get an argument from him.

Neither of us says anything for a moment and I pull my gaze away from him. The sun is almost completely set, making the room almost dark and the last thing I want is to be alone in the dark with him. “And second of all?” I say as I turn on the lamp on my nightstand in attempts to prevent the atmosphere from getting even more intimate.

“What?”

“You said first of all, watch your tone,” I say in a deep voice as I imitate him. “What’s the second of all?”

A smile pulls at his lips. “That’s how I sound, huh?” I cock my head to the side, trying to show my annoyance and not the slight amusement I feel at

his response. “Second of all, Trey and Chloe do still talk from time to time.” I furrow my brow in confusion because that is definitely news to me. “Seems like that’s a shock to you. He misses her. It’s no secret that he was in love with her too back then, he just fucked up.” He shrugs. “That’s not my business. But I saw the opportunity to give him a chance to talk to her and while yes it wasn’t a completely selfless act because I knew that would grant me some alone time with you, it was not something done maliciously. Furthermore, I certainly do not see your cousin as collateral damage here even though she is a pain in my ass.”

“She is just looking out for me.”

“She doesn’t need to do that where I’m concerned.” He frowns but even still he looks gorgeous.

“Oh? Because you weren’t here when she was picking me up off my bathroom floor once a week. You weren’t here when she was holding my hand through hours and hours of crying or holding my hair back when I drank my weight in whiskey. She helped fix what you broke, Jacob.” I wasn’t going to play games with him. I wasn’t going to pretend like he didn’t break my heart. But that part of my life is over and I had no interest in going back to it.

He at least has the decency to look contrite and runs a hand through his hair. “I’m sorry, Whitney.” I don’t respond. I just let those three words sink into my skin. “Can you forgive me for doing that to you? To us?”

“Even if I can, it doesn’t change anything,” I tell him. He sits down on my bed and he pats the space next to him and I shake my head. “No.”

He lets out a sigh and looks up at me with the saddest blue eyes. “Fine. Whitney you were *nineteen*. In your second year of undergrad and your whole life ahead of you...”

I sigh. “The age argument is tired Jacob, try again.”

“We weren’t ready for each other,” he tells me honestly. “Call bullshit if you want but there’s a huge difference between you three years ago and now. I can tell in the ten minutes you’ve allowed me to be around you tonight. There is a difference between being nineteen and twenty-two and it’s not just your ability to legally consume alcohol. You’re different.”

“I’m happy.”

“You were happy being with me. Don’t try to tell me otherwise. I would have been prepared to tell your parents if I felt you were ready to be with me.”

“EXCUSE ME?” I shout before claspng a hand over my mouth. I shut my eyes, hoping I didn’t draw much attention to us from the party down below. “I begged you not to go. To let me come with you. To be with you. I was ready to tell my parents. I was ready for the fallout. You’re really trying to put this on me?”

“No.” He shakes his head. “Not at all. I take full responsibility for hurting you and everything that transpired. I ended things and then I just left you. I just... I knew that if I stayed, I’d never be able to get over you. You would never be able to get over me. It would have been hard for both of us. But I truly did think it was for the best.” He gets off the bed and moves toward me. “I was scared of what all of it meant. My feelings for you. Your feelings for me. And yeah, I was a little worried about what your parents would think because as your mother so eloquently reminded us not long ago, I was the second person to hold you after you were born. And then I was in love with you and I didn’t know how to explain what changed and how you weren’t the same little Whitney that I taught how to ride a bike. I didn’t think we could make it work. I panicked, alright?”

I’ve never known Jacob to lie to me so I’m sure that he was thinking all of these things way back when, but what’s the point of telling me all of this now?

“So, what’s all this now? You thought I’d wait around for you to stop being scared of my dad? Whose... and if you repeat this I’ll deny it, ass you could kick by the way if he threw the first punch.”

He chuckles. “I’ll take it to the grave.” He reaches up to touch me but not before asking me with his eyes if it’s okay. I hate that I don’t move and the gentle brush of his knuckles across my cheek sends a shiver through me. “I just... I thought I’d have more time.”

“More time for what?” I whisper.

“For a second chance with you.”

His words are sobering and I’m grateful for the moment of clarity. “Jacob.” I shake my head. “You’re saying all the right things but... you’re only here because you heard I’m getting married. Where was this energy a year ago? Hell, six months ago? You’re treating this like it’s a game or about the chase, and it’s not. It’s my life.”

“It’s not a game. Not the chase. None of this was a game. I couldn’t... I wasn’t able to come back before.”

I cross my hands in front of my chest. “You have a phone. Why didn’t

you call?”

“Like I said I just... I thought I’d have more time. I wasn’t expecting you to meet someone and get engaged in the three fucking years I was gone, Whitney,” he says as he moves away from me and begins to pace the room. “I thought about you every day for three years. At first, I believed I was doing the right thing. That you would move on and meet someone and that it was the best thing for you. I was too old and we had too much history and it just wouldn’t work out. But after a while... I couldn’t get over you Whitney, and there’s a reason for that.”

“So, what you’re mad that I didn’t... wait for you? You broke up with me, and I was supposed to take that as you just needing time? What kind of ridiculous fuckboy logic is that?” I interrupt because I refuse to take responsibility for something I didn’t have a say in to begin with.

“Whitney...” He stops pacing and stands in front of me again putting both of his hands on my bare shoulders. “Don’t marry him.”

I push him off and shake my head. “You’re unbelievable.”

“You don’t love him, Whitney. Not the way you loved me. *Love me.*”

He thinks I still love him? “Seriously? My God. Were you always this arrogant?”

“Only when I’m sure about something.” His nostrils flare. “Whitney, I feel like our time is limited in here,” he says, referring to my bedroom. “Can we go somewhere and talk?”

Bad idea. “Nope.” *Don’t ask again. I don’t know how many times I can keep saying no.*

“Please.”

“I’m engaged.”

That must strike a nerve because he balls his hands into fists and a scowl finds his perfect face. “You think I give a fuck? You could be married with three kids, and you’d still belong to me.” Fury courses through me and I push past him finally having enough of this conversation. “I’m done being patient with you about this,” he snaps, just as I reach for the doorknob. “You’re going to listen to what I have to say before you make the biggest fucking mistake of your life.”

I turn around prepared to let him have it. I’m furious that he thinks that he can disappear from my life and just come back into it like nothing’s changed. Like I haven’t changed. Demanding me to listen to him? The fuck? “You know what, Jacob? You’re right. I *am* different. I’ve moved on and I am not

interested in whatever *this* is anymore. I met someone. I'm happy. And while what we had was great and fun, it's not who I am anymore. You don't just get to come back into my life and fuck it all up just because you're unhappy. It's over, Jacob."

I don't give him a chance to respond before I'm out of the door and moving down the stairs and out the front door within seconds.

CHAPTER FIVE

Jacob

Well, that could have gone better. I rub a hand over my forehead as I watch her from her bedroom window. She's pacing the driveway, assumedly waiting for her Uber while she looks down at her phone. I don't see Chloe or Mason, so I wonder if she's just trying to escape without anyone asking questions which leads me to believe she's probably going home. *Not sure where she lives though.* I watch from the window until a car arrives and she hops in before it drives off.

I head downstairs in an effort to find Chloe or maybe something that will give me an inkling as to where she lives. I curse myself for stooping this low but I know the best way to figure out where she lives. "Miche, I want to send Whitney and her fiancé something, can you give me her address? I meant to get it, but I can't find her... did she leave?"

"Without saying anything? I doubt it!" Michelle says as she hops up from the table where her and a group of people are playing cards. "But yes, let me grab it. Her and Parker live not far from here."

She lives WITH that fucker? Jesus Christ. At least he's out of town.

She jots it down on a piece of paper before handing it to me and I nod. I feel like shit for lying to Michelle but I just... I need more time. I know this makes me an asshole, but I can't let her go that easily.

"Thanks, Miche. I'm probably going to head out though."

"So soon?"

"Yeah, I'm still exhausted from the trip. But I think I'm coming over to watch the game with Kev tomorrow."

"Oh, good!" She kisses my cheek. "See you!" She waves me off before

going back to the table of people that had been shouting for her to come back ever since she got up.

I scan the room and don't see Trey or Chloe or even Mason making me wonder if Whitney won't be alone for much longer. I'm in my car in minutes and I put their address in my GPS and I'm grateful to see that they don't live far. I arrive in less than fifteen minutes and I see that the lights are on inside. Part of me wants to call because I had no interest in setting foot in a house that Whitney shares with another man. But she probably wouldn't answer and I find myself at war with what to do.

I get out of the car, wishing like hell I knew what I was going to say. I'm annoyed all over again that she lives here with him as I walk up the pathway to their house. The house doesn't suit Whitney at all. It's not particularly small, but it just doesn't look like her. She always talked about having a red brick house with large bay windows and a porch and a gray stone terrace in the back. I'm fairly certain I still have the pictures saved in my phone of one she found on Pinterest she'd sent me for "inspiration." While this house was nice, it didn't have any of those things making me believe that she'd just moved in with him. I'm almost to the door when she opens it and storms out, her wavy chestnut hair flowing behind her like she's a model on a runway. She was still in that sexy jumpsuit that showcased her tits and a gorgeous tan but she'd kicked off her heels and was currently barefoot. Immediately my eyes dart to the ground to make sure she doesn't step on anything.

"Can you not take a hint? How did you even figure out where I lived?" I shoot her a look as if to say *do you think it was hard?* "Of course, one of my freaking parents. Don't you feel like shit obtaining information about me under false pretenses?"

"No." I rub a hand behind my neck. "Well, yes. Can I come in?" I ask against my prior judgment of not wanting to go inside.

She tucks a hair behind her ear and if I wonder if she's nervous. "Inside my house I share with my fiancé? No."

"So, you want to do this outside in front of your neighbors?" I raise an eyebrow at her.

Her eyes dart between all the houses surrounding hers before turning back to me. "No, I want you to leave."

I ignore her request. "Tell me about him. About this Parker. What makes him so special that you're not willing to even hear me out? Because there was a time you told me you'd never love anyone like you loved me. That there

could never be anyone else.” There were so many nights she’d whisper into my skin after just making love that she would only ever love me. That I was it for her. Her soulmate. The love of her life.

I’d told her the same.

“And then you left me!!” she screams and she curses herself before looking around and I don’t see anyone outside but it doesn’t mean they aren’t looking from their windows. “I don’t want you to come in. I…” She bites her lip. “We have cameras.”

I nod, slightly annoyed but also pleased that at least that means she’s safe while she’s here alone. “Can we go somewhere and talk then?”

“Jacob... us being alone... I just...,” she continues to stumble over her words. “I hate that you’re pushing this so much and forcing me to have to say it.”

Well at least she’s not indifferent toward me. This I could work with. “So, you *don’t* trust yourself with me. Doesn’t that mean something to you?”

“That I’ve had a few drinks and it makes me horny and okay, my body still remembers you? Sure.” I shrug. “People make mistakes while they’re under the influence of alcohol or hormones all the time, it doesn’t mean they want to be with that person. I’m not interested in fucking up my whole life for one night. I don’t want to put myself in a compromising situation to do something I’ll regret.”

“It wouldn’t just be one night, Whitney. It could never just be one night.”

“My mind and my heart beg to differ. I am over you. So yes, it would be one night that I’d regret and be forced to live with the guilt of potentially cheating on my fiancé? No. I don’t want that.”

“Are you trying to convince yourself? Or me?”

“Are you kidding me?” She storms past me and goes toward her car. “I can’t continue to have this conversation with you on my front lawn. If you’re refusing to leave, then we can go somewhere to talk.” She looks so gorgeous in this moment. Angry, her cheeks flushed and her hair slightly bigger, my guess from playing with it like she used to do when she’s nervous.

“I am not letting you drive, get over here,” I tell her, motioning toward my car parked in front of their house.

“What!”

“You’ve had more than a few shots and you don’t even realize that you don’t have shoes on,” I say, pointing to her bare feet. “Do not make me tell you again. You are not driving. Now get over here.”

“I am not getting in your car.”

“Then I guess we aren’t leaving.” We stare at each other for a second before her phone begins to ring in her hands.

She looks visibly panicked at the name on her screen before taking a deep breath. “I haven’t done anything.” She shrugs as if talking to the person on the phone already and not to herself. “Hi baby.”

The word stings and I realize that it’s her fiancé. A term of endearment she’d used for me once upon a time is now being said to another man. She looks up at me and narrows her eyes visibly annoyed.

“Seriously? It’s Jacob, he’s a friend of my parents.”

I raise an eyebrow at her. *He’s figured out I’m here already?* Her eyes look toward the door and assumedly she realizes that the door camera ratted her out. She tries to hide the fact that she rolls her eyes but I catch it and I wonder if this situation of him questioning her is a frequent occurrence.

“Now suddenly you care where Chloe is?” she jokes. “She’s on her way over. He’s my Godfather and he’s been in Mexico for the past three years and just got back. He wanted to make sure I got back from my parent’s okay since Chloe stayed a little longer. I took an Uber home by myself.”

It’s not a complete fabrication but the way she twists the story so effortlessly makes me chuckle at the fact that she’ll definitely make an excellent lawyer.

“I’m not sure.” She walks away and I try my best to strain to hear because it sounds like he’s giving her a hard time but I’m not sure for what. The way she shared so easily that I was here, means that this guy probably has no idea who I am or about our previous relationship. I vaguely hear the words *ridiculous* and *trust* thrown around and I frown that she’s having to deal with someone who’s so clearly insecure. But I reserve judgment for now because maybe there are things about this relationship that I don’t know. She hangs up the phone with a huff and comes back over.

“I hate when he gets like that.” I can see the irritation on her face and I want to touch her to relax the frown lines on her forehead but I don’t want to make things even more complicated.

“Is he like that... often?”

“It’s like he doesn’t trust me. And... he doesn’t know about you. He has no reason to feel this way.” Her voice is getting more excited as she gets more worked up. “I’ve never even come remotely close to doing anything inappropriate when *he’s* cheated on *me!*” She claps a hand over her mouth

like she hadn't just blurted out the truth. Her eyes widen. "I didn't say that."

My blood begins to boil. *He did fucking what?! I will fucking murder that kid.* Aside from still being the most important person in my world and the love of my life, she was also my Goddaughter and I vowed a long time ago to kick the ass of any man that didn't treat her right. "Yes, the fuck you did."

"Don't tell my parents. They will... they already..." she winces.

"I'm not concerned about Kevin and Michelle right now and neither should you. You need to be concerned about *me*. I am fucking pissed." He takes a step toward me. "He did what?"

"It's not..."

"No, don't backtrack now. Go get your shoes and get back out here. We need to talk. And if you don't, I'm coming in the house and you'll have a harder time explaining *that*." My tone is direct and I hope she realizes I am very serious in this moment. She lets out a sigh and I hear a *fuck* leave her pouty lips as she goes back into the house. She's back moments later with her heels on and her purse before moving quickly past me toward my Mercedes. She slides in the front seat without even waiting for me to open her car door which pisses me off even more, but I assume she's just in a hurry to get away from her house and any prying eyes. I follow suit and pull off into the night, going down a few streets and finally pulling out of her neighborhood.

I've pulled onto the highway without any real direction or idea as to where I'm taking her. *Just keep her talking.* "Did I really hurt you that badly that you believe you deserve to take that kind of shit from anyone?"

I notice her tense and snap her gaze toward me. "Not everything is about you, Jacob."

"No, you're correct. But your first relationship sets a precedent for how you expect to be treated and the shit you'll tolerate and the shit you won't."

Cars are zooming around us and I regret getting on the freeway when all I want to do is take in her expressions as we have this conversation. There was a time that I could read every one of her looks and I missed being so deeply in tune with her. I take the next exit just as she begins to speak. "You never cheated on me," she says quietly. "To my knowledge, you never so much as looked at another woman. I was always the only woman you saw."

"You still are." The words leave my lips on their own accord.

"Yeah, okay." She snorts and I frown at the thought that she doesn't believe me.

"When have I ever lied to you?" I ask her.

“I’m just saying the thought that you haven’t looked at a woman in the past three years you’ve been gone is ridiculous.”

I pull into a parking lot of one of the lounges downtown. I didn’t want to go into one of the loud clubs, but I also wanted another drink and to keep her talking. “And if I haven’t?” Her eyes find mine and for a second, I feel like she’s going to press the issue. She’s going to ask if I dated someone since we’ve been apart, fucked someone, made love to someone, claimed someone the way I did her three years ago. I wonder if she can see the truth all over my face because her face snaps forward and she shakes her head. I get out of the car and this time I make it to her side of the car to open the door before she has a chance to stubbornly do it herself. I offer her my hand and she takes it on instinct before snatching it out of my hand the second she’s standing upright.

“Stop. You can’t...”

“Be a gentleman?” I finish for her because even women I wasn’t in love with would get the same treatment in terms of opening doors.

She licks her lips and my eyes drop to them tracing her full pout that’s coated with a layer of what looks like a tinted lip balm. It’s not bright or vibrant. It doesn’t look glossy, but just slick enough to keep my attention on her mouth. I find myself wondering if it’s flavored and what she’d taste like if I brushed my lips against them.

She begins walking toward the door and I follow behind her, my hands balled into fists as to not touch the small of her back to guide her. We are seated rather quickly given that it’s still on the earlier side of the night and it isn’t too crowded yet. We’re seated in a U-shaped booth with me seated in the center in hopes that she’d sit next to me. She sits on one of the sides and immediately orders a glass of water and a glass of Malbec. I order a Macallan 18 neat, my usual order before turning away from the overly flirtatious waitress. A look of satisfaction floods me when I see the look she’s still giving her long after she’s walked away.

“Jealous?” I ask, trying my best to keep the smug expression off of my face.

She turns to me and her beautiful eyes narrow into slits. “Did she not see me here?”

“So, yes.”

“No, it’s just... rude!” she exclaims.

“Maybe she doesn’t think we’re together given how far away you’re

sitting,” I say, gesturing to the space that could fit two people comfortably. She huffs and tucks a hair behind her ear. “Your hair is longer.” I’ve been staring at it all night. She’s always had gorgeous hair and if anything, it’s gotten more beautiful. It’s full and healthy and has those natural waves that women damage their hair trying to obtain. “It’s beautiful.”

“Of course, you noticed,” she murmurs, more to herself but I hear it despite her low tone and the dull roar of the lounge. “Anything else?”

I narrow my eyes and wonder if this is some sort of test. I lean forward. “Are you asking if there’s anything else that’s different since the last time I saw you? If I noticed the tattoo peeking out from under the strap of your jumpsuit?” I point at the ink I’d never seen before. It’s sitting just below her clavicle, which means it must be small because it’s somewhat hidden beneath the strap of the halter strap that is probably only an inch wide. “That you don’t wear eyeliner anymore, just mascara and, quite frankly, that suits you better. You were nineteen the last time I saw you, so I don’t think you’re taller and your figure looks pretty much the same. You’ve always had a gorgeous shape and if you want me to comment further on that I can.” I give her a smile and her lips part and her teeth sink into them and if I’m not mistaken a quiet sigh leaves her. I swallow down a groan, wishing I could lick that pouty lip. “Is that a yes?” I raise an eyebrow at her. If she wants me to go down this road, I am more than willing to.

“It’s not a no...” She trails off and her cheeks pinken, probably in realization as to what she’s just said.

“This jumpsuit highlights your slim waist. I remember how I could grip your hips when you rode me. They fit my hands perfectly.” She swallows, her brown eyes not leaving mine not even to blink. “Every time you turned around in this tonight, my heart stopped. It hugs the curve of your delicious ass so perfectly. Since it’s a wide leg pant, I can’t really tell if those thighs you got from cheerleading and dancing are as juicy as I remember them.” I lower my voice and my gaze to find her breasts. “And those.” Goose bumps erupt on her flesh and I take that as a good sign that I can still affect her with just a look and my voice. “Your perky tits.” I groan, thinking about what they used to feel like in my mouth and how they’d pebble under my gaze. “I used to think that your tits had the power to make me do anything.” I chuckle. “All you’d have to do is pull your top off and I’d be on my knees in front of you.”

“I never had that much power over you,” she interrupts and I frown at her.

Is she serious? When we were together, all she had to do was look at me and I'd do anything for her. “What world are you living in? Yes, you did.”

“Clearly not. Because you left. After I begged. Pleaded. Cried. Begged more. Don't tell me that all I would have had to do that night is pull my top off and you would have stayed because I will get up from this table right now.” Her words are hard but I see the pain in her eyes and the tears she's trying to keep at bay. I ball my hands into a fist again to keep from touching her.

“Baby.”

Her eyes harden and she turns away from me. “No.” In that moment, our drinks arrive and I barely pay our waitress a glance as I grunt out a *thank you*. When she leaves, I speak again.

“Whitney.” She looks at me as if to say, *okay what?* “I made a mistake.” She looks down at her drink and takes a tentative sip, followed by a large sip of water as if to counteract the alcohol she's putting in her system so she can maintain some semblance of control. “I love you.” Her eyes widen and I shrug, laying all my cards out on the table once in for all. “I've always loved you. I've never stopped loving you. Don't marry him.” Her lip wobbles and I know she's seconds from losing it. “Can I take you somewhere more private? We can go to my house—”

“There you are!” The voice of Chloe stops me and unfortunately penetrates the haze that Whitney and I are in because I think Whitney was going to agree to coming back to my place. *Fuck, Trey seriously?* I give him a look and he winces and gives me a look as if to say *what the fuck did you want me to do?*

Chloe slides in next to Whitney forcing her slightly closer to me which I'd love if not for the fact that Chloe is in fact here. Trey slides in on the other side closer to me. “What are we talking about, what are we doing?” Chloe bounces in the seat, her blonde curls bouncing with her. She snaps her fingers between the two of us and I laugh at how drunk she clearly is. “Where do we get drinks? Do we have a waiter or do we go to the bar?”

“Baby, I think you've had enough,” Trey says and Whitney and my eyes both snap to his.

“Baby!?” Whitney shrieks. “Let me at him,” she says, trying to push Chloe out of the booth so she could get to my younger brother.

“Relax, Whitney,” Chloe says before shooting a look at Trey as if to say *really?*

“We’re together, everyone just has to get with it.” Trey gives Whitney a pointed look as if he was talking specifically to her.

“WHAT!?” Whitney blinks her eyes several times before shaking her head. “I don’t believe this. For how long? Until you come later?” I wince at her harsh words.

“Whitney.” I give her a look and she narrows her eyes at me. Because although I was thinking something similar, it’s really not our business.

“Are *you* kidding me? You have zero room to talk about anything.” She looks at Chloe. “Bathroom.”

“Whitney…”

“Move it,” she says through gritted teeth. “Now.”

Chloe rolls her eyes and gets up before casting a glance at Trey. “Can you order me a vodka soda, please?”

“Of course.” She smiles and moves to his side of the table before pressing her lips to his quickly. When she pulls away, they’re both staring at each other with the goofiest smiles on their faces. Whitney’s wide eyes find mine and we share a look of confusion before Chloe and Whitney leave for the bathroom.

As soon as they’re out of earshot, I stare at my brother prepared to not only berate him for ruining the moment with Whitney but for whatever the fuck has happened in the last hour since we left Whitney’s parents’ house. “Okay, first of all, you have the worst fucking timing. I told you, I’d let you know when to meet us and second of all, what the fuck?”

CHAPTER SIX

Whitney

“Are you kidding me right now?” Chloe is touching up her makeup and not even paying me any attention as I pace the length of the thankfully empty women’s room. “You and Trey? This isn’t a good idea!”

“Well, isn’t that the pot calling the kettle black?” she says as she pulls her mascara wand away from her lashes to cast me a sideways glance. “I’m fairly certain what I’m doing isn’t hurting anyone. Or what would you call what Trey and I just walked in because you looked about five seconds from mounting him in the booth?” She looks at my engagement ring and then back at me.

“We’ll come back to your judgment in a second. It’s going to hurt *you*,” I respond, referring to what she said about how starting things up again with Trey wouldn’t hurt anyone.

She puts her mascara back in her purse and lets out a sigh. “Maybe it does. But I still love him and maybe I don’t owe *him* the chance he’s asking for...” She shrugs. “But I owe it to me.” She leans against the sink and crosses her arms. “There’s a reason I still love him, Whitney. He didn’t do anything *to* me. I broke things off with him.”

“Because he wouldn’t commit!” Memories of her being so depressed she refused to get out of bed come charging back into my head. *These Price brothers did a fucking number on us both.*

“But that’s something that can change. It’s not as if he was too into his work or slept with someone else or he wasn’t good in bed. The problem was that he wasn’t ready for *more* a year ago and now he is. I’m available, he’s available. He wants to *be* with me, Whitney. I’ve wanted this for so long and

maybe things don't work out but I just want to give it a chance."

I sigh because it actually does make sense and if Trey is actually willing to commit to her this could actually be great for the both of them. They were, at one point, very good for each other. "I just don't want you to get hurt again."

"And I love that and you. You're my best friend Whitney, you always have been but I'm *your* older cousin. You don't have to look out for me all the time." She puts her hands on my shoulders and gives them both a squeeze before dropping her hands. "Now circling back to my 'judgment,'" she says, using air quotes. "What did I just walk in on? What are you doing here alone with him? Whitney, you know this is a bad idea."

"Well, he showed up at my house so thank you for warning me that he'd left my parents' house. I could have assumed that he'd come after me but I wasn't anticipating him surprising me at the house I share with my fiancé!"

She puts a hand over her mouth in shock. "Oh my God, really!?"

"Yes, and Parker saw him on the door camera and—"

She puts a hand on her forehead. "Wait, you let him in?"

"No! I saw him pull up because I was waiting for you to show up and I met him outside before he could even get to the door."

"So how did Parker see? I understand if he rang the doorbell because I get those alerts too from the *Blink* app but... how would he have seen...?"

"I guess he got an alert when I opened the door?"

Chloe narrows her eyes at me. "Why? You can turn that off, you know."

I feel like I can hear where her thoughts are going and I really don't want to go down this road with her about that too. "Chlo..."

"It just reads a little... controlling."

"Parker is not controlling, he just worries!"

"Worries that you realize you're out of his league and you leave him?"

She snorts. Like the rest of my family, Chloe wasn't necessarily Parker's biggest fan. But hers more came from just not really meshing with his personality. She was exuberant and loud and bubbly and Parker could really only handle her in small doses. *Well that and the fact that he'd cheated on me.*

"Chloe," I snap, already getting fed up with this conversation. "You can't chastise me about Jacob and Parker in the same conversation. Pick a lane."

She blanches. "Sorry."

"So, he shows up and he wants to come in and I say no and then he's like

can we talk and then Parker calls and is asking all these questions about him and I think he accepted my answer when I said who he was but then I just felt like I was doing something wrong..." I know I'm talking a mile a minute and I feel myself getting more worked up by the second. "So, we left and came here and... he told me he loved me and not to marry Parker and then asked if I'd come back to his place so we could talk in private and then thank God you showed up because I was honestly going to say yes." I take a deep breath because I don't think I did the whole time I was speaking. "I am a shitty person."

"Have you done anything with him?" she asks.

"No, we just talked."

"Then you're not a shitty person. Although I will say, Whitney, you're going down a slippery slope because for you and Jacob? Talking sounds a lot like foreplay." We are walking out of the bathroom and immediately my eyes find him. I wasn't even looking for him and yet my gaze lands on him instantly from across the room. He's staring at me like if he blinks, I'll disappear and a part of me wants to. I want to run so far away from this bar. Run away from Jacob and my feelings and nineteen-year-old Whitney who's begging me to give him another chance because this is *Jacob*.

JP My JP

"He's still in love with me," I say as I guide her toward the bar nestled in the corner of the lounge.

Chloe leans against the bar and pushes my hair behind my back so she can see my face better. "That much is obvious. The question is are you still in love with him?"

"I'm trying to do the right thing, Chlo. I'm engaged to another man."

"One doesn't have anything to do with the other. Doing the right thing means admitting the truth to yourself. It means walking away tonight, breaking up with Parker so you can be free to be with the man you love. You're twenty-two years old, marrying Parker when you're still in love with someone else out of some weird sense of obligation because you said 'yes' to his proposal, isn't doing the right thing, Whitney. You haven't done anything wrong, yet." She winces. "But I see the look he's giving you and the one you're giving him and I think you're one drink or brush against him away from falling into bed with him and then that isn't doing the right thing."

"Weren't you drunk like ten minutes ago? Where is this voice of reason coming from? And where is all this logic when it comes to you and Trey?" I

ask her as I drink the glass of water that the bartender placed in front of me that Chloe had motioned for.

She shrugs. “The logic comes and goes.” She chuckles. “And it’s easier when it’s not your own life you know that.”

I nod in agreement, because I know that’s the truth. It’s easy to cast opinions when your heart isn’t the one invested. We begin walking toward our seats and my skin begins to prickle in anticipation at being close to him again. “I... I don’t know what to do.” He scratches his beard and runs his thumb over his bottom lip before darting his tongue out to lick the skin. *God, he’s fucking hot.*

“Then I suggest you put a pin in this and go home until at the very least, you’re sober,” Chloe advises.

I let out a breath, trying to ignore the blood heating in my veins and the tingling in my sex. “You’re right.” I nod, and as if the universe is in complete agreement my phone begins to vibrate in my purse that’s currently resting against my hip. I open my bag and see Parker’s name on my phone. *Perfect timing. Amazing timing.* “Let me take this, I’ll meet you at the table.” Chloe heads back toward them and I swipe my finger across the screen.

“I love you.” I tell him instantly. “I miss you. How are you?”

“Where are you?” he asks and I frown that he didn’t respond to any of the things I said.

“At a bar with Chlo,” I tell him and he sighs in response. “What’s wrong? I told you I was going out.”

“You’re just with Chlo?”

I freeze. There are moments in life where you’re forced to make a decision where the choice isn’t obvious but you don’t have a chance to weigh the pros and cons because you only have about a second to give an answer. The lie comes out before I have a chance to stop it. “Yep. Mason is still at my parents’, I think.”

Guilt washes over me at the idea of lying to him. But what was the alternative? Tell him I was here on what is shaping up to be some kind of double date? Or even if I left out the tidbit about Trey and Chloe getting back together, he’d still question what I was doing drinking with my parents’ friend without my parents or even Mason. It would lead to questions and perhaps accusations that would be well warranted.

I’ll tell him the truth when he gets home. I’ll tell him everything. Just not on the phone while he’s across the country and working. “What are you

doing?" I ask.

"When are you going home?"

I frown, also recalling my earlier conversations today. I feel like I've been interrogated all day and I'm officially over it. "Parker, stop it. I asked you a question, one I'm realizing you've been avoiding answering all day."

"I'm working, Whitney. What do you think?"

"I think it's past midnight in New York on a Friday night," I say, looking at my watch. "There's no way you're still at the office. You run a chain of clubs."

"I'm the financial advisor for a chain of clubs, you act like I spend much time at any of them." And that was true, I went to his clubs with Chloe more than he did. He didn't mind me going, *my guess because everyone knows I'm his fiancée and he has people keeping an eye on me*. That wayward thought comes out of nowhere and throws me off slightly.

"It still doesn't change the fact that I asked what you're doing and your response is to continue to interrogate me like you've been doing all day."

There's a door where I'm standing that leads out onto the patio and I push through it and I'm happy to have some fresh air. There are people taking pictures and drinking, some rowdier than others but it's still quieter than it is inside.

He lets out a sigh and I can already picture him pulling at his hair like he always does when he's agitated. "We went to dinner earlier at a steakhouse owned by one of the investors. Now we're just at a rooftop bar. I wish you were here," he says finally. "Everyone has their significant other here and I just... miss you."

Finally!

"I miss you too. I'm sorry I'm not there."

"You could come tonight?" he says immediately. "I could get you a red eye and you could be here by the morning," he offers and I freeze. "There's an impromptu meet and greet before we open tomorrow night, I'd love it if you were here with me."

"Parker, I can't... I have a huge paper due Tuesday."

"And yet you're out tonight."

"Yes, for a few hours and I was planning to spend the entire day tomorrow, Sunday and Monday working on it, maybe even at the library. There's a big difference between a few hours tonight and a cross-country trip that wouldn't allow me any time to do any work."

“I’ll leave you completely alone until tomorrow night. I have work to do too. The suite is so nice, you can do your paper on this terrace with a view of Central Park and—”

I wince, wondering how I’m going to let him down easily. “Parker, there’s a reason I didn’t come this time. It was just bad timing, remember? I have a lot going on with school.”

“Whatever.”

“Baby, don’t do this,” I plead with him. “Why have you been so pissy with me today? You’re acting like you don’t trust me here without you almost.” I swallow. “I haven’t done anything to deserve this.”

“You’re really throwing *that* in my face right now?”

I frown, because I actually wasn’t but clearly his guilty conscience is showing. “I’m not throwing anything in your face, Parker.” I’m leaning over the railing of the patio with my back to the lounge when I sense someone in my space. I turn to the right to see Jacob now leaning over the balcony as well, his forearms resting on the bar. “Why are you getting so defensive?”

Great, just what I fucking need. “Maybe we should just talk in the morning,” I say before he can respond, not wanting to allow Jacob any further glimpses into this view of our relationship.

“I thought we agreed you’d call me when you got home tonight.”

I suck in a breath before letting it go slowly, trying to calm my irritation. “Yes, of course. I’ll call you when I get home.”

“Fine. I love you,” he says and the habit of always saying it before we get off the phone is the only reason I say it back because quite frankly I’m annoyed as hell at how he’s treated me all night.

“Love you too,” I tell him before hanging up the phone. I don’t look at Jacob, whose gaze I can feel on mine. “Don’t say anything. I don’t want to talk about it.”

He doesn’t say anything at first, he just gives me a second to calm down I assume. But then he begins to speak, his voice low and gravelly and *seductive*. “So, let me get this straight, he cheats on you, I need some context on that by the way, and from what I’ve heard in just a few moments of conversation he also seems to be giving you a hard time for what? Living?” He faces me. “Typically, when one person cheats, they don’t have a lot of room to make demands. Usually, the wronged party is the one demanding everything short of a lie detector when the other party gets home.”

I don’t say anything and when he grips my chin and brings my face

toward his, he cocks his head to the side.

His large, warm hand on my face makes my skin tingle. I used to love his hands on my face. He'd hold it when he'd kissed me. Stroked my cheeks. Wiped my tears. It used to be my weakness and evidently it still was because my knees buckle slightly. "Whitney, what's going on? Why... just why?"

I pull away from his grasp and take a step back. "He said he was sorry... it was a mistake and that it wouldn't happen again."

He runs a hand through his hair. "I need more than that. What happened? And how do you know it's not happening wherever he is right now?"

The thought had crossed my mind, but I was choosing to trust him. "It was earlier in our relationship. We'd only been together about three months. I ended it for a little bit and he begged, groveled, he sent flowers, cards and gifts." I wave a hand toward him as if to say et cetera. "You get it, I took him back on a trial run." I chuckle. "He became this perfect guy. It truly was just a stupid drunken mistake. He was in Vegas. Bachelor party. You know how it is."

"Can't say that I do. I went to three bachelor parties while we were together and I distinctly remember demanding nudes from you every four hours. So don't hand me that drunk mistake bullshit because I could have been so drunk I didn't remember my own name, but I damn sure always knew yours." My heart flutters at his words and I shake my head trying to rid myself of the high that my entire body feels hearing his words. "So okay, you took him back, you forgave him. How long after that did he propose?"

"Ummm we've been together about a year and a half total. So, it's been a little over a year since that happened?"

"He slept with her?"

I nod.

I notice that he balls his hands into a fist and anger flashes over his features. "You deserve better than that. Better than *this*."

"What's better...? You? Is that where you're going with this?"

"Yes, Whitney I am. You know it and I know it." *I was not expecting him to say that.* He pins me with a stare, his blue eyes boring into mine and I feel like I'm frozen in this spot. I lick my lips, and his eyes trace them before he lets out a groan.

"Stop doing that."

"Sorry."

"Fucking hell, Whitney. You're giving me all the signals. The lip biting,

and the playing with your hair and just the way you're fucking looking at me. What the fuck am I supposed to do with that?"

His words are biting and his tone is harsh and I feel them all over my skin. He rubs his beard and I clasp my hands together so I don't reach up and run my fingertips over his sharp jaw.

"I told you I love you."

My heart skips a beat again hearing those words come from him. I rub my chest, trying to calm the erratic beating just beneath the skin. "It's unfair of you to expect me to say it back when I'm with someone else. Jacob... it's too late."

"Why? No one is married yet. You can still change your mind; the question is do you want to and I think you do."

"There's that arrogance again." He doesn't respond, he just lets out another sigh and leans over the railing. "I should go." It's getting late and while I haven't necessarily consumed more alcohol, I feel my inhibitions lowering. I don't know if it's in response to my irritation with Parker, Jacob's revelations or the combination of the two but I hear Chloe's voice in the back of my head telling me to take a step back before I do something reckless. "I'm going to get an Uber."

"Don't be ridiculous. I'll take you home, Whitney."

"Okay but you can't come in..."

He doesn't look at me, he just continues to stare out into the night. "Are you telling me that or yourself?"

"You." I answer with as much conviction as I can muster though a part of me believes I need convincing as well. Maybe I don't need the temptation. "I could just go home with Chloe..."

"You and I both know Chloe is going home with my brother." He laughs.

"Well, they could drop me off on the way, Chloe wouldn't just leave me."

"I said I would take you," he counters.

"I just don't want to inconvenience you."

"Doing something for you is never an inconvenience." I melt and I try to hide the smile but he notices it and his lips turn up in what I assume to be triumph.



Trey and Chloe had long been ready to leave and I was able to convince Chloe that I didn't need to be chaperoned and that she and Trey could leave to get their more intimate reunion underway. We parted ways under strict instructions from Chloe to drop me off and for me to call her when I got in the door. The ride back to my house was quiet which I could only attribute to the mounting tension between us and I was trying my best not to fixate on it.

"Are you happy to be home?" I ask and Jacob's eyes pull away from the road briefly to look at me.

"We're doing the small talk thing?" I see the humor in his expression but I can also hear the sarcasm in his voice. *I confessed my love for you, you haven't responded and you ask me that?*

"I... was just trying to make conversation."

"I'm happy to see *you*. Even if you don't share the sentiment," he says. "And even if you are engaged to someone else," he adds.

I need to get out of this car right now. My hands twist in my lap as I try my best to calm the nerves that are whispering in my ear to reach for his hand on the gearshift. To run my fingertips over his knuckles like I'd done a hundred times before.

"You're nervous," he adds when I don't respond. "I'm not sure if I'm happy or annoyed about that. You've never been nervous around me before, but part of me believes it's because of what you still feel between us." His hand moves from the gear shift and before I can blink it's resting on my thigh.

Push it off. Push it off. My mind is screaming at me to remove his hand, but I can't. It feels warm and strong and it looks sexy as hell wrapped around my thigh. He squeezes it gently and my sex pulses in response. "I—" I start, not even knowing what to say before closing my mouth. His touch feels dangerous but safe and wrong but right and I'm struggling with all of the conflicting feelings fighting for control. "I feel like you're trying to break me. You're not playing fair."

"I never agreed to play fair. Another man asked you to marry him. As far as I'm concerned, he declared war on me first. And you know what they say

about love and war.”

“But what about what I want? You’re acting as if I don’t have a say.”

“If I truly believed that this Parker guy is who you wanted, I’d leave you alone.”

I feel like I’m holding my breath for the rest of the ride back to my house. My emotions are running high and I feel like the second I exhale; I’m going to shatter into a million confused pieces. As soon as we pull up in front of my house, I’m out of the car before he has a chance to try and open my car door for me or any other seductive chivalry, he may have up his sleeve.

“Thanks for the ride.” *And I try to ignore the innuendo my mind conjures.*

“For you? Anything.” *Fuck.* That dimple appears and I feel myself getting weak in the knees.

I almost close the door before I open it back again.

“I am happy to see you, JP” I don’t wait for his response before I close the door, but I definitely do not miss the smile on his face before I turn toward my house.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Jacob

My dick is hard as fucking stone. I don't think it's ever been this hard. Not since Whitney rubbed her sweet little ass against me for the first time nearly five years ago. She'd been trying to tease me. Entice me into fucking her. I had been trying my best to exercise restraint when all I wanted to do was pin her to her parent's couch and feed her my cock. Of course, at the time, my best friends, *her parents* were just upstairs. She'd been determined that night. Her hands touching every inch of me like I belonged to her. But I couldn't touch Whitney. It was sick that I was even considering it, but with every sigh that left her lips and the sexy shy look that crossed her face, I found my resolve weakening.

I slam the door of my house so hard it rattles the bookshelf in my office just off the foyer. Books fall to the floor but I can't be bothered to care as my only concern is wrapping my hand around my dick like a horny teenage boy. I'm unbuckling my pants before I even get to the chair in my office knowing exactly what the fuck I'm looking for. I drop my pants to my ankles just before I sit in my office chair and power up my laptop, finding the photos in the locked file on my computer. The photos that I had deleted numerous times but could never bring myself to permanently delete from my computer's recycling bin once they were in there. I tried to delete them after we broke up, part of me flooded with guilt for keeping these photographic memories of her. *Proof that we'd been together. Proof we'd been real.*

Photos of Whitney. Some clothed some *not so clothed*. Whitney sent me pictures of herself constantly. If I was away on business or even just at the grocery store. She'd once sent pictures of her fingers in her cunt just before

I'd gone into a three-hour surgery leaving me with a hard-on for ninety goddamn minutes.

"Fucking hell, Whitney," I grit out as my hand finds the base of my cock and I drag it up to the top. "Fuck, I missed you so much." My dick twitches at the same time my heart begins to pound in my chest as the thoughts of her taking me back begin to fester.

Thoughts of her showing up at my door and telling me that she loves me are all I can think about as I begin to move my hand faster. My dick gets harder thinking about her lips. Those full pouty lips wrapping around my dick, sucking my balls into her mouth, or pressing her lips to mine. I open the folder and the first picture that pops up is a picture of the both of us. It was probably about a year into our relationship and we'd flown to Aspen for the weekend. The plan was to go skiing but we never made it out of the room. We'd made love in front of the fire countless times and watched as snow poured just outside the window. The picture is of us kissing. You can tell we're lying on the bed, pillows behind our heads and that we're probably naked given that our shoulders and upper chests are bare. Her hand is resting on my cheek and both of our eyes are closed. Despite not being able to see our eyes, we looked happy. Happy and fucking in love.

How did I give this up?

I let my hand fall from my dick, that's soft and suddenly angry at me for taking me on this particular trip down memory lane and not one of the many others that would provide a visual of me fucking her ass for example. I drop my head into my hands when my phone buzzes in my pocket indicating a text message. I contemplated ignoring it, thinking it's probably Trey or maybe my college fraternity group chat which has its intermittent moments of activity on random Friday nights. I pull it out of my pocket and I'm pleased to see the name and message on the screen.

Whitney: It was good to see you.

I smile because unfortunately for her, I still spoke fluent Whitney Monroe, and this was more than just the words on the screen. I smile before giving her a cheeky reply.

Me: So, you said when I dropped you off.

Whitney: Don't be an ass.

My smile widens.

Me: My apologies. Why are you still awake? I assumed you'd be asleep once you were in range of your bed.

Whenever Whitney had been drinking, the second she got home she'd be knocked out. There were nights she barely got undressed and even more nights I'd take her makeup for her when she was already asleep because she'd drunkenly passed out before she had a chance to get ready for bed.

Whitney: I'm not that drunk. And just worked up, I guess.

Me: About what?

I have a guess but I want her to say it. I want her to admit she still feels the spark between us. That this isn't easy for her either. Something. Fucking anything.

Whitney: Don't you have like twenty-five years of schooling and a medical degree? Can't figure that out?

Me: I want you to say it. I don't want to assume.

Whitney: You, alright? Seeing you was... exactly what I expected and somehow, I wasn't prepared for it.

Still not exactly what I was looking for, but we are getting somewhere.

Me: I don't know what to say to that

Whitney: Parker is a really nice guy.

This joker again. I don't respond, hoping she'll expand on her comment or even if there's a 'but' coming.

But I don't love him.

But he doesn't look at me the way you do.

But he's bad in bed.

Something.

Whitney: When I said I would marry him, I meant it. But I'd be lying if I said, you showing up doesn't change things.

Me: You wait until we're apart to want to have this conversation? Why didn't you tell me this earlier?

Whitney: I couldn't do it in person. I'm not a coward but it's hard to say these things to your face. While you kept looking at me... like... well you know how you were looking at me.

I want to at least call her and hear her voice, but if she's feeling skittish, I don't want to break the spell of honesty she seems to be under right now.

Whitney: I don't know what to do.

Me: Then you shouldn't be getting married.

Whitney: Of course, that's your response.

Me: That would be anyone's response. Marriage is serious and if you're going in with doubts or concerns about anything let alone about things regarding you and me, then it's not right to get married. It's not fair to you or to him, all things with me aside.

Me: Not that I'm particularly concerned with his feelings for what it's worth.

She doesn't respond so I nudge her gently.

Me: What are you doing tomorrow?

Whitney: I have a paper due Tuesday.

Me: Can I see you?

Whitney: I don't think that's a good idea.

She doesn't 'think'. I can work with that.

Me: I'll be at your parent's house most of the day. Maybe you should come by if you need a break?

Whitney: I'm surprised you're not already there. My parents really missed you. They didn't make you go back over? haha

Me: Surprisingly no. I think Miche passed out and Kevin stopped answering soon after I left earlier.

Whitney: I'll think about it. When are you going?

Me: Early afternoon. The game starts at noon.

Whitney: I'll see.

Don't press her. This is progress.

Me: I look forward to maybe seeing you.



Sweat pours from me as I go into my third mile the following morning. I barely slept a wink all night, despite the exhaustion from traveling I couldn't fall asleep. Every time I closed my eyes, I saw Whitney and her fiancé kissing, touching and it made me fucking irate. I slow to a jog, stopping a few yards shy of a main intersection with cars zooming by. I begin to pace around the stop sign, thoughts of Whitney taking over again. I'd always been a runner, having played soccer in high school, college and in several recreational leagues post-graduation. After I left for Mexico, I'd started running non-stop to try and clear my head of thoughts of Whitney. It was the only time I felt free of the regret I had over leaving her.

This time however was different. The run did nothing but made me conjure about a hundred different scenarios over how the next few months would go. *Would she marry him? Prolong the engagement until she figures out what she wants? Date us both? Break up with him and be with me? Start another affair with me behind his back? Tell me to fuck off?* I used to be in tune with Whitney and now I had no idea what she was thinking. The three years apart had changed more than just her relationship status and it pissed me the fuck off.

I run a hand through my hair before raising the T-shirt I was wearing up over my brow to wipe the sweat. My heart rate is starting to slow as I begin walking back toward my house when my phone begins to ring through my AirPods. I pull the phone out of my pocket and I'm not surprised to see it's Kevin.

"You coming over for breakfast?" Kevin asks before I even say hello. "Michelle's making waffles and I may have already started drinking mimosas."

I look down at my Apple Watch that I use when I'm working out to track my miles and I see it's only eleven. I assumed we'd be drinking but I wasn't thinking he'd be starting without me or even before the game was on. "Already?"

"It's not my fault, Whitney is a bad influence." He chuckles and my ears immediately perk up when I hear her name.

“Whitney?” I ask as nonchalantly as possible. *She’s there already? So much for a study break.* A smile pulls at my lips that she’s there because I told her I was spending the day there.

“Yeah, she came over for breakfast and to work on her paper. I guess she’s bored at her house. But I don’t think she’s getting much work done today if she’s already had a mimosa.” I hear her voice in the background and I wish I could hear what she said. “Oh, she says, one won’t hurt.” He laughs and I’m grateful that he spoke the words that had gotten lost in translation. “So, breakfast?”

“Yeah, of course. You know I can’t say no to Michelle’s waffles.” *Or the idea of being around Whitney.*

But you’re going to be around Kev and Miche, act accordingly.



Whitney is seated on the couch, with her legs propped up on the coffee table in front of her with her computer perched in her lap. Her notebook is next to her and a variety of textbooks occupy the space next to her and on the table. A pen is nestled between her teeth and air pods are in her ears. I narrow my gaze when I note the round frames around her eyes and I wonder when she started wearing glasses. Upon further inspection, I’m wondering if they’re blue light glasses based on the reflection I see on the lenses. She still hasn’t noticed me, and Kevin and Michelle must be in another room because she’s in the living room by herself with the pre-game show playing. The San Francisco 49ers are playing the Seattle Seahawks making for one of the biggest games of the day.

I move into Whitney’s line of sight and drop to the couch next to her. Her tanned bare legs are on display under the black cotton dress she’s wearing. “Fancy seeing you here.”

She smiles as she pulls an air pod out. “I just thought...”

“Can’t stay away from me, huh?” I tease and she crosses her arms in front of her chest, drawing my attention to her sexy little tits. I pry my eyes away from them, to meet her gaze. “Hey, I told you I was coming here first. So that means that you followed *me* here. Don’t get me wrong, I am flattered that

you wanted to see me.”

She rolls her eyes before turning back to her paper. “I can leave, you know.”

“Please don’t,” I whisper and I watch as she shivers. She swallows and squirms in her seat and the fact that she might be getting turned on by me makes my cock throb in my jeans. “I can’t stop thinking about you,” I tell her. “I tried. I went for a run this morning and you were all I could think about.” She’s not looking at me, but I can tell she’s not paying attention to whatever’s on her screen. She lets out a sigh, letting her eyes flutter closed before opening them again. I decide to push her because she’s here at her parents’ house and there has to be a reason for that. “Did you think about me at all last night?”

“I plead the fifth.”

“Alright calm down, law school,” I tease and she giggles. I nod toward her computer. “How’s your paper coming anyway?”

“Fine—” she starts when Kevin comes into the room with two stemless wine glasses of champagne.

“I thought I heard you in here,” he says, handing me one of the glasses. “Whit, you need a refill?”

“Dad, I am literally trying to do homework! And I’m the bad influence?” She shakes her head as Kevin drops to the love seat adjacent to the couch where Whitney and I are seated. A huge flat-screen television is mounted on the wall in front of us making it feel like we are damn near seated on the field with how large it is.

“Michelle is almost done with breakfast, I think Mase is coming over in a bit too,” he says without removing his eyes from the television.

Fucking great. I just wanted some alone time with Whitney without any knowing eyes. Whitney stiffens slightly next to me making me believe she wasn’t aware that her brother was coming over either. I am somewhat aware that Kevin is still talking but I can’t focus on anything he’s saying. My attention is entirely focused on the woman next to me despite the fact that I’m not looking at her.

“Price.” I hear my name, breaking me out of my thoughts and I turn toward Kevin.

“Sorry, what did you say? I spaced out.”

“We didn’t really get a chance to talk last night, but are you going back to work at the hospital? Or thinking about doing something different? Opening

your own practice, maybe? You're not going back to Mexico, are you?"

Not without there being a very different ring on Whitney's finger.

"I don't have any plans to go back, but we'll see."

"You'll see what?" Her voice pipes up and I turn away from Kevin to see Whitney staring at me. I can see the unasked question all over her face. *It has to do with me, doesn't it?*

"Just... if I'm still needed here." I shrug, trying my best to answer her question without alerting Kevin of anything.

"You're one of the best general surgeons in the tri-state area, you're needed everywhere," Kevin responds. There was a time not so long ago that I'd thought about opening my own practice, but then I spent two years spending every bit of my free time between Whitney's legs so those plans had been put on the back burner.

"I'm taking a few weeks off to just reset but I have a meeting with the chief of surgery at my old hospital at the end of the month. More of a formality." I shrug, because they've been begging me to come back since the day after I left for Mexico three years ago.

"Dad," she says, closing her laptop and giving him an innocent smile. "I think I'm ready for another mimosa, can you please get me one?" she says, clasping her hands under her chin and smiling widely at him.

"You're younger than me, shouldn't you be getting *me* another one?" He laughs, but I know he's going to do it. Whitney has her father wrapped around her little finger.

Me too.

"Dad, pleeeeeease." She points at the work surrounding her. "I'm slaving away here!"

"Yes, I see that." He snorts, as he gets up leaving us alone again.

She follows her dad with her eyes out of the room and peeks over the couch to make sure he's not within earshot. "You're only back in town because of me." Her tone isn't hopeful or judgmental, it's even and I can't tell what she wants to hear.

Enough of the games already. "Yes, Whitney. I'm back in town because I heard you were getting fucking married and I..."

"Waffles are ready!" I hear Michelle call from the kitchen and I let out a sigh of exasperation over being interrupted again.

"This is why I wanted to talk about this in private, where there was no chance of interruptions." I lower my voice as I stand up. I reach my hand out

for her and pull her to her feet, rubbing my thumb instinctively over her ring finger again. “I hate this here.”

“Well, I hate that you left me, so we’re even.” She snatches her hand out of my hand. “You didn’t ask me to wait for you, Jacob and I’m tired of you insinuating that I should have. You told me to move on, so that’s what I did.”

CHAPTER EIGHT

Whitney

So, you know that “the opposite of love isn’t hate, it’s indifference” thing? Yeah, that’s been shot to hell, I think to myself as I all but stomp through the kitchen. I told myself I wouldn’t get worked up. I told myself that I could handle being around JP but clearly, I was wrong because his presence coupled with what had to have been a strong as fuck mimosa to already be feeling the effects of it, has me on edge. He’s baiting me and I’m over it. Like he wasn’t the one who ended things. And now suddenly I’m in the wrong for not waiting around pining for him for years?

He’s not saying you’re in the wrong, Whitney. He’s saying he understands but get rid of Parker.

Okay, so because now he’s ready and wants to be with me, I have to oblige? “How high?” That’s what he wants to hear?

No, he loves you and doesn’t want you making a mistake because you obviously still love him.

Obviously!?! No, I don’t.

Ummm yes, do you see how good he looks? You know you want to sit on his face. Or his dick. Or both. Don’t you remember what coming during sex feels like? You know it’s been a while.

Love and sex are two different things.

Okay, so you still love him AND you still want to fuck him. Better?

“Honey, are you okay?” My mother breaks me of my thoughts thankfully because the back and forth going on in my head right now makes me want to scream.

“Yes. Yep. Great.” My voice sounds about three octaves higher than I

usually sound and I feel like my heart is about to beat out of my chest. I let out a deep breath and my fingers go to my engagement ring and begin sliding it around.

“Are you sure?” She comes around the island and puts her hand on my cheek. “You’re flushed, how many drinks did you have?”

“One! I just... I’m stressed about my paper.” I swallow and she frowns before wrapping me in her arms.

“Well honey, don’t get yourself worked up. I am so proud of how well you’ve been doing.” She presses a kiss to my forehead before pointing at the breakfast she’d made. “But come eat some food, you can’t work on an empty stomach. I’m going to go take a shower,” she says before she heads out of the room. I know he’s staring at me and probably can tell I’m on the verge of a breakdown so I hope he can also feel the ‘don’t fucking talk to me’ vibes I’m shooting his way. I grab two of the fluffy waffles my mother made and put them on a plate. I’m still in the process of cutting them up when the container of syrup is slid in front of me. I look up and see the sadness all over his face.

“I’m sorry,” he says and I snap my head around the room to see if my dad is still around and notice that we’re alone, making me wonder just how long I was in my own world cutting my food.

“For...?”

“Making you mad... again. What can I do to make you less angry with me, Whitney? Do you want me to leave? Will that make it better? Please just tell me.” I look up at him and the sincerity radiates from his blue eyes. He gives me a sad smile making the skin wrinkle next to his eyes. Before I realize what I’m doing, I’ve wrapped my arms around him, pressing my face into his hard chest and breathing in his scent. He must seem shocked at first because he doesn’t hug me back right away, but after a second his arms wrap around me and I feel his cheek resting on the top of my head just like he always did.

“No. I don’t want you to leave.” I pull out of his grasp before I get too comfortable and one of my parents walk in and begin asking questions. “I want this to be... easier.” His hands are still on me but now he’s slowly dragging them down my arms before gripping my wrists. He squeezes them gently before dragging his thumb over them and letting them go and just that innocent touch has me affected.

I want him. My mind finally speaks what my body has been saying since I saw him yesterday. But I can't have him.

“Whitney.” His voice is low and has a direct line of communication to the space between my legs. Memories of him calling me a *good girl* in that same voice while I rode him comes flooding back and I suddenly feel an overwhelming *need* to come. *Like now.*

Fuck. He STILL has that power?

I remember him telling me that he was going to condition me to need an orgasm with just the sound of his voice. It didn't matter what he said, but the tone he used. A sexy low almost growl that apparently *still* speaks to the most primal urges in me.

I back away slowly and grab my plate wanting to run from him and this space that's suddenly way too small for the both of us to inhabit. *Just avoid being alone with him. Stay with your parents. Nothing will happen if I stay around them.*

Or better yet, why am I not going home? My subconscious snaps snarkily. I ignore it, because I'm not ready to answer that question.



It isn't until a few hours later, during a study break prolonged by more mimosas and a shot of tequila when the universe decides to test me once and for all.

“Hey hey!” I hear a voice called from the entrance to my house. It's not Chloe, *she was still indisposed with Trey even after I all but begged her to come over and run interference* and it doesn't sound like anyone that would walk into my house unannounced. *Which actually could be a lot of people, my parents were not familiar with boundaries and wanted everyone to feel like family.* But seriously, who the fuck is that?

My eyes widen to the size of saucers I'm sure when I see the recently divorced Georgina Martin, from down the street holding a bottle of champagne and what looks like *fucking cookies!?* My parents are so fucking obvious it's insane and the look on JP's face means he knows what this is as well.

My mother had called me the night Georgina's husband moved out quite literally from the window as she watched them argue in the front yard about

his secretary or boss or whatever cliched mistress he had from work. She and I had always said we had a hunch that something was off about their marriage. Whenever they came to my parent's parties, he was always a little *too* flirty and she was always a little too drunk and or oblivious. So evidently, he had a wandering dick and alas, they divorced.

And now they're evidently trying to set her up with JP.

Great.

Now we have to add my fucking jealousy into the mix. I rub my forehead as my mother hops off the couch where she's now seated next to me and pulls her in for a hug. I share a look with Jacob and I'm pretty sure his reads something along the lines of "*I'm not planning to*" in response to my look that says, "*do not test me.*"

"Georgina, this is me and Kev's oldest friend! You moved in shortly after he left for Mexico, so you've never met! Jacob Price, this is Georgina Martin!" She claps her hands as if she's not even trying to hide the fact that she's trying to fix them up or her intense enthusiasm over it for that matter.

Really, Mom?

Georgina is pretty, I am not going to deny that. She's tall and blonde with powder blue eyes and a body she keeps very tight thanks to a lot of yoga and Pilates. She was also much closer in age to Jacob, *probably midthirties if I had to guess* and wouldn't cause a giant scandal in my family if they were to get together.

So, points for her, I guess.

Despite the fact that it was an obvious fix up, she doesn't seem to be trying too hard. No heels or overly done makeup. She truly looks like she's just a neighbor coming over to hangout and it irks the shit out of me that she's actually playing it cool.

Jacob stands up and shakes her hand after Mom had rid her of the alcohol and cookies she brought over. "It's nice to meet you Georgina, any friend of Kev and Michelle's..." He looks at the two of them before turning back to her, "deserves a medal." They all laugh and I force a smile so that I'm not the only one in the room not amused by this nightmare I'm forced to witness.

"Whatever! Georgina, come let's get you a drink," my mom says and just as they leave the room, Georgina looks at me and gives me a smile that I'm not completely sure is genuine before she speaks. Maybe I'm imagining it, or maybe she is annoyed about the potential fifth wheel on this 'double date.'

"Oh, hi Whitney! Didn't see ya there at first!"

I feel like that's untrue, but okay. "Hi Georgina."

"I had nothing to do with this," my father says when they leave the room without drawing his eyes away from the television.

"This has your wife written all over it, I already know." Jacob laughs as he pulls the bottled IPA beer to his lips.

"You know she wants you to settle down. Meet someone. Give her a baby to babysit while we wait for grandchildren, I don't know." He waves his hand around and the idea of him meeting someone makes me sick to my stomach. Fucking some other woman and giving her a baby. The alcohol mixed with my jealousy is causing an anxious feeling in the pit of my stomach and I suddenly want to throw up the waffles I'd eaten.

His eyes flit to mine as inconspicuous as possible but that quickly I can see the apology in his eyes. He turns back toward the television and away from me. "So, this is what I'm going to be dealing with for the next few hours? Entertaining this? I thought you and I were supposed to be watching the game. I didn't realize this was a... whatever this is," Jacob says, and I'm glad he doesn't seem to be into the idea.

"What do you want me to do? Tell her to go home? J, if you're not interested, she'll live."

"I don't want to have to be warding off her attempts to flirt or talk. I can't be rude to the woman."

"Why does it matter anyway? So, she flirts? What, you can't talk to a single good-looking woman without it turning into something?" He's still looking at the television so he doesn't notice me stiffen at the question with the underlying accusation. *What was the big deal? After today, never talk to her again if you're not interested.* The big deal had to do with me sitting in the same room witnessing said flirtation and seething with jealousy over something I had no business being jealous over. *But he couldn't tell my father that.*

"Nothing, never mind," he mutters, because really what could he say? *I don't like women flirting with me now? It makes me uncomfortable especially in front of your daughter who just so happens to be my ex-girlfriend?*

"You're being weird," Kevin says, looking at Jacob and I quickly look down at my phone before his gaze pans to mine and can potentially see something in my eyes that I can't hide from one of the people responsible for bringing me into this world.

No more than a minute later, my mom and Georgina are back in the room

and suddenly I feel like my spacious living room is again way too small. Georgina sits next to Jacob on the love seat as it's one of the few seats open and *why not?* Despite her sitting next to him and the whole reason for her being here, she turns her attention to me.

“Congratulations by the way! How excited are you?” She leans across and holds her hand out. “Let me see your ring!” I’m used to this. It’s all I’ve heard for the past month. I hold out my hand and she beams. “It’s beautiful! He did good!” *Typical response.* My eyes flit toward Jacob for no more than a second who’s staring daggers at my finger.

Good, now we’re both annoyed.

“I feel like I haven’t heard the story of how you two met anyway?” Jacob asks. “Don’t tell me a dating app?” he jokes condescendingly.

I furrow my brows at the judgment in his voice. My dad chuckles before taking a sip of his drink and my mother chimes in, ever my biggest fan. “Don’t be like that Jacob, that’s how all the kids are meeting people these days!”

His eyes dart to mine and he doesn’t even attempt to hide the anger. “You went out with some guy you met online? Alone? Was Chloe at least with you the first time?”

“Calm down, *dad,*” I snap and his blue eyes darken and narrow in response. *I didn’t call you daddy so don’t even look at me like that.*

“That’s exactly what I said,” my father interjects and I snap my gaze to him who’s shaking his head at Jacob.

“Which is why you didn’t know until way after the fact,” I sass. “I am alive, you know. I’m fine. He wasn’t a serial killer. And for your information, Jacob. Yes, he and his friend met Chloe and I for dinner for us to meet for the first time... and the second time if you must know.”

“So, you met this joker online. He couldn’t meet a girl in person? Bad social skills?” Jacob asks sarcastically with a scrunch of his nose.

“Yes,” my dad pipes up without taking his eyes away from the screen *again.*

“Kevin!” my mom exclaims at the same time I say, “Dad!”

“What? Miche, come on. And Whit, don’t act like you don’t know we feel that way. JP, wait till you meet this guy, he’s just so... not like us.”

“And that’s a bad thing?” I ask.

“It is when he’s marrying my princess. He’s just so standoffish. Aloof. The guy barely speaks and he’s been around almost two years. I just don’t

think he's good enough for you, sweetheart. We've been back and forth about this so many times, my feelings aren't going to change."

"Kevin, enough." My mother speaks before putting her hand over mine and squeezing. I look up at her. Eyes that match mine. Warm brown eyes that I'm fairly certain knows all of my secrets, even the ones I've tried to keep from her. She tucks a hair behind my ear before pulling me closer to her and wrapping her arm around me. "If Whitney is happy, we're happy."

I smile but it's fake. My head is resting on her shoulder, so she can't see my fake smile but Jacob can. He's staring right at me like he can read every thought in my head right now.

"Well, I guess I have to meet this guy that has Whitney so happy then. When is he back?"

"Next week," I answer.



Later that night, like a typical Saturday at my parents' house, the small gathering of me and my parents, JP and the neighbor from down the street that they are trying to set him up with, grew. There are at least ten people here now. People from around the neighborhood, my brother has gotten here with a woman he sometimes hangs out with from time to time. Chloe and Trey have shown up and my paper has been long forgotten as I indulge in a few more drinks with Chloe. I'm not drunk and I've been very cognizant of how much I'm drinking in case I want to do any more work later. I've talked to Parker a few times throughout the day and I've been able to keep his accusations at bay at the idea of me being at my parents' all day doing homework. I hadn't really told him that me hanging out at my parents' house had turned into this and I was starting to feel guilty especially since Chloe took a few pictures of us that I'm sure she's already uploaded to her Instagram story. Now, Chloe, Trey, Jacob, and I, *much to my reluctance*, are outside on the patio watching as the sun sets.

Chloe and Trey are in their own little world, her seated in his lap like she has been since they got here leaving Jacob and me alone to talk.

Except we're not talking. We are sitting in silence just staring at the

sunset. I guess at this point there is nothing left to say. I'm just about to get up to get a break from the tension flowing between us when my mother and Georgina make their way outside. They're both more than a little tipsy and I wonder what is about to come of this. "Jacob, the four of us are going out to dinner tomorrow. It's already been decided."

I'm seated next to Jacob, my legs crossed and I find myself flexing my foot into a pointed toe like I used to do when I was seated and anxious. It's getting dark, but the lights around my backyard give everything a romantic warm glow.

"Sure, sounds good. Tell me where to meet you."

The words, ones that I did *not* expect though I should have, instantly tank my mood. *No. I cannot be having what feels like a visceral reaction to Jacob going out with another woman. I'm engaged. I told him no. He told me he loved me and I said it was too late. He can move on. He can...*

NO. HE. CAN'T.

I'm up out of my chair before I can hear my mother's excited response though I can hear her chatting animatedly as I make my way into the house. I bypass the living room where my father is talking to Nick Barnes from next door about his new lawnmower or whatever the fuck and make my way upstairs toward my bathroom. I did actually need to go but I also needed a moment away from the chaos that I was barely staying one step in front of. If this were a romance novel, I had about five seconds before Jacob showed up at the door, pushing me backward into the bathroom and demanding me to explain why I'm behaving like a jealous brat.

My sex clenches at memories of him calling me that when he'd pulled me over his knee and spanked my bare ass.

Parker. Call Parker.

Fiancé. You have a fiancé.

I immediately pick up my phone and press his contact and I frown when it goes right to voice mail. *Come on.* I'm sending him a text letting him know that I called him when sounds of movement outside of the door sends every hair up on the back of my neck. *No. No. No.* I cross my fingers and pray. "Please be Chloe, please be Chloe," I whisper. "Chlo—?" I ask nervously.

"Yeeessss?" she sings. "Let me in, I have to pee."

A sigh of relief but also... what feels like disappointment floods me. I try to ignore the latter feeling and focus on the fact that temptation in the form of my ex and my parent's best friend isn't standing on the other side of the

bathroom door.

I let her in just as my phone beeps in my hand and I expect it to be Parker, letting me know why he couldn't take my call.

Jacob: I feel like you're smart enough to realize you don't have any reason to be jealous.

Me: I'm not. I text back before I even have the chance to come up with something wittier.

Jacob: Please. Is that why you ran from the patio like you were on fire?

Me: I had to pee.

Jacob: Bullshit, you were anxious. I could feel it. And see it. I saw your foot.

Me: That was nothing.

Jacob: That's your tell.

Oh my God. My heart flutters in response to the fact that he noticed something so minute and now I'm realizing that the chaos I was trying to stay ahead of seems to be getting closer by the second.

Me: Do you like her?

Jacob: Do you care?

Me: Answer my question first.

Jacob: Why should I?

Me: You're not in any place to negotiate right now.

I see the bubbles indicating that he is typing when Chloe interrupts my thoughts as she flushes the toilet. "Who are you texting?"

I look at her and let out a sigh, deciding that maybe I need to let her in on the mayhem going on in my head. "Jacob."

"Obviously." She washes her hands and stares at me through the mirror as she fluffs her hair. "He's not into Georgina, Whit."

"I know, he said that."

She turns to face me and drags her hair through her fingers like she does when she's looking for split ends. "The fact that he had to say that to calm your jealous ass down is a problem."

“He didn’t have to!”

She looks up at me and away from her hair. “Oh? Is that why you stormed away when your mom came over to talk about their double date? Maybe your mom didn’t notice but I certainly did. Whitney, you can’t have it both ways.”

“I know! Jesus, Chlo.” My heart is already pounding when there’s a knock on the door, and I’m certain this time it *is* Jacob. I open the door and there he is standing in front of it, blue eyes staring at me. His gaze is so intense I feel like he can read every thought in my head. His phone is in his hand and I can see our conversation still on the screen as he brushes past me and makes his way into the bathroom.

“We need a minute,” he says, staring at me. When Chloe makes no effort to move, his eyes flit to her. “You need to go, Chloe.”

I half expect her to put up a fight or say that it’s my decision but she just nods before looking at me. “You don’t have a lot of time.”

The door closes quietly behind her with the faintest click leaving us alone. He doesn’t say anything, he’s not even looking at me as he stares out the window. I’m getting anxious waiting for him to speak when he begins to pace back and forth in front of me. I follow him with my eyes, watching him get visibly more agitated with each passing second. He runs a hand through his hair and it’s the first time I’ve noticed a bit of gray peppered throughout his chestnut strands. *Say something!* I’m not sure if I’m talking to myself or to him but all I know is this silence is making me crazy.

I’ve just convinced myself that I should speak up when I’m against the wall with his arms caging me in. “Whitney.” He lets out a slow shaky breath. “You are... impossible. Did you just ask me if I *liked her?*”

I go to respond when he puts a finger up. I listen because I don’t really have a response or a reasoning behind my irrational jealousy I’d have to explain.

“I wish I did like her.” His right hand moves off the wall and finds my face. His palm rests against my cheek as he drags his thumb under the space just beneath my eyes that are now welling with tears. “I wish I liked anyone. But I don’t.” He shrugs before shaking his head. “I can’t. Not while I’m still in love with you.”

A gasp escapes my lips and the sound sends his eyes to my mouth. He bites his bottom lip and my eyes follow the movement.

“Say something,” he whispers.

“I don’t know what to say.” And that was the truth. I feel like my mind has gone blank.

“Tell me to walk away.” I don’t speak. He drags his hand away from my cheek and I know the pinkness is coating my cheeks in response to his touch. His thumb finds my bottom lip and he strokes the skin gently. “Tell me not to kiss you.”

I don’t speak.

CHAPTER NINE

Whitney

He leans down so our faces are only an inch apart and I'm sure he can tell that my breathing has become labored and I also wonder if he can hear the pounding in my chest. He's giving me a chance to stop this. *But I don't want to.* I know it's wrong and I know I'm about to start down a path of destruction but I can't think about anything except Jacob's mouth on mine. *Fuck, his lips. I remember he had the softest fucking lips.* His nose brushes against mine and I let out a sigh that causes him to utter a groan. Our lips are so close but not touching as we essentially breathe in the same bit of air and then just as my eyes flutter closed, I feel his lips touch mine gently. It's light and quick but it's enough to send an explosion of fireworks behind my eyelids and goose bumps to appear all over my flesh. I open my eyes and he's staring straight at me.

His hands find their way into my hair and he pulls gently and just that small action has my panties dampening. "Baby."

"Hmmm?" I respond without thinking and the smile that finds his face makes my knees buckle.

"You still respond to that."

I don't respond.

"I love you," he repeats and I don't respond to that either.

I just raise my chin, letting him know what I want. I lick my lips and he raises an eyebrow at me sexily. But also, in that arrogant way that tells me he knows he's got me. That sexy arrogance. Not many men can pull that off, you know. *Bastard.* His lips find mine again but this time it isn't a brush or light, it's a full-on kiss. He wastes no time and soon his tongue finds mine and I'm

lifted off the ground and I'm pinned to the wall. My legs wrap around his waist instinctively as he grinds his dick into me. His tongue weaves with mine in the familiar dance we did for the better part of two years. His cock is hard and the space between my legs is getting slicker by the second as he drives himself hard against me.

He grips my ass harder and I'm grateful that all of it is covered by the lacy boy short underwear I'm wearing instead of some of my barely there underwear. Whenever I'm wearing a short flowy dress like I am today, I feel too exposed wearing a thong so I wear something with more coverage and I'm grateful for that in this moment. I know that if he was touching the bare flesh of my ass, it would be even easier for him to rip them from me. *And then who knows what would happen.*

I want him to rip them from me. The thought enters my mind and the words leave my lips before I can stop them.

"Fuck me," I moan out when he takes a break from attacking my lips to find the space behind my ear and trail kisses down my neck. His tongue darts out and licks the same path just before he pulls back to look at me.

"Here?"

"Ah." I gasp as he bites my earlobe and it brings me slightly out of the sex haze and into the present where I remember where we are. "No. Not here. We shouldn't." I think I say, because the angle that he's grinding against me now is providing direct friction against my clit and it's making my whole body sizzle every time he thrusts.

He tugs my hair gently and it has a direct line to my clit which pulses in response. "Yes here. We absolutely should. The sooner my dick gets inside of you the better."

I pull back, those words also reminding me of the fact that I'm engaged to another man. "We are in my parents' house... I'm still engaged." *Fuck fuck fuck. What am I doing?*

He traps my bottom lip between my teeth and pulls on it gently before pressing a peck to my lips and setting me down on my feet. His hands fall from my ass but not before moving forward and tracing the top of my panties gently with his index finger. A flutter moves through me and I grip his biceps to steady myself.

"We'll go to my house."

"Now?"

"Now." His eyes are dark. "You're not feeling well. I'll offer to take you

home.”

“That only settles one part of this dilemma,” I tell him. Tears flood my eyes at the thought that I just cheated on my fiancé and I’m contemplating going even further.

You just asked him to fuck you, I think we’ve officially crossed the line of further.

“Anything else is irrelevant,” he grunts as he runs his fingers through my hair in an attempt to smooth the tresses he’d pulled on. He runs his salacious gaze all over me and I realize he’s probably seeing if I look presentable enough to go back downstairs.

A knock on the door stops us from speaking and I briefly panic thinking it could be my parents or anyone that would be confused as to why Jacob and I are in here alone. “It’s Chlo...” her voice is low and rushed. “Mason realizes you’re both gone and you’ve got about ten seconds to get back downstairs before he makes that fact known to more people than just me.”

I know Mason wouldn’t rat me out but I also know he might come find us and there aren’t many places we could be. Or he’d make a point to ask where I am sending anyone on a search for me that would lead to questions I am not prepared to answer right this second.

I move toward the door when Jacob grabs my arm stopping me in my tracks. “Not now, JP,” I tell him before he has a chance to speak.

“Come home with me.”

“JP, stop.” I pull out of his grasp and open the door to see Chloe’s worried eyes. She pulls me out of the bathroom and toward my bedroom, my guess so that Jacob and I don’t reappear at the exact same time after being gone for so long.

Chloe shuts the door behind us and I feel like I’m finally able to breathe after being trapped in a bubble with Jacob. “We kissed,” I blurt out. “More than kissed.” I recall his cock rubbing against me and my sex clenches in response. “Not sex but...” I bite my bottom lip before rubbing my fingers over the skin remembering his bruising kiss. The way he bit my lip, ran his tongue along the seam of my lips, the way his hands gripped my hips, his fingers digging into my flesh like he was afraid I’d disappear from his grasp.

“Oh my gosh, this is huge. You and Jacob, oh my God!” she squeals and wraps her arms around me. “I mean, I’m going to have a long talk with him about what I’ll do to him and more importantly his balls if he ever hurts you again but oh em gee!” She claps and I shush her.

“Can you be quiet? I don’t think my parents heard you.” My phone vibrates with a message.

Jacob: Come home with me. We can talk. Or whatever you want. Just... that can’t be it. Don’t tell me that was the end of us because I don’t believe it.

It’s risky and not the smartest idea and the idea of getting out of the house with Jacob right now doesn’t seem plausible. My brother is here now. My car is also here but I shouldn’t be driving and if I was able to get the idea past my parents that Jacob was giving me a lift home, Mason would definitely have an issue with that.

Jacob: Please.

Me: Do you think we can just walk out the front door? What about Mason?

“I can distract him,” Chloe says and when I look up, I see her looking down at my phone. “I’ll make him take a shot with me and you guys can make your swift exit. Aunt Michelle and Uncle Kev won’t think anything of it. I’ll say you weren’t feeling well. Mason isn’t going to say anything when he figures out you’re gone.”

Me: Never mind, I think I have it figured out. Can you just grab my laptop for me please? It’s in the living room.

Jacob: Of course.

Me: I’ll meet you outside in two minutes.

The idea of doing an Irish goodbye at my parent’s house isn’t exactly the best of plans. Not only did I not want them to worry, but they were going to inevitably text me later when they realized my car was still there but *I* was not. But I didn’t want to raise too many questions.

What the hell am I doing? I am premeditatedly deciding to go to Jacob’s house. To have sex.

Not necessarily! He said we could talk.

Yeah okay, good one.

I creep down the stairs, peeking my head over the banister and toward the foyer with each step. I can still hear the noise of the gathering and thankfully they can’t see me as I make my way toward the door. I open the door and I’m just about to take a step outside when a hand darts out and closes the door.

“Where are you going?”

I spin around and see Mason staring at me. He takes a step back and crosses his arms over his chest and I can feel the judgment radiating off of him.

“Mase...” I start.

He shakes his head. “Whitney, you’ve got to be kidding me.”

“Before you jump to any conclusions—” I start.

“So, you’re not leaving with Uncle J? You’re telling me that he didn’t tell Mom and Dad that you’re not feeling well and he’s taking you home?”

What!? Who told him to do that? And so much for Chloe keeping Mason distracted.

“I...”

“Whitney, come on. Don’t do this to yourself. It’s going to blow up in your face. You know it is,” he lectures and I wince at the harsh truth.

“Can we talk outside at least?” I plead, not knowing how close my parents might be or who might overhear something.

We walk out onto the porch and he closes the door behind us. “You’re not leaving with him.”

“That is definitely not your call to make.” I hear from the other side of the porch and I am wondering how he got out here before us. Jacob has my laptop bag slung over his shoulder and a part of me melts at the idea of him carrying my things for me just like always did.

“Are you kidding me with this? Whitney, tell me you’re not this reckless.” He looks from Jacob to me. His hazel eyes narrow. “I don’t want you to get hurt again.”

“You don’t have to worry about that, Mason,” Jacob interjects. “I’m all in with this... with her.”

Mason lets out a deep sigh before turning back to me. “You know what you’re doing?”

“No,” I tell him honestly. “But, if I’m so uncertain...” I trail off and tears begin to build in my throat. “Please don’t judge me,” I whisper.

“Never.” He pulls me into a hug and when he pulls back, he glares at Jacob. “I judge *you*.”

“Mase...” I try to calm his anger but he’s already heading back into the house without another glance at either of us.



Neither of us say anything on the way back to his house but his hand, his large strong warm hand is firmly resting on my thigh as he weaves us through traffic. The buzz has slowly started to wear off and the gravity of what I'm about to do takes over. I open my phone and open my messages with Parker, unanswered ones from last night and this morning that are starting to irritate me. *Perhaps I'm being a bit of a hypocrite with what has transpired between me and Jacob but what the fuck?*

Definitely a hypocrite.

"The boyfriend?" he asks.

"Fiancé," I correct, though I don't really know why.

"Does it make a difference?" he counters and I look out the window as we near Jacob's house. He lives in a somewhat secluded community about fifteen minutes from my parents that he kept even while he was in Mexico. I think he had a housekeeper and a gardener come in monthly to maintain it and a few family members and friends may have stayed there while they were in town visiting but for the most part it had been vacant for three years while he was gone.

"It isn't fair."

"What isn't, angel?"

I try to ignore one of the many pet names Jacob had for me but my heart flutters in my chest. "Any of this. All of this. We would probably be married by now. Or at least engaged... the way you always were with me before you decided to end us on a fucking whim," I bite out. "I believe you would have had a ring on my finger the second my parents knew about us. Instead, now we're in this mess because you're having a mid-life crisis or whatever the fuck and realized you don't want to spend the rest of your years drowning in random pussy. That's what this is right? You're over being single and you realize no one can suck your dick like I can?"

I was angry. At him. At myself. Angry at the world for putting me back in this situation when I fought like hell to get out of it. For giving the man I've loved my whole life back to me when I wasn't free to love him anymore.

It took almost a full year but I'd mended my broken heart the best way I

knew how and now he was here ripping out the stitches that I'd used to do it.

Where was this energy before I met Parker? Where was he then?

“You waited until I moved on to come blow up my life?”

“You think that’s what this is about,” he snaps. “You think this is about sex? When did you get to be so cynical?”

“Probably around the time the only man I ever loved broke my heart. The same man who had spent years kissing my tears away became the cause of them.”

He pulls onto his street and he doesn’t say anything as he pulls into his driveway. It’s relatively long, maybe enough for six or seven cars to park leading up to a four-car garage. His house was large, sleek and modern and looked and felt like my dream home. Despite my annoyance, I am happy to be here. Once upon a time, Jacob’s house was the place I felt most comfortable and safe. For two years, this place felt more like home than anywhere else.

The pool and outdoor fireplace he had didn’t hurt either.

I’m about to get out of the car when he grabs my hands and brings them to his lips, kissing my fingertips before nibbling on my index finger. My mouth goes dry at the feeling of his teeth grazing my skin. “Whitney, I haven’t slept with anyone.”

My head cocks to the side. “What do you mean?”

“While we’ve been apart, I haven’t been with anyone else,” he says just before his lips form a straight line. “You’re the last woman I’ve slept with.”

CHAPTER TEN

Jacob

I watch her lips part and a gasp leaves her wet pink lips as she realizes what I said. “You... you haven’t?” She looks away from me, her eyes wide and unblinking before turning back to me. “HOW!? Have you seen you? You’re telling me no one in Mexico wanted to jump on the unbelievably gorgeous, successful, charming, DOCTOR?”

Her voice is high pitched and I used to love when she got animated like this.

“You are literally McDreamy and McSteamy personified and you haven’t had sex in THREE years!? I had sex with myself last night just *thinking* about you!”

My eyebrows raise as that confession slips through her lips. My cock hardens at the thought of her slipping her fingers in her sexy little pussy. A vibrator running over her sensitive nub as she screamed my name through her climax. “You did, huh?” I cock my head to the side and give her a smug grin. “What were we doing?”

She bites her bottom lip as she presses a hand to her forehead shielding her eyes from me. “I can’t believe I told you that.”

“Why? You were always honest with me. You told me everything. You always have.” I shrug. “Even before all of this...” And that was true, Whitney always told me everything. Things she didn’t even tell her parents. Her first crush. The first time she failed a test. When she got drunk for the first time. When she smoked for the first time. I picked her up from more parties when she’d snuck out of her house and even covered for her once or twice when her parents suspected she was out somewhere she had no

business being. I was the first person she told that she wanted to be a lawyer and the first person she called at three a.m. when she finally worked up the nerve to open what would come to be her acceptance letter from Stanford letting her know she got in for undergrad.

She doesn't respond to what I said, she just stares off into space before she finally turns back to me and meets my gaze. Her eyes are glassy and I can see the unshed tears dying to fall. "How... why?"

I let out a sigh and slide my seat back to lean back a little. The car is still on but I don't want to risk changing the direction that this night is headed by suggesting we go inside yet. I'm trying to let her navigate where things go and she seems to be comfortable sitting in my driveway as the faint sounds of The Weeknd play through my speakers.

"When I got down there, it was mayhem. We were working for days on end. Forty-hour shifts. Ninety-hour weeks. I mean, you saw how those first few months of the pandemic were; there was so much uncertainty and chaos. I barely slept or ate and when I did it was at the hospital. I think it took me two months to call my mom. I felt like I was in a daze and one day I looked up and I'd been there nine months. It was still crazy, but I was at least starting to leave the hospital for more than a few hours at a time. I was just busy..."

"Saving the world?" She smiles. "God, you can't actually be this perfect."

I lean over the console and brush my nose against hers. "Are you referring to me as God?"

She chuckles and rolls her eyes and then she's climbing out of her seat and into my lap. My eyes widen as she straddles me and I'm shocked that she's being this aggressive. She's sitting directly on my cock and when she squirms a little to get comfortable, my dick jerks in my jeans. She whimpers at the feeling because it's resting right against only her panty clad covered pussy. She slides her hands up onto my shoulders. "Are you mad? At me? For... not abstaining while we've been apart?" The way she phrases this makes me feel like she doesn't want to be apart moving forward and I feel my heart begin to accelerate at the idea of getting her back for good.

I put those thoughts aside, remembering she asked me a question. It stung like hell, but I shake my head and truthfully, I wasn't. To be fair, a part of my abstinence was that I had no time. "I went out with a few women. We flirted. We kissed. And maybe I would have done more with a woman that I felt attracted to but I just hadn't met anyone that... made me feel that spark I had

with you.”

Her face falls. “Jacob, I knew I’d never find that spark again. Parker and I... we’re different.”

I snort, interrupting her. “Yeah, no shit. He fucking sucks, Whitney.”

She puts a hand up. “Not now, JP.” She furrows her brows and purses her lips before continuing. “I settled, because he was nice and treated me well—”

“Treated you well? He cheated on you, baby.”

She narrows her eyes into slits like she does when she’s irritated with me. “Okay, can I talk?”

I glare at her for her sassy response and she rolls her eyes back at me but I can see the smirk pulling at her lips. “I knew I would never feel about anyone the way I felt about you. I convinced myself it was because you were JP so of course I couldn’t recreate that magic with anyone because... you’re *you*. So, I told myself that I could love Parker in a different way. A way that wasn’t so intense. I could love him in a way that didn’t consume me and make me crazy and feel alive and also like I’m dying. In a way that didn’t set my soul on fire. It didn’t strike me as odd that our intimacy was lacking because I only had one man to compare it to and of course nothing would ever be able to compare to what we had.”

As much as it annoys the shit out of me that she fucked this joker, it does irritate me somewhat less that it hasn’t been as enjoyable as it was with me. And that she’s only had sex with Parker? “You’ve only been with him?”

She nods. “I... dated some guys casually but the end of undergrad really kicked my ass. I was exhausted and then the pandemic and being on lockdown, there just wasn’t a lot of time for me to have a ho phase,” she jokes.

I pinch her side playfully and she giggles before leaning in and brushing her lips over mine. I slide my hand up her dress to grip her ass and pull her against me. “Are you going to leave him?” I whisper. The way she’s behaving I assume but this situation is messy and complicated and I need to hear her explicitly say it.

“Of course, I am.” She lets out a breath before she lets her forehead drop to my shoulder. “I’m such a terrible person.”

“No baby, you’re not.”

“I’m a cheater, Jacob. I’m actively cheating on the man I agreed to marry. But I know you will defend me to the death even though I am very much in the wrong.”

She's right. I always defended her, even when she was in the wrong. I don't know how to respond so I'm thankful that she speaks again.

"Can we go cuddle on your patio by the fireplace?"



Ten minutes later, she'd changed out of her dress and into a pair of my sweatpants and one of my t-shirts and now she's seated between my legs as we watch the fire in silence. The night is a little cooler than usual so I pulled a blanket over the two of us and I'd poured us some whiskey that we're both nursing as we share kisses in between sips. I know we're inching toward that line and my dick is getting harder with each passing second especially with how she's rubbing up against me, letting little sexy sighs escape every few minutes. "You're being a little tease, Whitney." I press my lips to her temple.

She presses a hand to her chest in feigned shock. "Me? Never."

I throw my head back and laugh loudly. "You've always been an expert tease." I run my fingers down her arm as I recall all the times, she used to drive me out of my fucking mind.

"I have no idea what you're talking about." Her back is resting against my chest so I can't see her straight on but she turns to the side and I see a smirk on those pouty lips of hers. I set the whiskey I'd had in my hand down to grip her chin holding her in place. I run my nose down the side of her face and press a kiss to the corner of her mouth.

"Is that so?" I drop her face but keep my lips pressed to her cheek as I move my hand under the blanket and drag my fingertips gently down her torso, stopping just shy of her mound. I pull back and watch as her eyes flutter closed at just that bare touch before I move my hand under the loose sweatpants of mine, she's wearing. I instantly feel the silk between her legs and I'm pleased to find that they're damp. "You're wet."

"Brilliant observation."

"It makes me proud as fuck that I'm the only man that's fucked you the way you need to be fucked. Is it because your pussy knows it still belongs to me? Tell me, baby, how bad has your pussy missed me?" I brush my thumb down her slit before pushing in just a little immediately applying pressure to

her clit.

She arches her back slightly off of me. “Oh, my Godddd,” she moans. “More than *I* did.”

I nip at her neck over her response and she giggles. “Don’t lie to me.”

“Mmmm JP.” Her eyes are closed now while my fingers are still stroking her through her panties. She drops her head back against my shoulder and lets out a sigh. “Fuck.”

“That feel good, angel?” God I’ve missed seeing her like this. So vulnerable and open and willing to do whatever I want.

She nods. “My whole body is tingling. Being with you was always such a body high.”

I smile before pushing my fingers under the waistband of her panties. I stroke her slit lightly, not entering her and her hands find my thighs under the blanket as if she’s anchoring herself to me and grinds her ass harder against me. *She’s getting hornier by the second, I wouldn’t be surprised if we end up fucking right here.* Which was not unheard of; we’ve fucked here before. My backyard was gated, the patio was heated and the fire in front of us was the sexiest aphrodisiac.

I slip my fingers into her wet cunt and I watch as goose bumps erupt on her flesh. “God yes,” she whispers. I rub my index and middle finger over her clit, back and forth, inching my way closer to her opening. I drop my lips from her cheek and move to her neck, nibbling on the sweet skin before I bite down on her shoulder gently just as I push two fingers inside of her while stimulating her clit with my thumb.

“Right there, JP.”

So, tonight is going to be like that then. Whenever she calls me JP it’s usually only a few more minutes until she starts calling me Daddy.

“Oh, is my princess feeling needier than usual?”

She nods and then she does something that shocks me. She pulls my fingers out of her and spins around so that she’s kneeling between my legs. She’s still holding my hand that was just inside of her. She looks at my fingers that are wet with her juices before pushing them toward my mouth. I take a second to inhale her scent, my cock going to granite in the memory of her. I suck them eagerly and my senses are reminded of her tangy, sweet flavor that used to be my favorite thing to have on my tongue. She pulls her fingers from my mouth and a smile so sweet and sexy crosses her face that for a moment, I’m lost in her smile and those eyes.

“You know what I think about... often?” she asks me and I shift, trying to relieve some tension in my dick because I already know it’s going to be something to make me even harder.

“That first night...” She trails off. “Dry humping on my parents’ couch while they were asleep upstairs.”

“You mean the night you seduced me?” I chuckle, because that’s exactly what happened. The night I became absolutely powerless against Whitney Monroe.



Five Years Ago:

It had been a month since I’d been back in the States and I was settling back into my old life. Which basically consisted of the hospital and then Kevin and Michelle’s and sporadic visits to see my mother. Then one night, I’d drank a little too much with Kevin after a Lakers playoff game went into double overtime so I planned to stay the night. I’ve stayed over so frequently that the “guest room” is basically just my room that “guests” use when I’m not there. I’d fallen asleep on the couch my guess when the post-game show was on because when I wake up, the television is on but most of the lights are out and there’s a bottle of water in front of me.

Thank you, Michelle. I think to myself.

I briefly wonder what woke me up when I hear sounds coming from the kitchen. I make my way there, not sure who I’m expecting and I groan inwardly when I see Whitney standing on her tiptoes to grab something from the top of the cabinet in a very short mini skirt. I try to back my way out of the room so as to not engage with her at two o’clock in the morning when she’s obviously a little under the influence of something. As much as I want to scold her and ask her how she made it home, and help her get whatever she’s trying to reach, I don’t want to interact with her because things between her and I are changing and I don’t fucking like it.

Well, I don’t hate it if I’m being honest, but it’s wrong. So, fucking wrong. This is Whitney. My goddaughter.

She spins around and I'm granted a view of her front, which is a low-cut shirt that has her delicious tits that I've thought about more than a few times over the past few weeks on display. Her hair falls around her shoulders in messy waves, her lips are pouty and full and coated in something fire engine red but it's her eyes that get me. They're large and kind of hazy but they're staring at me like I hold all of the answers to life's questions.

"JP!" She squeals, but not at a high enough volume to wake anyone in the house. She runs around the island and into my arms before I have a chance to reply. "I didn't know you were here!"

"Yeah..." I cough, trying to stifle the groan sitting in the back of my throat caused by Whitney pressed up against me squirming around. "The Lakers game ran late and I had too many beers. I was going to take an Uber but I fell asleep and I just woke up to your entrance I guess." I rub the heel of my palm into my eyes to try and chase the rest of the sleep away.

"Sorry!" she says as she pulls out of my arms and hops up on the island in front of me and begins to swing her legs. I'm hyper aware that she's in a skirt so I'm trying my best to avoid looking down, while also trying to avoid her tits. God, I'm in hell.

"And where have you been anyway? Isn't your curfew at midnight?" I say, looking at my watch that reads just after two in the morning.

"Technically it's one now that I'm out of high school, but shhh." She puts her finger to her lips. "I'm literally going to college in two months, I don't think my parents care that I'm down the street at my friend's house."

"They will if you're drunk."

Her eyes widen before she puts a hand over her mouth. "Who says I'm drunk?"

"Your face, for one. Your voice for two." I cross my hands over my chest and give her a fake scolding look.

Her mouth drops open before she presses her hands to my cheeks. "They won't know that I'm drunk, unless you tell them. And you won't tell them, right?" She puts both hands under her chin and cocks her head to the side, batting her eyelashes at me. "JPEEEE, please."

"I won't but just... you're always careful right? No driving? Not in the car with anyone that's been drinking? No drugs?"

"Definitely not the first two things but..." she cups her hands around her mouth and whispers, "I do smoke weed sometimes."

I let out a breath. "I don't like that you're doing that."

“But...” She pouts. “It’s fun...” She pauses. “And it’s legal now! I’m eighteen, JP, relax.”

Yes, weed was legal in California for recreational use but the idea of Whitney doing any type of drug has my blood boiling. “I will certainly not relax. It can be dangerous and you’re barely legal.” My voice is stern and I hope she gets the message that I’m not fucking around about this.

“Barely legal is still legal,” she responds instantly and I know I’m not imagining the look she’s giving me. She looks up at me through her lashes and a sexy smirk crosses her face. It’s obvious what she’s doing and while in some circumstances it might be obnoxious, in this moment, it’s sexy as fuck.

“Whitney...” I trail off. “What’s going on with...” I point back and forth between us. “This.”

“What do you mean?” she says innocently and I give her a look.

“Don’t. You’ve been... you know... you’re...” I don’t know if it’s the alcohol or the situation or a combination of both but I’m at a loss for words.

“Attracted to you.” She nods. “Correct.” She says it easily like they aren’t words that change the dynamic of our eighteen-year relationship.

I’m shocked at her boldness and it makes me wonder just how much she’s had to drink. “How? I mean... I’ve known you... you can’t.”

“Why not? You’re not my father, as much as you thought you were.” She says, rolling her eyes.

“When?”

She shrugs. “I don’t know. When do girls start developing crushes?”

My eyes widen at the confession. So, what, early teens? Jesus Christ. “That long ago?”

“Of course. Most girls’ first crushes are on wildly inappropriate people. Teachers, sometimes family members, Dad...” She ticks off her fingers as she lists them. “I just never grew out of mine.”

I’m shocked she’s being this direct and honest with me. Maybe it’s because she’s always felt comfortable with me to share her feelings. Plus, the alcohol of course. This is the first time we’ve truly been alone since I’ve been back and she’s been eighteen so maybe she’s been waiting for this moment?

I scratch my stubble and drop my head back silently asking for some sort of answer from above on how to navigate this. “Angel...” I wince, realizing I can’t call her that right now especially when I see the look in her eyes.

“Whitney.”

“Mmmhm...”

“We can’t.”

“Why?”

“WHY?” I whisper shout. “What do you mean why?”

“We’re adults.”

“Yes, and I’m one of which who helped raise you. I’m your Godfather.”

“And nothing about that turns you on? Because it makes me wet as fuck,” she says hopping off the counter and grabs one of her dad’s beers from the refrigerator and I almost choke on my spit at her words. I didn’t care if she swore and Mason did like a sailor but it was rare that I hear any curse words come out of her mouth and I don’t think I’ve ever heard her say ‘fuck.’ Not to mention: WHAT as fuck? I blink at her, my cock hardening in my sweatpants that I’m now realizing is probably on display for her lustful eyes.

And sure enough her gaze drops to my dick before meeting my gaze again. “Do you know how many nights I gave myself an orgasm thinking about you?” She leans over the counter, giving me a better look down her shirt.

I swallow, blinking my eyes several times as if I’m trying to convince my brain that what I’m seeing is actually happening and it needs to do something to stop it.

“How many boys dumped me because ‘how can I be this hot, to be so cold’ when it comes to anything related to sex because I never wanted any of them to touch me.”

“You... you’re a virgin?” Based on how comfortable she is talking about sex, I did not expect that.

“It’s hard to get in the mood when you’re obsessed with your dad’s best friend. Really, who can compare?”

“Have you... has anyone given you an orgasm?” The words leave my mouth before I can stop them. She shakes her head no and I feel a painful ache in my dick that should serve as a warning to not proceed down this road.

“Only my hand. Fueled by a lot of fantasies of you,” she whispers.

These revelations have my head spinning. Did I not realize this whole time that she’d had these feelings for me? I mean when she was younger, I knew she had an innocent crush but that didn’t have her touching herself to thoughts of me. No, this is different.

“Whitney... I...” I begin pacing wondering what the hell I’m going to do with this information.

Fuck her. A thought floats through my brain. One time. Or maybe hundreds of times. She's eighteen. Ride her sexy little virgin cunt until she comes all over your dick.

I take a step back trying to rid myself of these lustful thoughts coursing through my brain. I pass by her and grab a bottle of water from the refrigerator. "No," I say, slamming the door shut.

"No?" She looks up at me before biting down on her lip as it trembles. "You never tell me no."

"You never ask for shit that's impossible to give you."

"Not true. You once got me a pony before Mom made you take it back." God, I remember that. Whitney cried for three months when I took it back but Miche and Kev were pissed as fuck that I'd even gotten her one in the first place.

"And even that was easier to get and I got it from Goddamn Europe."

"I loved Cheerio." She pouts and I roll my eyes remembering that she ran around the house screaming 'Pip Pip Cheerio', in an awful fake accent when she found out the pony was from London.

"You're not doing yourself any favors by reminding me that I bought you a pony when you were seven years old, Whitney." I march out of the room, prepared to put all of this out of my mind when I hear her running behind me. I'm back on the couch, sitting, not laying because I did not trust her not to crawl on top of me with how she's acting.

"So, you're telling me you don't want to?" she asks, putting her hands on her hips.

"I'm telling you I can't want to."

"Are you attracted to me? Because I saw how you looked at me when you got home a month ago."

Fuck. "I was confused at who you were at first. Your hair was different, your braces were gone, and you had different... curves. I thought you were a friend of yours."

"Bullshit."

"I'm serious, Whitney." Sort of true.

"I think you've been struggling with the fact that you're attracted to me. That I've been flirting with you pretty hard and you want to respond to it. You want to respond to the fact that I touch myself thinking about you. That I want to touch you. Kiss you. Fuck you." She sits next to me and then before I can even blink, she's in my lap. "Why are you fighting this so hard?"

I try to move her but she puts her hands on my shoulders and tightens her thighs around my legs to keep herself in place. "Because..."

She bites her bottom lip. "Because why? No one has to know."

"I can't betray your parents like this."

"It's not betrayal."

"Hooking up with their daughter I've known her whole life is very much a betrayal."

"Okay, but what about betraying me? Aren't you concerned about that?"

My eyes widen but somehow my hands find her hips. I hadn't meant to; I just didn't know what to do with them and they naturally found their way there. I pull away instantly but she's already noticed and she squirms on my lap. Rubbing her pussy against my cock. Fuck me. Get her off, Jacob. "Me not touching you is betraying you? That's a stretch, Whit, and stop moving around on my lap so much" I grip her hips trying to keep her in place but she keeps fucking moving, rubbing against my dick and making me harder with each passing second.

"Why? It feels good." I swallow past the lump in my throat because it did feel really fucking good but I have to stop. "You told me you'd do anything for me. On numerous occasions." Her hands find my chest and I'm grateful she doesn't make a move to kiss me.

"That does not include a lot of things."

"Like what? Because I'm fairly certain if I needed you to help me hide a body you would. So, you'd commit a crime for me but you won't do this?"

"Theoretically, I'd commit a crime for you."

"No. You and I both know you would."

"Why are we talking about this? Whitney, this is wrong."

"But it feels good." She wets her lip and my eyes drop to mouth. "Doesn't it?" I don't respond. "Don't I feel good?" She leans down and presses her lips to my neck before grazing her teeth over my earlobe and I groan.

"Fuck. Where did you learn to be like this? How are you this confident about sex as a virgin?"

"You made me this confident about everything," she whispers. "You taught me to go after what I want and what I want JP, is you."

She begins to move back and forth against me, and I feel the heat from between her legs even through my sweatpants. My cock is hard as steel and standing up, nestled between her legs as she continues to rock against me.

“Will you let me come like this?”

I don't respond, but I don't make an effort to stop her, if anything I grip her hips harder to keep her in place. Our eyes are locked as she continues to fuck me through our clothes and I feel like I'm going to come at any moment.

“I can feel how wet you are,” I tell her through gritted teeth. I drop my head back on the couch letting the feeling pull me under and then I'm lost to what's going on. My hands have begun moving on their own, pulling her harder against me. She whimpers against my neck, running her tongue up toward my pulse point before sucking on the skin there.

How did she know that was my weak spot?

I move my hands from her hips to grab her ass, putting my hands under her skirt to find silky underwear. I squeeze and she lets out a low moan in my ear.

“God, I think I'm going to come.”

I lift my head up at her words and let my eyes open to watch her. I've been hovering over my climax for a few moments now and hearing her whisper those words against me has me spilling into my briefs. “Fuck fuck fuck.” I press my face into her neck as I come for what feels like forever. I'm vaguely aware that I hear her gasp and when I pull out of her neck her lips are caught between her teeth. “Come for me, princess.”

“Fuck.”

“Use me to make you feel good.”

“So good.” She drops her head back and I press my lips to her neck, doing the same thing she did to me. Trailing my tongue along her before nipping her chin.

“I want to kiss you when I come,” she says, her nails are digging into my shoulders at this point so I imagine she's only got a few more seconds before she goes over the edge.

I grip her chin and guide it toward me and press my lips to hers. She gasps in my mouth and my tongue takes off in search of hers and then she begins to shake in my arms. Her thrusts against me become more erratic, her nails dig into me harder and she lets out a low whimper. Her tongue is still dancing with my mine sensually and it's easily the most erotic experience of my life. Her entire body vibrates on top of me and when she pulls away from me, her eyes fluttering open all I can think about is cleaning up the mess between her legs with my mouth.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Jacob

We kiss through the entirety of my trip down memory lane, our bodies twisting together underneath the blanket as she climbs into my lap and begins to hump me in a similar fashion that she did that night. That night was the beginning of our relationship. It took me a few weeks to take her virginity but we did everything else up until then. She loved my mouth between her legs, and if I was honest so did I and she sucked my dick with such enthusiasm despite my size. And then one night, when I'd whisked her to a hotel under the ruse that she was sleeping at a friend's house, I took her virginity on a bed of rose petals atop satin sheets in a room full of candles.

The first time I made love to her, soft and slow and worshipped every inch of her beforehand to try and temper the pain of losing her virginity. But after we'd finished, seeing the blood on my dick made me feel almost feral as feelings of possession bloomed in my chest and I took her almost brutally the second time.

For what it's worth, that time she came.

"I've missed this so fucking much," she moans as she pulls off my shirt. She pulls hers off immediately after leaving her in a lacy white bra that I can see her nipples through. I run my tongue over my teeth and I immediately want to suck them into my mouth. I reach around her and unhook her bra letting them spring free and I let my eyes flutter shut at the visual.

"Jesus, Whitney." My eyes immediately go to her clavicle where the words are written in light script. It's dark, only the light from the fireplace and the string of tea lights illuminates the patio so it's hard to make out. "When did you get this?"

“A few weeks after you left.” She leans down to give me a better look and while I assumed it had to do with me, I wasn’t expecting it at the same time.

In script, it says, “*after all this time?*” and just beneath it, “*always.*”

She swallows and leans back. “I told myself one day you would come back to me. That you still loved me and we’d find our way back to each other. But, in the off chance you didn’t, I would just look like a normal Harry Potter stan, which I am.” She shrugs with a faint smile on her lips. This was true, she was one, but so was I. It was something we bonded over when she was growing up. We read all the books and watched the movies together and had been to Harry Potter World more than once. So, the tattoo has many different meanings which I’m sure made explaining it easier.

“Then baby, why all the pushback when I did come back to you?” I push the hair out of her face and hold her face with both hands.

“Because I was mad at myself for not waiting,” she tells me honestly, as a tear slips down her cheek. Her brown eyes are bright, her chocolate-colored orbs highlighted by the tears in her eyes. “I am mad at you too for breaking us, but... now I have to hurt someone. I put all these unresolved feelings and emotions I had over you and locked them in a box in my brain and away from where my heart could feel it so I could heal. And then you come back and you ripped it open.” She snuffles and I wipe the tears from her eyes. “I hoped and prayed every day for over a year that you’d come back and then I guess I just gave up. You told me to move on and I realized that I needed to listen. You love my parents and I understand not wanting to ruin that relationship.”

“I’ll tell them. Tomorrow. You don’t have to be there, or you can. But tomorrow.”

“No!” she says, her eyes wide and unblinking.

“No?” I frown. “Baby, we’re going to be together and before we can make it official to the world, we have to tell the people in *our* world.”

She shakes her head. “No, I know, but... I have to tell Parker first.”

I let out a sigh. “I thought he wasn’t back until next week?”

“He’s not, and I’ll tell him then. I just can’t do it over the phone. This also gives me time to pack up my things.”

I wince, realizing this guy thinks nothing is wrong and he’s going to come home exhausted from a long business trip to find his fiancée moving out of the house. *I guess I kind of feel bad over that.* “That’s fair.”

“We can tell them after, okay? We’ve waited this long.”

“Okay. No backing out. We come clean to everyone. No more secrets.” I tell her, holding my pinky finger up and she links hers with mine.

“No more.” We kiss our fingers, before her lips are on mine again and she’s rubbing against me. I feel her hands on my sweatpants and she pulls back to yank them down my legs before she’s pushing hers down her legs as well. She tosses them both to the ground before getting back on top of me. My couch is wide enough for us to both lay comfortably and change positions with ease thankfully because right now I’m desperate to get my mouth on her. I reach up, trapping one of her nipples between my teeth and sucking it into my mouth. I hold it, trying to get as much of it into my mouth as I suck on her breast. I pull back, stiffening my tongue and rubbing it over her nipple as she mewls and rubs on top of me. Her pussy is getting wetter and my mouth waters, needing a taste of her. I used to be obsessed with eating her pussy. I don’t know if it was because I was the first to ever do it or her taste or her scent or a combination of all three but every time we were together, I had to put my mouth between her legs at least once.

“I need to taste you before I fuck you.”

Her eyes flutter open and she blinks several times at me. “What about what I want? Maybe we could sixty-nine first?”

“You hate sixty-nining.” I stare at her incredulously and it annoys me that maybe she likes it now after being with someone else.

“I never hated it, I just felt like I couldn’t focus. But right now, I want to suck your dick and you turn into a maniac if you can’t eat my pussy the second you want to.” She rolls her eyes and I raise an eyebrow in response.

“You say that like you don’t love that fact.” She scrunches her nose and giggles. “Just one taste.”

“Yeah okay, you and I both know there’s no just one taste with you and my pussy.” She stands up and slides her panties down her legs and standing in front of the fire has her skin glowing even more than usual.

“Fuck,” I growl, pulling her by her waist to my mouth. She’s short so I have to lower my head to get to the apex of her legs.

“Oh my God. Can I lay down first?” she whines, but I ignore her request, holding her tight against me as I tongue her sex for the first time in three years. I open her up, sliding her left leg over my shoulder as I begin to fuck her with my tongue. She’s drenched from our foreplay and I’m rewarded with her dripping all over my mouth and chin. “Oh, fuck me. You always know exactly what I want.” I swirl my tongue around her opening before pushing it

in as far as I can. She lets out a squeal. “Oh my God, right there.” She grips the back of my head to keep me in place and I laugh to myself knowing that I’m going to end up getting what I want anyway which is her coming all over my face. I pull my tongue out of her and rub it over her clit, back and forth rapidly as I know she’s nearing the edge. “Fuckkkk, I’m going to come.” She moans from above me and I smile because thank fuck. I drop one hand to my throbbing cock, rubbing it through my briefs trying to prepare it for being inside the love of my life again.

“Come for me, Whitney,” I tell her and when I look up at her, I catch her gaze and see the look in her eyes. “Come for daddy.”

Her mouth drops open, and with our eyes locked I watch her go over the edge. She rolls her hips against my mouth and lets her head fall back and I grip her tight with both hands to keep her steady and her cunt against my mouth. “God yes yes yes!” Her clit pulses against my tongue and I groan at the feeling. Seconds later, I have her on her back and my briefs down my legs. I’m just about to push into her when a thought hits me.

NOW WE’RE THINKING? I have her legs around me, her ankles locked at my lower back with my hard cock leaking onto her wet pussy and the thought hits me. “Baby...” I say through gritted teeth as my body shakes with the anticipation of being inside her. “Condoms?”

She frowns and looks up at me. “Why? We’ve never used condoms before.”

“I know I just, I wasn’t sure if you were comfortable...”

She cocks her head to the side as she realizes what I might be asking and then her eyes widen. “OH! No, I—I’m fine. I got tested after Parker slept with someone else and... I’m good.”

I nod and swallow hard. “Good, because I would have killed him but... no that’s not why I asked.”

She shakes her head and wraps her hand around my dick, pulling it closer to her pussy, but I refrain from pushing inside. *Some fucking how.* “I’m on the pill, J.” She raises her pelvis and it grazes my dick and the air leaves my lungs in a gush.

My balls are tingling and my cock *that is still in her tiny hand, by the way,* feels ready to explode. “Right, but... you could still be pregnant. Like now.”

Her eyes narrow and she scoffs. “No, I couldn’t.”

“You’re a hundred percent sure about that?”

She looks off to the side and back to me probably trying to remember the date of her last period and the last time she had sex and I can't believe I'm coherent enough to have this conversation.

"I'd love to fuck you raw. Believe me baby. But in the off chance you're already pregnant and don't know it, you're left with the mess of not knowing who the father is if we have unprotected sex. Or say you're not pregnant but I get you pregnant now... same boat." I lean down and lick a trail across her mouth. "Make no mistake, I'd love any baby that came out of you regardless if it was mine or his but I just don't know if he'd feel the same way given that you're leaving him for me."

She lets out a sigh. "Fine, yes. God, how are you able to be this rational right now? I wouldn't have been able to stop just now literally if Parker and my parents were standing right over there." She points a few yards away from us, before pinching the bridge of her nose and squeezing her eyes together. "Condom. Hurry please."

I laugh. "Baby, I haven't had sex in three years, I don't have any condoms."

"ARE YOU KIDDING!?" she screams. "No, JP there has to be some, somewhere. I know we didn't use them but... we did once or twice?" She hops up and grabs my hand and I laugh at the fact that she's dragging me into my house. "You have to have a box somewhere in here. Even if it was from when Trey and Chloe stayed over. Fuck, don't condoms expire!?" She's rambling a mile a minute and I can't help but laugh.

"They're usually good up to five years, but yes." She runs upstairs to my bedroom and I hear her rummaging around my bathroom before I make it there. I make it to the entrance to my door just as she rips a box open.

"YES." She throws it toward me. "Put it on." She stands up and makes it over to me just as I rip it open and slide it on. My cock is still hard as steel watching her run around the house naked with her tits bouncing deliciously. She lunges for me and I pull her into my arms before walking toward my bed. Her ankles are locked around me and my cock brushes her cunt with every step. I drop her to the bed and then slowly, with our eyes locked on each other, I push my cock inside of her.

"FUCK." The scream comes out of me like a roar as I bottom out inside of her. "Jesus Christ, Whitney." I don't thrust because I feel like I could come the second I feel more friction on my dick. I guess this is what three years without sex does to a man. Especially after sex with a woman like Whitney

Monroe.

“Daddy,” she whines. She raises her pelvis. “Please move.”

I smile at how easily she knows how to get what she wants. “Daddy needs a second, angel.”

“Told you to let me suck your dick first,” she mutters before rolling her eyes and I lean down and run my tongue over her closed lips.

“Don’t roll your eyes while I’m inside of you.” I take her teeth between my bottom lip and bite down. “You won’t like what happens.”

The mischief crosses her face. “Oh?”

“Don’t test me,” I tell her as I begin pushing in and out of her. I think she’s going to but then I hit a spot that has her eyes fluttering closed and I’m guessing she rethinks going down the road of potential orgasm denial.

I lower myself to her, pressing my lips to hers and feeding her my tongue. I’ve pictured sex with Whitney hundreds of times over the past three years and memories don’t do it justice. Her nails run down my back, scratching me hard enough to make my balls tingle.

“I love you.” She moans when I let her lips go and I stop thrusting for a second to look down at her. She smiles. “I thought it was obvious?” she whispers, probably in response to the look I’m giving her.

“It’s the first time you’ve said it... in a while.”

“I do.” Her eyes are welling up with tears and I watch as one falls down her cheek and into her hair. “Please don’t ever leave me again.”

“Never, baby.” I lean down to kiss her perfect mouth and slowly we go from a frantic fuck to slow lovemaking. I roll her so that she’s on top of me and I push my hands into her hair as she begins to ride me. “I love you too,” I murmur against her mouth.

We kiss at the same speed as our bodies’ movement and it’s like we’re moving as one. I grip her hair with one hand and grip her ass with the other. She gasps against me when I hit her G-spot. “God yes, there it fucking is.”

“JP.” She rides me harder, squeezing down on me every time she bangs against my pelvis.

“You always know just what I want. You know how to fuck me, Whitney.” Lightning begins at my spine and it shoots to my balls making them tingle and I know I’m seconds from coming.

“God, it’s been so long since I’ve had this. I forgot...” she moans. “JP, I’m going to come.”

“Look at me, baby. Let me see you when you come. Take me with you,” I

beg, wanting to go over the edge with her. She lets her eyes flutter open and all I can see is lust all over her face. “Yes, fuck,” I grit out. “Come all over my dick, baby. *Your* dick.”

“Yes,” she cries out. “Fucking mine.” She moans and then I feel it.

Even with the barrier separating us, I know the second she begins to climax. Her cunt grips me harder and she leans over so she can grind her clit against me.

I run my hands up her chest and grab her breasts, tweaking her nipples as she fucks me through her climax. “You’re such a good girl. Fuck, I’m going to come.”

She drops her face into my shoulder and bites down and it spurs my own. “Oh God. Fuck, make me come. Please baby. I’m coming.”

Her lips are on mine as we continue thrusting against each other. I grip her hips and help her bounce up and down on me faster.

“God, that’s it. Holy fuuuuck,” I groan out as the best orgasm I’ve probably ever had rips through me.

She falls to my chest, my dick still inside her as she peppers kisses on my face. My cheek. My nose. My lips. Something she always did.

“I can’t fucking wait to get my dick in you, raw,” I tell her as I slip out of her.

I slide the condom off without spilling my semen *and fuck there was a lot* before tying it off and setting it on the floor next to my bed, not caring to look for a trashcan in this moment. I pull her into my arms and she sighs.

“Me too. This felt like coming home, after... a really long time away,” she whispers and I pull her to rest on top of me. She rests her cheek just above my heart as our legs thread through each other. I grab the throw blanket from the end of the bed and pull it over us. She looks up at me and smiles. “Thank you for coming back to me.”

CHAPTER TWELVE

Whitney

A feeling between my legs wakes me up and before I'm even fully awake I know what's the source of the pleasure. Jacob woke me up with his mouth between my legs more times than anything else and *oh. My. God.* My eyes flutter open and I'm so grateful to see it's still dark out meaning it's not morning and no one is looking for me *yet.*

"Mmmmm." I let out a low moan and pull at the silky head of hair face down in my pussy.

I tug his hair gently and he raises his head, his tongue still working my spread sex as his eyes find mine. He pulls away for a second and my mouth drops open at the sight of my cum all over his mouth and chin.

I bite my lip at the visual, trying my best to burn it into my memory so I never forget how sexy he looks in this moment. I watch his tongue work my clit and my entire body feels like it bursts into flames. *Fuck, how is it sometimes watching someone eat your pussy is just as hot as feeling it?* My back arches and I begin to pull at my nipples, rolling them between my fingers when I feel his warm hands over mine. I drop my hands, as he covers them both with his large palms and he drags his thumbs over the nipples. Thumbs that are firm and a bit rough from being a surgeon and the texture against my sensitive buds make me bite my lip.

"Oh God, Jacob," I cry out, because his tongue is now inside of me, circling my entrance while he begins to tug harder on my nipples to the point of almost pain. He's always been obsessed with my tits. It was rare that they weren't covered in hickeys at any given time. He'd suckle the skin, pulling the nipple between his teeth before nibbling gently. Or strum them between

his fingers while he'd eat my pussy. The man knew exactly what to do to make me sigh, to make me scream, make me climax on his face or his dick. "I'm going to come." I sigh, my eyes rolling back behind my eyelids. His hands drop from my breasts to my hands, lacing our fingers like he does when he wants to feel even closer to me. And I felt it. Something about our interlaced fingers while I come is just a different high.

His thumb drags over the skin just below my index finger which is what he does when he wants my eyes on him.

I force my eyes open and look down and meet his gaze and I can see the smile in his eyes and on his mouth despite it being on me. I feel my cheeks getting hot and I can only imagine they're bright pink. I feel so exposed under his gaze. Naked. Vulnerable. Like he can read every thought in my head.

The feeling overwhelms me and suddenly I want to be even closer. "Baby, come here and let me touch you." I hold my arms out and he shakes his head.

"Come first."

"But—"

"Not a request, Whitney. Give me another one."

I bite my lip, knowing he wasn't going to let up until I came and that thought made me melt even though I wanted to be in his arms. I was craving the intimate feeling of his strong body wrapped around me after not having it for so long. Nothing felt like the safety and security of being in his arms. The sex with Jacob was amazing. Unbelievable. I craved sex with this man more than I did anything on Earth. But it was the after, that I craved too. The moments where everything is still and quiet and I get lost in the tranquility. During these moments, I allowed my mind to drift to a life where things weren't so complicated. He wasn't the man I couldn't have; I wasn't the woman he shouldn't touch. *Everything was perfect.*

It isn't long before he's hovering over me. He runs a hand over his mouth collecting my juices but I still smell me on him.

"Why are you in your head, Angel?" He brushes his nose over mine before dropping a kiss to my lips.

"I've missed you and this." The tears well in my eyes and I try my best to keep them down but one escapes, slipping down my face. I wrap my arms around his back pulling him closer to me, wanting to get as close as possible to him. "It was really hard when you left and I just... I'm scared you're going

to leave me again.” I look up into his stormy blue eyes. “You’re right, I’m just in my head.”

“It was tough for me too.” His thumb finds the space just below my eyes and wipes the stray tear. “I felt incomplete, like a part of me was missing. We’d never had a period in our relationship where we weren’t speaking. I knew you were angry and upset with me and I felt like shit that there was nothing I could do to make it better. That *I* of all people had hurt you. The first six months, the few times I was allotted to sleep, I spent staring at the ceiling thinking about you. If you were okay, if you were safe, if you were happy...” He wraps his arms tightly around me and buries his face into my neck before pressing his lips there. “If you were thinking about me.”

“I was always thinking about you. I was never not thinking about you.” He smiles but it doesn’t reach his eyes and I feel like I can hear his thoughts. “I met him a little over a year after you were gone. Over a year with no communication. No nothing. You told me to move on. It almost killed me, but I did it.”

“I know,” he grits out. “I know. And I’m not mad at you. I’m mad at myself. And... the life we have and who we are in each other’s lives. I’m mad that I lived so long without you and now there’s some other guy in the picture. Some other guy that’s touched you.” He squeezes his eyes shut. “The thought of him... drives me fucking crazy, Whitney.” When he opens them, they’re dark and he looks almost angry. But in the sexiest way. He pushes me to my back and gets on top of me before sliding back inside.

“He’s not going to touch me again. Not that we’re back *here* again. It’s you and me,” I say with as much confidence as I can, but that small voice of doubt speaks up and the word leaves my lips on its own. “Right?”

“I’m not going anywhere.” “I’m yours, baby. Forever. I’ll never leave you again and nothing is going to tear us apart.”

His words make my heart melt and I let out a low moan as his pace begins to pick up and I succumb to the pleasure coursing between our bodies, all the while trying to ignore the small part of me telling me that he was wrong.



“Ughhh what is that?” I groan as I burrow farther into the warm body next to me that seems like it is moving away. I grab Jacob, trying to keep him *and his body heat* pinned to me. “Don’t get up.”

He chuckles. “I have to, baby, it’s my phone.”

“What time is it?” I press a hand to my head, trying to ignore the light streaming through his blinds. It’s not totally offensive, if I was still sleeping, but now that I’m awake, I need the curtains drawn and a lot more time with a naked Jacob. We’d made love at least two more times last night before finally drifting off to sleep for the rest of the night and now my limbs felt loose and sore and I wanted to soak in his bathtub with him.

“What’s up, Trey?” he says and I roll my eyes before turning to face him.

“Really? At...” I turn my head to the clock on the nightstand. “Eight in the morning?”

“Wait... slow the fuck down, man, what?” His face goes through a range of emotions of what seems like shock to confusion to anger before he pulls his phone away from the phone and puts him on speaker so I can hear. “Say that again, I have you on speaker and Whit is here.”

“Jesus fuck, you two. You couldn’t have covered your tracks a bit better?” My heart pounds in my chest at the implication that we’ve been caught. “Chloe was luckily able to cover for you two, as long as Parker doesn’t at some point compare notes with your parents. He really has a camera tracking you?”

Jacob’s eyes find mine and I can see the fury behind them. “Excuse me?”

“Stop. No. Just cameras at our house,” I say, trying to calm Jacob down, although I know he’s going to have a few questions when we get off the phone. “Trey, you’re speaking in code, what’s going on?”

“Whitney, where is your phone? Everyone has been trying to get a hold of you.”

I blink several times, realizing that I haven’t seen my phone since last night. “I brought your purse in.” Jacob nods to the chair and I hop out of bed and grab my phone out of my bag. I always keep it on vibrate, but I also sleep with it next to me so I can feel it if anyone calls me.

“Holy fuck. Nineteen missed calls?” Calls from my parents. From Parker. From his assistant. From Unknown calls in New York. Parker’s mother. *Thankfully that one was only an hour ago.* “What is on fire!?”

“Apparently Parker got into a car accident in New York. He’s alive and evidently going to make it, but he’s banged up and he had to go into

emergency surgery.”

“WHAT!?” I drop the phone from my hand. “Oh my God.” There are a million questions going through my head right now, but I put a pin in them for a second since Trey said he was alive. “Okay, where do they think I am?”

“Luckily for you, Chlo and I left soon after you guys did and Chloe said Jacob brought you to Chlo’s house because you didn’t want to stay at your house alone,” Trey explains. “So, you’re fine, but... you need to get your ass to New York.”

“Why the fuck would she do that?” Jacob barks.

“Because it’s her fiancé.”

“Ex-fiancé,” Jacob interjects.

“Does he know that? Do his folks? Do Kev and Michelle? I’m going to say a fuck no on all accounts given that you’re probably still inside of her, so yeah, she needs to go to New York, or she’s kind of the worst.”

“I... DAMMIT. Laura is calling again,” I say in reference to Parker’s mom. I pick up the phone and slip out of the room. “Laura... oh my God, I just heard!”

“Where have you been!?” I hear shrieked into the phone and I pull my ear away. “The hospital and some of his friends have been trying to get in touch with you all night.”

“It’s eight in the morning, Laura. I’m sorry. I just woke up, and I must have been asleep when the hospital called.” I press a hand to my forehead.

“It’s an emergency and you’re sleeping beauty.” She sighs. “I can’t believe it!”

Laura Anderson was dramatic and very much an overreactor by nature so I can only imagine the whirlwind she’s been since she heard. Luckily her and Parker’s father live in Colorado and I’ve only had to deal with her a handful of times, none of which were particularly enjoyable. It wasn’t that she was necessarily mean, she was just... *a little judgmental* maybe? She always found ways to make little digs or comments to and about me and it was obvious that she preferred Parker with his previous girlfriend. A girlfriend she still had a relationship with.

It was weird but whatever.

“I just heard, I... I guess I’m going to try to get a fly out there for today?”

“You guess!? My baby is all alone in New York—”

“Well, he’s not all alone. His coworkers are there.”

“I’M NOT THERE!” she shrieks and now I hear shuffling and I wonder if

she's packing.

"Are you...?"

"Of course, I am, Ben got us on a noon flight. You need to book your flight before it gets too late."

"Of course, I'll check right now—"

"Ours is Flight 1958, non-stop to JFK," she interrupts.

"Got it..." *Although, I'm not sure why I needed to know given that assumedly she'd land in New York before me.* "Ummm did the doctors say anything? About his condition?"

"That he was going into surgery and it was a little touch and go until they got him stable last night."

"Do you know what happened?"

"No... car accident... I don't... Whitney, my baby!" she wails.

"I know, I know. He's going to be fine though, alright?"

"You... are you sure?" Her voice is small like a child's almost, and I know she's a pain in the ass but I do feel for her in this moment. *He is her child.*

"Yes. He'll be okay, Laura."

She sniffles and then I hear her talk to I assume Parker's father. "No, don't pack those. Those shoes won't go with any of the clothes I packed."

Alright then, priorities.

"Okay, let me get packing and get a flight out of here," I say just before I hang up the phone, not before hearing Laura scream 'hurry!' one more time.

"You're going?" Jacob asks from the entrance to his bedroom. I am very aware that I'm still naked but he's put on a pair of briefs that doesn't do anything to hide his cock that is hardening as he roves his eyes over my body.

"I have to."

"Do you?"

"Jacob, no one knows so I kind of have to. How would that look? And even if I am planning to break up with him, I don't want him to... I don't want anything bad to happen to him. He's not a terrible person, no matter how badly you want him to be."

"He touched my woman. Fucked my woman. And had the nerve to ask him to marry her." He closes the distance between us and pulls me into his arms. "He's the worst."

I sigh, knowing his possession of me is about to get even more intense. "You understand why I have to go?"

He nods before leaning down and tucking his face into my neck before placing a hot open-mouthed kiss to the skin. “Can I come with you?”

I pull back and stare at him with wide eyes. “How in the hell are you going to explain that?”

“I’ll say I’m flying somewhere else. I don’t have to tell your parents everything.” I press a quick peck to his lips before going back into his room. I’m grateful that he brought all my stuff in, so I put on my bra and pull my dress over my head and put my underwear in my purse not wanting to put on the panties that very well may be still wet from last night.

“How am I going to explain you being there to Parker and his family and friends?”

“I don’t have to come to the hospital, I can just be nearby if you need me.”

“Baby, I won’t be able to see you.” I know he’s feeling territorial that I’m about to fly across the country to see another man when I’ve been in his bed all night but letting him come with me is the worst idea. “I know how this must look and if the situation were reversed, I’d be pissed but JP...” I wince, hoping that my use of his nickname will calm his irritation. I move over to him where he’s leaning against the wall and put my hand on his chest. “Baby, please try to understand.”

He lets out a breath through his nose and shakes his head. “I get it, Whitney. I’m not mad at you either, I’m just...” He grabs me and pushes me against the wall and grips my face with his hands. “You are fucking mine. All mine.”

“All yours,” I repeat.

“I just got you back and now you have to go to New York to tend to some other man.” He drops his forehead to mine. His eyes close slowly and I hear him take an inhale.

I raise my hand to his cheek and his eyes open and I see the uncertainty behind them. “Nothing’s changed. I’m still ending it. It’s just a slight complication.”

“And what’s this about a camera?”

I let out a sigh and head into his en-suite bathroom to brush my teeth. I grab his toothbrush from the cabinet and apply the paste and the smug look that passes over his features makes me smile. I spit out the toothpaste to speak. “You know about the camera he has on the outside of the door. I told you. It’s just to monitor who comes in and out of the house and for

packages.”

“And evidently when you don’t come home? Whitney...” He lets out a sigh and presses off the doorjamb to sit on the closed toilet. He looks up at me and grabs my arm, pulling me into his lap. “Was he... controlling? It sounds like he’s been keeping a close eye on you. I heard your phone calls in the bar...” I wince, remembering that those conversations weren’t the best portrayals of our relationship.

“JP...”

“He’s never gotten aggressive with you, right?” His lips find my chin and he drags them along my jawline. “I’ll kill him, you know.” He pulls back and gives me a stern look.

“No.” I shake my head.

“Don’t lie to me.” He gives me a look that makes the space between my legs flutter and I do my best not to fixate on it because we don’t have time to do anything about it.

“I’ve never lied to you,” I whisper. My tone is soft and quiet and I hope he realizes that my guard is all the way down with him, *again*.

He nods in understanding and I get out of his lap and turn off the still running water before I finish brushing my teeth.

When I’m finished, I hand him his toothbrush with a wicked grin, I say, “Can you give me a ride?”

He raises an eyebrow before snatching it out of my hand and slapping my behind as I leave the bathroom. “Tease,” he grunts.



Nearly eight hours later, I’m in New York sitting in bumper-to-bumper traffic as I make my way to New York Presbyterian Hospital where Parker has been admitted. I’ve talked to two of his co-workers, his mother and his Doctor and now I have somewhat of a clear story as to what happened. Parker and two of his associates were on their way back to their hotel in their private car when another vehicle ran through an intersection and slammed into the side of their car going almost sixty miles per hour. Parker was sitting on the side where the car made contact and thus suffered most of the injuries but all four of

them, including the driver, were expected to make full recoveries.

“Then bring your sexy little ass home tonight.” One of the reasons I’m not too opposed to sitting in this traffic is because it gives me time to talk to Jacob. “I didn’t get a chance to reunite with it properly.”

I ignore the first part of his comment, because he and I both know that I can’t hop a plane and come back home tonight after spending half the day traveling. I trap my index finger between my teeth and bite down gently. “Oh?”

“Don’t act coy, Whitney. Like you don’t love anal.” His voice is low and that one word vibrates throughout my whole body. “Like you’re not ready to come the second I get my dick in that tight hole.” I’m vaguely aware of the cab driver as I close the partition so he’s not alerted that I’m breathing like I just ran a marathon.

“I do love it.” Chalk it up to doing it for the first time with the man you trust most in the world. The man who also took your virginity and did anything sexual with. Despite the horror stories, I found it not so painful and actually a little enjoyable after a few times. After a month or two, it was an orgasm I craved. A full body high that was incomparable to anything I’d ever felt.

“All I had to do was rest a vibrator against your clit or rub it with my fingers and you’d be begging for my cock.” I squeeze my thighs as I try to quiet the low hum between my legs. “Your tiny little body underneath mine as I rocked into your ass, gripping your hips as it sucked every ounce of cum out of me.” My breathing has become erratic and I’m fully aware that I’m sitting in the back of a taxicab on the way to see my soon to be ex-fiancé as the man I’ve loved since I was old enough to know what that word even meant is attempting phone sex with me. “I can picture your back right now, glistening with sweat, your hair matted to your skin after a time I took you particularly rough. Riding you so hard your body would practically collapse.”

I whimper.

“You still with me, baby?”

“Mmmhm.” I let my eyes close and let my head drift back against the headrest as I picture him. Picture us.

“Call me when you’re alone later. I’m not done with you.”

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Whitney

I arrive at the hospital twenty minutes later, my body wound so tight after my conversation with Jacob and no release. I only brought a small weekender tote packed with the basic necessities so I'm able to move through the hospital quickly. I'm brought to the floor where Parker is and I'm grateful to learn that he's stable and not in ICU. When I turn the corner, I hear his mother before I'm even to his room and I let out a deep sigh at the thought of her torturing whatever Doctor assigned to his case. I spot Savannah, Parker's assistant sitting on a bench in front of the door, her laptop perched in her lap typing away. She looks like she hasn't slept all night and a part of me wonders why she wasn't in the car with him.

"Whitney," she says as she looks up at me.

Her dark curly hair is wild and untamed unlike the tight ponytail it's usually pulled into. She pushes her glasses onto her head and hops up to give me a hug. Her brown eyes fill with tears when she pulls back.

"Thank God you're here. Mrs. Anderson hates me," she says, referring to Parker's mother.

"Laura hates everyone but Parker." I give her a small smile and look toward the door where I still hear her barking orders like she has ten years of schooling and a medical degree. Savannah was young, probably about my age. Fresh out of business school. Wide-eyed and bushy tailed about the world and not one of those assistants trying to sleep with her boss. I couldn't read her at first. Perky, enthusiastic and always willing to give one hundred and ten percent. It was foreign to me that she hadn't fallen into the allure of trying to seduce her boss for a leg up like so many other assistants and interns

at Parker's company. "*One of the good ones.*" Parker always said.

"How long have you been here? You weren't in the car?" I ask and then realize how that may be perceived. "I'm glad you weren't," I say, touching her shoulder. "I just assumed..."

"Mr. Caldwell and Mr. Kent were with him. They left the club and I don't know what happened. Next thing I knew I was getting a call from the hospital and Mrs. Caldwell was hysterical. She and Mr. Kent's fiancée had gone back to the hotel in a different car."

I briefly wonder why they'd left their significant others to go somewhere with Parker, but maybe the women were tired and left sooner?

As if she can hear my thoughts, she speaks up. "Mr. Anderson was a little... agitated." She bites her bottom lip, like she's struggling to let the words leave her lips.

"What do you mean?"

"He was a little drunk. And umm... Mr. Caldwell and Mr. Kent weren't exactly helping the situation." I blink my eyes at her several times. Parker wasn't a stranger to alcohol but he liked being in control. He didn't like that alcohol made him someone else. He hated that it made him shed his protective shell he wore and made him more social with "people I don't even like." *His words.* So, to hear him out drinking with Nick Caldwell and Owen Kent, who were always the drunkest at any given work event made me wonder what brought all this on.

"I see. Do you know why he was agitated?" I'm not looking at her. I'm staring at the door, wondering what I'm about to walk into. She doesn't respond and when I turn back to look at her, she's staring at me. She tucks an errant curl nervously behind her ear and shifts her weight back and forth between her feet as she looks down avoiding my gaze.

"No." She answers in a way that leads me to believe she does know and isn't telling me. Like she's worried she's said too much already. *Like the answer has to do with me.*

Great.

I let out a breath, leaving my bag with Savannah before pushing my way into the room. I draw the curtain back and the room goes silent as all three sets of eyes fall on me, a nurse, Parker's mother and Parker. His brown eyes soften a little when he sees me and I see a smile pull at his lips but he isn't the first to speak which is surprising given that he's not intubated.

"Finally! Didn't your plane land an hour ago?" Laura asks from where

she stands. Firmly planted right next to Parker's bed, his hand in hers. Her red hair *by box, not nature though she swears it is*, is pulled back into a low ponytail and her brown eyes are cold and icy like they always are when they're directed at me.

"Umm traffic," I whisper, before letting my eyes fall to Parker.

I don't know why I'm suddenly overcome with emotion. He's fine, he is expected to make a full recovery and yet I feel like the dam is about to burst. Maybe it's guilt over cheating on him. Cheating on him at probably the exact moment he was getting in an accident. Everything going up in flames both physically and metaphorically. Only he didn't know that I'd struck a match and decided to set fire to our relationship.

Fuck, I am a terrible person.

It was easy to avoid this thought when I was around Jacob. I wasn't terrible. I was a woman in love and he was back in my life. I can't be faulted for being in love, right? Things happen.

But you cheated. You're a cheater and that you can be faulted for.

Now that he's across the country and Parker is staring at me with those brown eyes that usually shine nothing but love for me, I feel like absolute shit.

And now I have to break up with him?

Well not now. Fuck no, not right now.

Laura sighs and casts a glance toward Parker. "Honestly, Audrey would have never," she mutters under her breath but I hear it and I narrow my eyes at her. The narrative that I was simply Parker's rebound after he broke up with his long-term girlfriend is one I've heard before and while it stings slightly less now, it's still a bitter pill that she believes that he is only with me out of convenience or to fill the void of loneliness. I mean I guess you could say Parker was my rebound as well but he didn't know that and even if he had knowledge of Jacob at all, I would never allow anyone in my life to infer that to him.

I am so glad I no longer have to worry about her as my mother-in-law.

"You should have been here hours ago," Parker speaks and I frown at the scolding in his voice. Savannah told me she started calling you at three a.m. east coast time which would have been midnight California time. Since when are you asleep at midnight? And you sleep with your phone under your pillow... for *emergencies*," he speaks and his tone is laced with accusations. I can hear the question in his voice though he doesn't explicitly ask. "So where

were you?”

“Mr. Anderson, I’ll be back in a little,” the nurse says as she picks up her clipboard and moves out of the room and part of me wishes I could leave with her to avoid this awkward tension.

“And since Whitney is *finally* here, I’ll go look for your father. I don’t want him filling up on junk from the vending machine.” She presses a kiss to his forehead. “Sweetheart, I’ll be right back, okay?”

“Thank you, Mom.” He nods.

She brushes past me before giving me a look like she can see everything I’ve done in the past twenty hours and I try my best not to appear guilty or nervous but I worry I fail miserably.

“Parker, I’m sorry it took me so long to get here. I... was asleep early. I was angry at you for how you’d been treating me and—”

“Asleep where?”

“What?”

“I didn’t stutter,” he snaps. “Asleep, where? Because you weren’t at our house. There’s been no one there since you left at like nine a.m.?”

“I went to my parents’ house, where I told you I’d be when I left yesterday morning,” I tell him.

“You said you were going for breakfast, not to stay the whole damn day.”

“What difference does it make? I’m policed on when I can go to my parent’s house and for how long? Are you out of your mind?” I hadn’t meant to come off that harshly but give me a break.

“So that’s where you slept? Your parents?” His tone bites and I’m equal parts relieved and annoyed that he hasn’t said anything along the lines of “*I’m happy to see you.*” No “*I just got in a car accident and thought I’d never see you again and now you’re here and everything is better.*”

I am relieved because dealing with an angry and aggressive Parker will make this easier but I just don’t fully understand the scope of his hostility.

“No. I slept at Chloe’s.” I’m grateful that Chloe had already laid this groundwork and I hate that I needed her to construct this lie for me. *That I have to lie at all.*

“Hmm. Convenient,” he says, raising an eyebrow at me before he lets his head fall back into the pillows and he lets out a sigh. “My leg is broken in two places, I have a concussion, some broken ribs and bruising all down my right side *not that you asked.*” His words sting.

“You didn’t give me a chance to. You jumped all over me as soon as I

walked in. But I'm happy that it wasn't more serious." I move toward his bed and reach for his hand. He flinches but lets me hold it and I squeeze it gently. "Why are you so angry with me? I understand that I should have heard the calls but..."

"You were drunk," he interjects. "That's the only time you sleep like the dead. The only time you sleep through phone calls and texts. When you and Chloe go out and drink and pass out." I blink my eyes. "Normally it's fine, whatever. But I needed you, Whitney. I needed you and you weren't there."

"I got here as soon as I could. You were across the country. I had to cross two time zones to get here and you're angry because I got the call at eight a.m. versus midnight? Mind you, you weren't even answering my calls last night. Why? Because you were getting drunk with Nick and Owen? Out of character for you by the way." I wasn't trying to point fingers, because I wish he would let loose more but he can't fault me for doing the same thing he was doing.

You kinda weren't though. You weren't answering because you were getting fucked within an inch of your life.

"Because you were driving me crazy."

"What?"

"The reason I was out with Nick and Owen? Because my fiancée wouldn't come to New York and be with me like I asked."

"I told you, I couldn't—"

"Bullshit. Because then you went to day drink at your parents' house. What the fuck is that about, Whitney?"

"Oh my God, what is it with you and my family? It's either my parents and if it's not them it's Chloe or it's Mason. Am I supposed to apologize for actually having a relationship with the people in my family?" I snap because although Laura was clingy and overbearing, Parker typically kept her and his father both at arm's length and on a need-to-know basis. I know it was fucked up to say but he did judge my family at times and it got old when they've been nothing but accepting of him.

"The guy outside my house? He's *family* too?"

Something about the way he says *family* has me on alert. *Don't jump to conclusions.* "Excuse me?"

"The guy you were talking to the other night when I called. Outside *my* house." *Not lost on me that he continues to say my house.* "You left with him. That's family too, right?"

I try my best to appear unaffected by his question. “My godfather? He’s my parents’ best friend.”

“Yeah, so you said.” He narrows his eyes at me and the anger is written all over his face. But there’s no way he knows, I’ve been so careful. Mason and Chloe know not to bring it up or mention that I even had a serious boyfriend before Parker. At first, it wasn’t for any reason other than I didn’t want to talk about it, but as things got serious, I didn’t want him to know anything to avoid him slipping up and saying something in front of my parents.

“That sounds like an accusation of some sort. So, if you have something to say, by all means go ahead.”

Something potentially resembling hurt crosses his face before it turns hard. “I’m just looking forward to meeting this guy that’s obviously so important to my fiancée.”



I’m back in the hallway after a nurse returned and ushered me out to run a few tests so I figure now is the perfect time to call my mother. I turn the corner away from Savannah and any other prying eyes and ears that are probably reading into everything I do at this moment.

“Honey, how’s Parker?” My mom answers on the first ring. “Do you want us to come?”

I almost burst into tears and tell her yes. *Come shield me from his mother and her judgment and a maybe little from Parker too.* “No no of course not. He’s fine. He’s okay.”

“Oh, thank goodness. Whit, you must be so worried. I’m surprised you didn’t get any of our calls last night. Chloe said you were knocked out though.”

“Mmmhm.” I wince and it reminds me that I haven’t even talked to Chloe yet who’s been keeping all my lies straight better than I could. I pull my phone away from my ear and shoot her a brief message that I’m sure she’ll be able to decode.

Me: I love you. Thank you.

Chloe: Always x

Chloe: Call me later?

I thumbs up her message and put my phone back to my ear. “Laura still hates me,” I respond.

“Laura’s the worst.” My mother answers and she lets out a sigh. “Are you sure you don’t want us to come? It’s hard for me to check her from here, you know. I can reschedule with Jacob and Georgina.” She continues her ramble about how no one can disrespect her baby and she has a few choice words for Laura Anderson but I’m so focused on what she said prior to really hear what she’s talking about. It takes a minute but I remember the situation that set everything in motion last night.

She set Jacob and Georgina up. A double date. My parents and them.

My man. Another woman.

“You’re still setting JP up with Georgina? I mean, are you sure she’s ready to start dating?”

“She said she is and the only way to find out is to just try.”

“Okay and JP is interested? Because when you and Georgina left the room, he told Dad he wasn’t.” I’m trying my best to seem aloof but I worry I’m coming off as hyper as I feel.

“JP doesn’t know what he wants and I’m not saying he has to marry her for crying out loud. It’s just dinner.”

Relax, Jacob loves you. He wants you. He wanted to come with you to New York and you told him no.

“Right, well. Have fun!” I roll my eyes at the high pitch of my voice.

“Keep us posted about Parker, okay?” I hear the subtext in her voice or maybe I’m just imagining that she’s confused as to why I’m more concerned about JP and Georgina’s sort of date than I am about my fiancé being in the hospital.

I’m barely off the phone before I’m sending him a text.

Me: Alone?

Jacob: I can be.

Me: Please.

My phone begins ringing moments later. “You’re still going on a date with my parent’s neighbor?” I ask before he can utter a hello.

“Hi beautiful.” I can hear the smile in his voice and I don’t know if it’s

because he's talking to me or because I'm feeling jealous and territorial.

"JP, a date...?"

"I wouldn't call it that."

"My mother is trying to set you up, what would you call it?"

"A favor." I begin pacing the hallway, peering over my shoulder every few seconds to make sure no one is within earshot. "Baby, come on. I feel like a dick if I back out and I hate when your mother is mad at me."

"I thought you hated when *I* was mad at you?"

"You're mad at me?"

I let out an exasperated sigh. "No. I guess I don't have the right to be given the circumstances and where I am right now but... Parker and I aren't even on good terms right now. It's not like this has been some sort of romantic reunion. He's pissed at me, for the record."

"Why?"

"Because I'm a shitty person."

"No, you're not."

Yes, *I am*. "To him? Yeah, I am."

"You told him?"

"No. He's mad that I didn't get here sooner and I'm not sure he believes I slept through the phone calls. I mean, maybe he does? But that just means he's mad that I was too drunk to hear the phone calls." I bite my lip, trying to decide if I should tell him about his accusatory question about JP, I go for it, knowing that the only way to survive this catastrophe moving toward me is if Jacob and I are on the same page. "I think he suspects something." I wince. "About you."

"What makes you say that?"

"He made a point to ask again about you coming over and me leaving with you the other night. Then, about me not sleeping at the house last night. It's not unheard of for me to stay at Chloe's but he's just speculating that I'm not being truthful about everything and I'm not." I let out a breath. "I know I caused this. I know, I'm just overwhelmed. I'm here and you're there and... I'm freaking out."

"We did this, baby. It's not just on you."

"You didn't cheat on my fiancé, Jacob. You didn't betray anyone, I did." He lets out a sigh and I remember he said he wasn't alone when I texted him. "Are you at my parent's house? You said you weren't alone."

"No. Trey is here."

“What are his thoughts about all of this?” There’s a long pause and I hate that I know what that means.

“He’s just worried this is going to blow up in our faces. But that being said, he’s happy I finally got my shit together when it comes to you.”

“I’m scared.”

“Of what? Parker?”

I hear the apprehension in his voice. “No. I mean, maybe but not how you’re thinking. I’m just worried Trey is right and this is going to blow up in our faces.” I remember another thing Parker said. “He wants to meet you.” I chuckle as I rub my forehead. ‘Meet the man that’s obviously so important to my fiancée.’ His words.”

“Is that what you want?”

The thought of Jacob and Parker in the same room. A room that my parents will be in as well brings on a wave of nausea coupled with anxiety. “No. I don’t. But it feels inevitable.”

“Baby, maybe I should tell your parents while you’re in New York. I can deal with the fallout of that and then when you get home, there won’t be this pressure about telling your parents on top of everything else.”

I begin pacing faster, my hands are sweating and I’m wondering if a panic attack is coming on. “They’re going to freak, JP. What happened to telling them together?”

“I always thought it might be best if I told your father by myself.”

My father, who rarely yelled. Rarely lost his temper flashes through my head. I can only recall a handful of times when he yelled. The time Mason crashed the car. One of the times I got caught sneaking back in at three in the morning, drunk as hell. The time I threw a party while he and Mom were out of town. It was rare but when he did it was scary. Run for the hills, scary. I can only imagine how he would react to this. “Okay but while I’m here?”

“I won’t if you’re really against it.”

“Fuck. I don’t know. I don’t know what to do.” My eyes are welling up with tears and they begin falling down my face rapidly. “What do I do, JP?”

“Please don’t cry, baby. I’m not there and it’s going to send me over the edge because there’s nothing I can do to stop it.” I wipe my face and let out a shaky breath.

“I can’t believe I did this.” I look up in time to see Laura rounding the corner and throwing her hands up when she sees me. “Chloe, I have to go.” I speak into the phone as I begin walking toward her. I hung up the phone

without waiting for his reply.

“We’ve been looking for you.”

“Talking to my cousin.” I know she can see the tears in my eyes and the sadness on my face and I’m grateful that she takes it to mean it’s about this situation.

“He’s going to be fine, Whitney.” She wraps a hand around me. “I’m just glad you’re here now.”

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Jacob

The call drops and I realize Whitney must have had unexpected company to make her end the call with me so abruptly. A part of me is pissed she was forced to do that but I know she's overwhelmed at the moment. I can feel her anxiety even across the country, so I just send her a text.

Me: Take a deep breath. I love you. Call me when you can.

I move back into the living room to see Trey on my couch with some of the leftovers I took with me from Kevin and Michelle's the other night. "How is she?"

"I think she's about to have a nervous breakdown." I sit next to him on the couch and rest my elbows on my thighs allowing my head to fall into my hands. "Have you met him?"

"You mean Parker? Once I think? Early on in their relationship. He came to Kev and Michelle's. But that was the beginning of the end for Chloe and me, so things were rocky and whenever I was around, there was always some shit going on between us so I didn't really get to know him well."

It's driving me crazy that I don't know more about this guy. How did he treat her? What does he call her, what does she call him? "I'm going to tell Kevin and Michelle."

The shock is written all over him. "When?"

"Today? I don't know. Maybe I should tell them before I'm supposed to be set up with their friend." I rub a hand down my face. I hadn't anticipated telling them this soon. I know Whitney wanted to break things off with Parker first but the plans have changed with him being in the hospital and who knows when it would be appropriate to tell him. I mean could she really

tell him while he's in the hospital? While he's injured? Who knows what the recovery period is and how long she'll be forced to hold up this ruse? "This is a fucking mess."

Trey scratches his jaw and gives me a look that leads me to believe that he's about to say something to piss me off. "I think I recall warning you to stay away." *Yep, pissed off.*

"And I told you I would if I saw Whitney was happy. She was not. She wants to be with me, Trey."

"At the cost of a lot of people's feelings, it seems."

Irritation spikes and I fight the urge to tell my brother to leave. "Okay and what about hers? And mine? She should just marry this joker out of what? Obligation? Fuck that."

"No, considering what the two of you were doing last night, she definitely shouldn't marry him." He takes a bite of pasta salad and continues through a mouthful of food. "So, you're going to tell them now? Can I watch?" he jokes and I glare at him.

"Get out if you're going to be a dick." I point at the door before letting my head fall back into my hands. I pull at my hair before running a hand through it.

He raises his hands in surrender. "Hey, I'm a dick that helped keep your story straight this morning when Michelle called Chloe looking for *your* woman who couldn't be bothered to answer the phone for eight hours."



I called Kevin shortly after my conversation with Trey to see if I could come over under the illusion of wanting to hangout before we went out later but Michelle went to a spa with her sister and Kevin was catching up on some work. So now it's quarter to seven and I'm just getting to their house before we go out with Georgina.

I've only talked to Whitney once since earlier and it was through text and I was getting more anxious with each passing second that I haven't heard from her. I hated that she was there and I was here. She is with another man while I am about to go out with another woman. Not that either of us had any

interest in anyone else but the perception we had to maintain irritated the shit out of me. It wasn't supposed to be like this.

"You're so early!" Michelle exclaims as she opens the door while sliding an earring through her ear. Michelle was notoriously late so it's no surprise that while she's dressed, her hair is still in a towel and only half of her makeup is done.

"We've been over this; fifteen minutes early is hardly *so early*, Miche." I close the door behind me as Kevin jogs down the stairs as Michelle runs back up giving her middle finger to me on the way. Kevin and I are dressed similarly, both of us in dark jeans and a button-down shirt though I'm wearing a black leather jacket over mine. My phone vibrates in my pocket and I curse mine and Whitney's terrible timing when I see her name flash across the screen.

"One sec, Kev," I tell him as I step outside and close the door behind me. "Talk to me baby, you okay?"

"Yes." She lets out a shaky breath. "I'm still at the hospital."

"Everything still okay?"

"Yes. Parker is sleeping now so I'm just in the waiting area."

"Have you eaten anything?"

"I had some terrible hospital food and some coffee that was only slightly better than that. What I need is a drink and a bed... and you."

My heart aches in my chest thinking about her out there by herself. Uncomfortable. Hungry. Lonely. "Do you want me to order something to the hospital for you?"

"You're so sweet but I can do that."

"But this allows me to take care of you."

"Would I be selfish if I said I want you to come here?" My eyebrows raise in shock because she was so against me coming before. "I know I said I didn't want you to... but... it's different now that I'm here. And you're there going on a date."

I look over my shoulder to make sure no one slipped outside without me noticing. "Baby, it's not a date."

"Stop saying that!"

"Fine, it is. A date that will lead to nothing. Not a kiss, not a second date, nothing. A date as a favor to your mother. But if you want me to fly out there after the said date, just say the word."

She lets out a sigh. "They said they don't feel comfortable releasing him

and clearing him to fly for a few days.”

My hands flex and ball into a fist and I grit my teeth in frustration. “I hate the thought of you being gone that long.”

“I can’t leave.”

“When are you going to tell him?”

“Not while he’s still in the hospital.”

“Why? He’s stable, he’s okay. He’s going to make a full recovery. Why are you prolonging the inevitable?”

“Isn’t that kind of in poor taste?”

“There are a few things we are doing that’s in poor taste, Whitney. I think choosing to be honest with him is the least of those.”

“But while he’s in the hospital?” The door opens behind me and I see Kevin staring at me. One eyebrow raised as he holds a beer out for me. He points at the phone in question. “Trey, I gotta go,” I say without another word before ending the call.

“Your super-secret phone call was to Trey?” He rolls his eyes. “Give me a break. You seeing someone?”

“It was Trey. It was about Chloe,” I say, not wanting to answer his question about whether I’m seeing someone and hoping he won’t press the subject. He sits down on the swinging bench on the porch.

“I don’t believe you but whatever, I have bigger problems. I’m worried about Whitney,” he says after a moment of silence and I’m immediately on high alert.

“Why?” I try to remain calm and not like I’m about to get in my car and drive to the airport.

“I don’t know. Parental instincts, I guess. Something’s going on with her and I can’t quite put my finger on it.” His eyes narrow. Eyes that remind me so much of Whitney. Mason and Whitney both have so many of Kevin’s features, it became the running joke that they couldn’t be Michelle’s children.

“Have you talked to her since she got to New York?”

“Once. Michelle put her on speaker. She sounds like she’s... holding her breath. Like she’s waiting for the other shoe to drop. I don’t like her being so far away either with no one with her. I’m kind of surprised Chloe didn’t go with her but she doesn’t really like Parker.” He laughs and I frown because I didn’t know that piece of information.

“She doesn’t?”

“I mean she’s team Whitney, you know that. So even if Whitney was

dating Satan himself, Chloe would try for *her*, but no he's not high on her list of favorite people."

"You and Miche aren't fans either, right? I know you were being diplomatic for Whitney's sake yesterday but what's the problem?"

"It's just what I said. He's aloof and quiet and standoffish. A little judgmental. I just don't think they're a good match. Mason has told him off a few times but you know Mase's temper. None of us are huge fans, but he seems to make her happy so we are trying, you know?"

"Mmmhm," I say as I crack my beer and take a long sip.

"Especially after what happened three years ago."

My blood runs cold hearing him reference what I assume to be the aftermath of our breakup. "Three years ago?"

"Yeah, you don't remember?" He frowns and scratches his head as if he's trying to recall the timeline and where I fall into it. "Oh no, I think you had just left for Mexico," he says and I pray he doesn't make the connection having said those words out loud for maybe the first time.

Hindsight being 20/20 and all.

But he doesn't flinch. "I don't know if it was COVID and not being able to return to college that semester because of lockdown or what but Whitney went through what I can only assume to be a period of depression. She wasn't eating or she'd eat everything in sight to the point she made herself sick. She'd stay up for days at a time and then crash and sleep for two days. We thought it was cabin fever but she was crying all the time. She never stopped. I begged her to talk to me, to Michelle, to a therapist, anyone. That just made her cry harder. Chloe seemed to help so she kind of moved in for a while. But it was hard. Seeing your child go through hell and not know how to stop it. Or what was even causing it. This went on for probably a year. Once restrictions kind of lifted and she and Chloe were able to at least go out a little bit, that did seem to help and then shortly after she met Parker. To this day, we don't know what happened and she won't talk about it. At one point, Michelle and I had a theory that maybe she was seeing someone and something happened but for her to be acting that way it must have been serious and I can't see her being serious with anyone and not telling us."

I knew parts of this through Trey and from what Whitney told me herself but seeing it through her father's eyes who also happens to be my best friend is different.

"Kev—" I start, not knowing what I'm planning to say but knowing that

after he shared *that*, I can't not say anything about my part in it. But clearly the universe had other plans as I spot Georgina crossing the lawn, a hand in the air and a jacket under her arm.

Kevin waves back. "Hey, G."

We both stand and Kevin gives her a hug. I'm not sure if she's expecting one from me but I freeze, still stuck in the conversation Kevin and I just had all the while thinking about Whitney across the country seething with jealousy at the thought of this date.

"Good to see you, Georgina, you look lovely." I nod, and she does. Her long lean legs were covered by high waisted black jeans and a black off the shoulder top that exposes her shoulders. She's wearing open-toed heels that would put her just under my chin making her way taller than Whitney who wouldn't even clear my chest in shoes that high.

"Michelle is inside still getting ready," Kevin says, and I'm grateful that he speaks just as my mind begins to drift to Whitney.

It pulls me back into the present and I give her a smile. *The* smile. The one that Whitney said had the power to make any woman melt. To be fair, I thought it was just my normal smile but the implication Whitney gave it made it so I never wanted to give that smile to anyone but her. Georgina blushes and moves into the house. As soon as the door closes, Kevin shoots me a look.

"So much for not being interested."

I snap my head toward him. "What? I already said I'm doing this as a courtesy, but no I'm not interested in dating anyone." *Because I'm in love with your daughter.*

"I've been your best friend for almost thirty years, I know what it means when you're interested in a woman."

Maybe once upon a time he knew, but I've gotten good at hiding it having had years of practice. "Mmhmmm." I down the rest of my beer and I wish like hell I had something stronger.



"What was *that* about?" Kevin asks me when I make my way into the kitchen

behind him. Michelle is still on the porch talking to Georgina who declined to come in probably for the same reason Kevin was about to ream me out for. “Dude, have you forgotten how to date?”

“Maybe? I didn’t date much in Mexico. I guess I’m a little rusty.”

“Are you a little rusty about how to be a human? Because you barely said two words to her.” I felt anxious all through dinner about what Kevin had shared. That mixed with being worried about Whitney had me less than good company. Whitney texted me during dinner and while I should have told her I would text her later when I was alone, I couldn’t, which had us texting back and forth for at least ten minutes. “You were so checked out.”

“I just have a lot on my mind, Kev.”

“Like what?” I don’t respond, I just drop to one of the bar stools circling the island and shake my head. “Since when can’t you tell me what’s going on?”

“I don’t even know where to start.”

“Well—”

“Jacob Maxwell Price!” Michelle screams as soon as the door slams. I wince at the use of my full name as she enters the kitchen. “I know you have better manners than that. Do not make me call your mother. You know what? Better yet, I’ll tell her next week when we have lunch.”

My eyes widen. “You have lunch with my mother?”

“Yes.” She turns her nose up and walks to the other side of the kitchen. “You and Trey are heathens that don’t call her and I’m the wonderful, considerate child she never had. Plus, I’m a girl.” She bats her eyelashes at me. “And I’m going to tell her that I set you up with a very sweet girl and you fucked it all up.” She stomps. “Well, I won’t say fuck because I have manners unlike YOU!” She crosses her hands over her chest. “What was that?”

“Please tell Georgina that I apologize for my behavior, I just... a lot happened while I was in Mexico and I’m just not ready to date anyone.”
Coward.

I swallow, trying to ignore the voice inside of me telling me that now was the time to tell them and I couldn’t keep prolonging it.

“Did you meet someone?” Michelle asks, her eyes wide and a smile pulling at her lips like she’s already planning another double date for me and whoever the potential mystery girl is.

Tell them.

I shake my head. "It's complicated."

Michelle cocks her head to the side. "Jacob, since when don't you tell us things?"

"That's what I said." Kevin speaks up and I can see him studying me. They both are. The sound of a phone buzzing breaks their stare and I'm grateful for a second to get my thoughts together in preparation when Michelle answers the phone.

"Whitney, hi honey," she says, walking out of the room.

"I want to talk to her!" Kevin calls to her and it takes everything out of me not to scream that I want to also.

Michelle comes back in, cradling her phone against her shoulder with her wallet in her hand. "Of course, you can use my Hilton points. I don't remember my account information to book the room though. Babe, Whitney is checking into a hotel. I think you're logged into the account on your phone, can you book her a room?"

"On it," he says staring down at his phone and I wish she'd come to me but I understand why she couldn't and it's not like we've been able to talk. But I'm grateful that if she's checking into a hotel that means she'll be alone when we talk later. My cock hardens slightly at the thought of being able to speak freely to each other. "I'm glad she's getting a room, I don't want her staying overnight at the hospital by herself."

"She said they won't let her. They're still a little strict with visiting hours." Kevin holds up his phone for Michelle to see and she speaks. "Honey what's the address, we need a cross street at least to make sure it's the right hotel." She points at the phone. "That one."

I look at my watch and note it's almost one in the morning there. "It's one in the morning there, how is she getting to the hotel? Is it far?"

"Hold on." She puts the phone down. "Whitney, you're on speaker and Jacob is here being your third parent as usual." I try not to react to that. "How far is the hotel and how are you getting there?"

"It's across the street, I'm walking."

"At one in the morning!?" I yell. My hands shake slightly and I feel myself getting worked up at the thought of someone messing with her.

"Across the street, JP. Literally."

"Stay on the phone with us until you get there," I order her.

"Fine," she responds and I can hear the fatigue in her voice.

"Are you okay?" Michelle asks.

“I’m tired. Really tired,” she says and I can hear the sounds of New York City through the phone.

“Alright hon, you’re booked,” Kevin says.

“Thank you, guys.”

“Of course. When are you coming home?” Michelle asks.

“They’re saying they may be able to release him tomorrow now which would be great. I don’t want to miss too many classes. I’ve already let my professors know what’s going on and they’re understanding, but it’s law school, that only goes so far.” She sighs. “I lost a whole day and I never finished my paper. I got an extension until Wednesday but I hate feeling behind.”

“Sweetheart, you sound like you have the weight of the world on your shoulders, I need you to take a breath,” Michelle says. “Take a bath when you get in the room.”

Take a bath and call me from there. I think to myself. I know a way to take your mind off of all of this.

“Alright, I just got inside the hotel. I’m safe.”

“When you get to the room,” I say.

“Huh?” she asks.

“We’ll wait until you get to the room,” I tell her and Kevin nods emphatically.

“Guys...”

“No, Jacob is right. What if someone is lurking in the hallway or something?” Michelle says.

“Fine. Not a whole lot of good you guys will do for me in California though.” She grumbles and I already know just how I’m going to get rid of her bad mood. The thought pisses me off that she’s right in that I can’t protect her from here. *I should have gone with her. Fuck.* “There’s a line. How was your guys’ date anyway? JP getting married anytime soon?”

Not to anyone but you, my mind thinks automatically.

Michelle snorts. “Not to Georgina, he behaved like a jerk.”

“Thanks.” I roll my eyes.

“Oh...?” Whitney says and I hate that she’s about to find out this information without letting me have some fun with her first.

“He barely paid her any attention and probably said ten words to her the whole time.” I can picture Whitney’s smile from here. Her eyes lighting up at the fact that she’s the only woman that has my attention. Even when we were

in mixed company, my focus was always on her even if my eyes weren't.

“Oh, well... I'm sure there's a woman out there for JP somewhere. He'll find her eventually.”

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Whitney

I drop to the king-sized bed in my hotel room, the weight of not having a relaxing moment all day taking over. I felt out of control. Nervous. Anxious. Scared. Alone. I hate to admit it but I was somewhat grateful I was forced to leave the hospital to grant me some alone time and away from Parker's cold gaze. He'd never been like this with me before. It's like he changed overnight. I rack my brain trying to understand what could have caused this change in demeanor. It can't just be about not answering their initial calls. To my parents' point, he'd always been a little aloof and stoic at times but he had never been that way with me. He had never been so cold with me. I feel like I've been walking on eggshells since I got here and now that I'm alone I feel like I can breathe.

I kick off my shoes and decide to listen to my mother's advice and make my way into the bathroom to run a bath. I already know I should expect to hear from JP soon but I don't want to call him in case he hasn't escaped my mother's wrath over the date. I'll admit it pleased me to hear that he didn't give her the time of day. I don't know how he'll explain why he isn't interested but at this point I can't bring myself to care. I pour in a considerable amount of bubble bath before making my way back into the room to open the bottle of wine I bought downstairs and take off my clothes. I take a healthy sip of the wine, trying to quiet the thoughts over what I'm going to do about Parker.

I slip into the tub, watching as the water rises around me and I let my eyes close as I think back to the first time I met Parker.

Three Years Ago

I was meeting Chloe for dinner but of course she was late. Probably arguing with Trey for the tenth time this week. They need to just call it quits already. Tale as old as time, he doesn't want a commitment, she does, whatever. I pick up my cosmopolitan that I'd ordered with my fake ID that our waiter barely glanced at as I look around the room. The restaurant is still new and thereby very crowded especially with all the crowd restrictions being lifted. It's high-end Asian fusion and the chef recently competed on one of those televised cooking shows and we're in LA so naturally this is the place to be on a Friday night.

I had been talking to this guy I'd "met" online and he was actually supposed to be meeting us here. Maybe that's why Chloe and Trey are fighting because Chloe is kind of my wingman since the guy, Parker, is bringing a friend. Chloe assured me it was no big deal, that things with her and Trey were super casual but maybe jealousy has reared its ugly head. But this could end up working in Chloe's favor though. So maybe she's milking it now.

I glance down at my turquoise Rolex Datejust watch, a high school graduation gift from JP that I still wear. But where the hell is she?

We were supposed to meet here a half hour earlier than we told the guys to give us a chance to have a drink and prepare our exit strategies just in case.

This was the first date I'd been on since things ended with JP and I was more than a little nervous. Not only did I feel the ache of JP every time my heart took a beat but he was the only man I'd ever been with seriously so I'd never really "dated."

I look down at what I'm wearing; a short black dress that hit just above my knees and hugged all my curves underneath my favorite leather jacket and I'd paired it with my classic black Jimmy Choo pumps. I was probably really overdressed for a first date but that's just me and judging by all the women in the room, I'm the perfect amount of dressed.

"Hi hi hi sorry!" Chloe takes the seat diagonal from me at the four-person square table and presses her cheek to mine and makes a kiss sound. "I changed four times."

"Why? Are you interested in Parker's friend now?"

“No, I’m interested in making Trey jealous and I want him to think about me on a date with another man while I’m wearing this.” She turns around for me to see the complete look and she does look hot. A long dark green dress with a slit all the way up her thigh to the point where if she moves a certain way, she may expose something. The dress is a little demurrer up top but still gives a hint of cleavage and she’s wearing her hair up to expose her neck which I’ve learned is Trey’s weakness.

“You’re going to kill him.”

“That’s the point.” She grabs the cosmo that I’d ordered her. “You’re a goddess.” She downs it in one gulp before looking around the room to order another. “How many have you had?”

“This is the first.”

“Okay we need at least one more.”

About fifteen minutes later, Parker and his friend show up and immediately I regret agreeing to the date. I was anxious, slightly buzzed and completely freaking out over the fact that this man was not JP. All I wanted to do was end the date early and go home and stare at pictures of him while I masturbated.

I know, horrible idea.

My eyes fly open as I realize I barely remember that first date. Was it that unmemorable? I blink my eyes several times and sit up in the bathtub trying to rack my brain for the memories of that date. What Parker and I talked about. What we laughed about. I can’t remember much of the specifics. I can barely remember what he wore and I have half of JP’s wardrobe memorized. I remember us being there and then going home and actually using my vibrator while I thought about JP.

Wow.

*How did I go from that to being engaged? I do remember more about the second date and the fifth and the tenth and how sweet he was and the time my car broke down after studying super late at the library and he came to my rescue because my parents were out of town and they were always my second call when I needed something *after JP*.*

*My thoughts are interrupted by my phone ringing and I let out a sigh of relief that JP is calling finally. I pick up my phone and my heart sinks when I realize that not only is it *not JP* but it’s Parker *and* it’s a FaceTime. *I wonder if I could just not answer it and say I fell asleep. No, I’m already on thin ice about not answering the phone and he seems to be wary about trusting me.**

With reason. I wince at the implication my subconscious makes that I am in fact not at all trustworthy.

Fuck. I have to answer this.

It's not lost on me that I try to angle myself so that nothing is exposed for the camera. I prop my phone up against something and answer the call.

"Hi."

His eyebrows raise when he notices that I'm in the bathtub and he smiles. "Hi beautiful."

Double fuck.

"How are you feeling?" I ask him.

He leans back against the pillows and lets out a deep sigh. "Like shit and I miss you. I wish they hadn't made you leave."

"Oh?" I realize the only way to prevent this conversation from turning sexual is to start a fight. "You certainly weren't acting like it while I was there."

"Baby, I'm sorry. It's been a really shitty day."

"Yes, I know. For me too. I spent practically a day traveling only to be berated when I got here for not getting here sooner and I am so sorry I wasn't. Believe me I wish this hadn't happened and that you were fine and safe." I bite my bottom lip and look away from the camera, my eyes welling up with tears over so many different reasons. "You and your mother by the way which I've come to expect but that's another story, made me feel like absolute shit today." I take a step further. "Never mind that you're absolutely fine and I'm missing a day of classes tomorrow and had to postpone turning in my paper which you didn't even ask about by the way."

"I've kind of had some things on my mind."

"Like interrogating me about my last few days?" I snap.

"Whitney, enough I'm sorry alright? Why are you biting my head off right now?"

"Why were you biting mine off earlier?!"

"Because you weren't here!"

I let my head fall back and a groan of irritation leaves my lips. "I said I was sorry, Parker. What do you want from me? You're going to have to let it go." I shrug as the indifference and impatience toward Parker begins to take over. We are going in circles and I know it was only a matter of time before JP starts calling. "Or don't. But this is ridiculous, Parker. I'm here now, alright? I'm here. This is all because you don't trust me and..." The words

are on the tip of my tongue. Words brought on by frustration and anger and a very large glass of wine on a very empty stomach.

My phone beeps indicating I have a call coming through and I freeze when I see it's JP and he'll absolutely freak the fuck out if I don't answer, knowing that I'm here by myself and wouldn't have gone to sleep without talking to him.

"I have to go."

"Wait... what?"

"I. Have. To. Go." I repeat each word slowly, disdain dripping from my voice. I am angry and maybe I don't have the right to be but I am. Yes, I am in the wrong for so many reasons I can't even keep track but I've never given him a reason to treat me like this. I've been loyal and doting and present and... *have you?* My subconscious sneers. *Have you ever let Parker into the part of your heart that you've only let JP? Or have you kept that part guarded ever since JP planted his flag there?*

I huff. "I'll talk to you tomorrow."

"Wait, Whitney, baby."

"No." My phone stops buzzing and a moment later, a message flashes across my screen.

Jacob: I hope you're not asleep. I have plans for us, baby. The space between my legs begins to tingle in anticipation and for a brief second, I remember I'm on FaceTime with Parker and the facade slips as I swipe the message away.

"Who's texting you this late?"

"It's eleven p.m. in California, it's not *that* late. It's Chloe." The lie comes out easily. "Let me guess, you'd like to see it?" I pray he doesn't call my bluff and I'm grateful when he doesn't respond. "I'll be there in the morning."

"Fine." His eyes drop to the bottom of the screen, which still isn't showing anything but I assume he's hoping that something may have become exposed. "I love you."

Part of me doesn't want to say it back. Or say *me too* or *ditto* instead. Or something that would be totally out of character for me. But because Jacob has now started calling me *again*, I take the easy way out. "Love you too." I give him a weak smile before I end the call without another thought.

"Hi." I lean forward as soon as his face shows up on the screen and I

press a kiss to the camera. “I miss you so much.” I don’t wait for him to ask me why I didn’t answer when he called and texted. “Parker FaceTimed me, it’s why I couldn’t answer your calls or your texts...” I put a hand over my forehead.

He frowns. “You answered him... like that?” he says, referring to my naked, wet body.

“He didn’t see anything. I had the phone angled away from me and then I picked a fight so he wouldn’t ask. I got in here to wait for you.” I can see the relief on his face but he still looks irritated. “Are you mad?”

“No.” He shakes his head. “I trust you, baby.”

“I almost told him. I was angry and I snapped and it was on the verge of coming out and then you called me. In retrospect, I’m glad I didn’t because that’s not the way I wanted to tell him. Here in New York, on the phone and not in person, while he’s in the hospital and his parents are here and *you’re* there in California.”

He nods. “Why were you angry?”

“Because of how he’s been all day. And then you texted and he asked who it was... I’m not saying he’s not entitled to ask. But I’m here away from every single person in my life in a high intense situation. It could have been my parents or Chloe or my brother and the way he asked made it seem like I was doing something shady. And maybe part of my anger is that he can see through all of this. That he knows me so well and that’s frustrating the hell out of me because he’s not giving me the benefit of the doubt at all even though I don’t fucking deserve it.”

“The more I think about it, I would prefer you told him while I was in the same state. He’s a little too... intense about you?”

I blink at him. “Intense? I think he’s just insecure, JP and I didn’t know that until now. I mean, there were signs but... this is on another level.”

I can sense the worry coming off him and I’m wondering what he means by *intense*. “And you’re sure he doesn’t know about our past? No off-handed comment you could have made that would have allowed him to connect the dots when you mentioned I was home and then left with me?”

I try to remember if there’s ever been a time I mentioned Jacob or even alluded to it being someone that my parents wouldn’t approve of or something I had to hide. He eventually learned I was in a relationship before I met him but I never gave many details and I wasn’t someone who spilled my guts when I was drunk to anyone but Chloe or Mason. I had trained myself

not to let myself think about JP and by the time Parker came around, I wasn't drunk crying over him even to Chloe so there's no chance he would have even overheard.

Unless he went through my text messages?

I had deleted my texts with Jacob right before I met Parker because I was still looking through them an unhealthy amount. Looking at what we were. Thinking about what we could have been. Cursing myself for getting so involved and attached. Wishing like hell he'd come back and tell me he loved me. I'd fall asleep reading his messages, letting them wrap me in a warm blanket and lull me into a fake sense of happiness and security that the next morning I'd wake up in his arms again.

It was my final step to healing and it only took me a year to do it.

But there were texts with Chloe if he knew what to look for but what were the chances he'd run a search for "Jacob" or "JP?" Even if he did search my texts with Chloe, he would have had to go back months to find anything and Chloe and I text twenty-five times on any given day.

"I don't think so." I take another large gulp of my wine and turn my gaze to the ceiling as I try to recall anything that would have given Parker a reason to be suspicious of JP. "No." I meet his gaze and his blue eyes are almost piercing. "Can we talk about something else? Like your *date*?"

He snorts and begins unbuttoning his shirt. "As your mother said, it was hardly a date. I couldn't focus on anything except my woman across the fucking country."

Warmness spreads throughout my body and particularly between my legs at his possessive words. "Is that right?"

"Your mother is pissed at me." He rubs a hand over his forehead. "It just didn't feel right. I already can't stop thinking about you and now you're there and I was worried and even if I wasn't madly in love with you, Georgina is not my type."

I roll my eyes. "Right. Gorgeous and tall and blonde and smart. Dad used to say *woman* was your type."

"Okay and now only *you* are my type," he says, giving me a pointed look that I feel between my legs. "And to be fair? I've never really dated blonde women. If I did, I may have fought your dad for your mom all those years ago."

My eyes widen and I almost choke on the wine I was trying to swallow. "Okay, ew?" I blanch, realizing what that would mean. "Can we not!?"

He laughs and I shake my head at him. *I am already pushing the boundaries of my daddy issues quite enough, thank you.* His bare chest is revealed and my throat goes dry at the sight making me forget our previous conversation. He moves the phone back to give me a full view of his torso as he's laid on his bed. The bed I'd just came on this morning.

"I wish I was there."

He runs his hand over his mouth and his tongue darts out to lick the skin. "The things I would do to you if you were here."

I prop my phone up again and move back so he can see the tops of my breasts. I'm submerged in bubbles and I know it's killing him not to see more of me. "Like what?"

He raises an eyebrow at me. "You want to play?"

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Whitney

JP and I were no stranger to phone sex or Skype sex or sexting. We spent many nights apart doing all of the above and it's amazing that those four words still put my body on high alert. I swallow the lump in my throat and nod my head. "Yes please."

"You're going to have to show me more of your sexy little body then. Get out of the tub."

I bat my eyelashes at him a few times and bite down on my bottom lip. "Can I have an orgasm first?"

"Without me getting to watch your fingers move in and out of your wet cunt?" He lowers his gaze. "Try again."

Despite the warm water, goose bumps erupt on my flesh and I run a digit down my slit in attempts to temper the ache. "I brought my laptop." I knew I was going to have time on the plane to study, and I anticipated this moment and seeing JP's dick on a larger screen is always better.

"Even better. Call you in two minutes." He says as he lowers the phone between his legs and grabs his dick through his jeans. "Be ready."

I hop out of the tub, dry off and apply some lotion as quickly as possible and I'm on the bed just as my laptop begins to ring with a FaceTime call. I place the computer between my legs knowing it's the view JP likes the best because it gives him a view of everything. My tits and my pussy are on display for him and when I answer the call, he's stroking his dick that's already standing at attention.

His eyes widen when he sees me just as I'm sure mine do.

"Hey." He gives me a smile so sexy it makes my pussy clench. The

movement must catch his attention because his eyes drop to the space between my legs and he licks his lips.

“Hi.” My eyes find his hand and it moves with it as he pulls at his dick.

“Touch your pussy,” he commands me, wasting no time. “Put those fingers between those sexy cunt lips of yours and rub that sweet little clit.” I listen, grazing my nipples in the process and spread my lips to expose the wetness between them. “Fucking beautiful.” His eyes are dark and full of want as he pulls at his dick. “I’m so fucking hard right now.”

“What do you want to do to me?” I tap my clit and he groans.

“Jesus Christ, baby. If I were there, I’d rip you apart.” He grits his teeth as he begins to pull harder on his dick. “Play with it. The way I like it. Play with it. Good girl. Get it nice and wet.” He says through gritted teeth as his eyes stare at my pussy. “Rub your clit faster.” I do as I’m told, already feeling myself beginning to inch toward my orgasm.

“JP...” I whine.

“How does it feel, baby?”

“So good.” My eyes lock with his and I bite my lip. A smile pulls at his lips as his eyes trace my face and it’s almost too intense. I drop my gaze to his dick that’s in his hand pulling harder and harder with every stroke.

“I know it does. Let me guess, you’re thinking about my mouth, aren’t you?” he asks, a cocky smirk on his full lips.

I lick my bottom lip, and I nod. “Uh-huh.”

“I didn’t spend nearly enough time with my mouth between your legs last night.” He leans forward slightly and the look he gives me sets my skin on fire. “Imagine my tongue is dragging through your wet slit.”

“Oh.” The word leaves my lips in a gush of air. I let my eyes flutter closed, and I let my head fall back.

“I know what you like, baby. I know you like when I take it slow at first, exploring your pussy before I settle on your clit. Put two fingers inside your pussy and massage that wall lightly. That’s my tongue inside you baby, fucking you with it like it’s my cock.”

I let out a moan as I picture his face between my legs, his thick tongue wedged inside of me. I gasp as I hit one of my spots.

“Oh, that feel good?”

I nod, words escaping me as I’m just trying to focus on breathing. I put a hand behind me to hold myself up as I begin to rock myself against my hand, my body beginning to build toward the peak.

“Look at me, baby.”

I open my eyes and stare at him as he pulls at his dick.

“You’re so fucking beautiful.” He drops his eyes to my pussy. “Look how wet you are.” His eyes darken and I watch as he licks his lips.

I whimper in response. “Baby, I... lick my clit.”

“Drag your fingers up, baby.”

I nod, doing as I’m told and find my clit and immediately start rubbing faster and harder. “Spread your lips and show me how wet you are.” I sit up straighter and use one hand to open me up while my other hand rubs at my clit. “That’s it. God, I love watching your clit when you’re ready to come. It’s so slick and wet and fuck it’s perfect.”

“Mmmm.” I let out a low moan feeling my orgasm looming. “JP.”

“Right there, Angel. I know you’re close.”

I nod. “I want to come.” It’s a desperate plea that I know he’ll oblige.

“Do you?”

“Yes!” I cry out.

“Get on your knees and ride my face then. I want your cum all over my lips and chin. I want my beard to smell like your pussy for hours after.”

I do as I’m told, getting on my knees and leaning forward slightly to ride my hand like I would his face. From this angle, he probably can’t see as clearly between my legs but he can see my face which he loves almost as much when we’re like this. Getting a close up look of my face when I come.

“Mmmm, JP.”

All my hairs stand up on end as a tremor moves through me and I feel like all of my nerves have been short circuited. My breasts jiggle and move with the erratic movements of my hand causing a growl to escape the man on the other side of the computer.

“Jesus, fuck. I need you to come, Whitney. Come right fucking now,” he commands. “I need your orgasm, on my tongue. Come on, baby, let me taste you.”

And then the feeling begins at the base of my spine and travels upward at lightning speed. “Oh my God, oh my God!” I chant. “Jacob!” I scream, letting my body succumb to the pleasure that Jacob’s words caused. My hand stops moving and I just continue to rock my hips against my fingers, dragging my clit against them with each thrust. “Oh God,” I cry out. Lights flash behind my eyelids and my mouth drops open as a smile begins to form and then I’m giggling as the sex haze swirls around me.

“There she is.”

“Oh my God, I forgot...” I let out a sigh. “All of this.”

He smiles and drags his thumb over his bottom lip. “I fucking didn’t.”

I sit back on my ass and spread my legs again for him, letting him see the very wet space between my legs. I stick out my tongue and drag my fingers along it, tasting myself and he lets his head fall back.

“FUCK!” And that word feels like a thump against my clit. “Whitney, you’re killing me.” His breathing has gotten more jagged and he starts pulling at his dick harder. “It’s only been a day and I miss your taste.” He licks his lips. “What’s it taste like?”

“Salty. Tangy. *Yours.*” I raise an eyebrow at him and he growls in response.

“You’re fucking right you taste like *mine*. You’re such a fucking good girl. My fucking good girl.” His voice shakes and I know he’s close to the edge having watched me come all over my fingers and then lick my orgasm from them.

I drop my gaze to his cock. “Your turn.” I look at him and nod at his dick. “My mouth or my pussy first?”

“Pussy,” he grunts.

“I can’t wait until I’m sitting in your lap, facing you. So, I can run my tongue down that spot on your neck that makes your dick even harder. My legs wrapped around your back. My wet cunt wrapped around your dick.”

“Oh God, Whit. Touch your clit again, baby, come with me.”

I do as he says but I try to stay focused on talking to him.

“That’s my good girl. God, you’re beautiful.”

“Your hands are gripping my ass as you move me up and down on your dick and God”—I let out a moan—“you feel so big. The ridges of your dick, Jesus JP. The way it drags against my walls, makes me feel like I’m vibrating.” His eyes are almost feral as he continues to jack himself off. “Faster. Imagine I’m riding you.”

“Yeah?” He leans forward and his eyes are wide as he watches me watch him.

“How does it feel?”

“Your cunt gripping my cock? So, fucking good.” He lets out a groan. “Jesus fucking Christ, Whit, look what you fucking do to me.” He begins pulling at his hard cock that’s already leaking from the tip and I know he’s close to his orgasm because his cheeks are getting redder and his perfectly

straight teeth are digging into his bottom lip.

Damn, that's hot.

“Why aren't you here, FUCK!” I scream as I start climbing toward my climax again. “Baby, your cock is rubbing against my clit at this angle too fucking good, I'm going to come.”

“Uh huh, yes the fuck you are. Jesus, you're squeezing my dick so hard, Angel. Daddy is going to come. Pinch your clit. Do it now,” he commands through gritted teeth. I do and my toes flex in response as I push my fingers inside of me. “Good girl.” He drags out the word *girl* and it sends a shiver through me. *This man is fucking sex in human form.*

My eyes slam shut as my orgasm begins to take me under. “Fuck me, daddy. I'm close.”

He lets out a low moan. “I know, AngelAngel. Fuck, me too. Your cunt feels so good.” I shiver. “The second I see you, I don't care where we are or who the fuck is around, I am dragging you into the nearest room with a door and fucking you so hard against it I might drive you through it.” My eyes flutter open and his eyes are trained on my face.

“Please.”

“Tell me when you're coming, baby.”

“Fuck fuck fuck,” I cry out as I begin to ride my hand more aggressively. My strokes are getting more erratic as the feeling is beginning in my toes and slowly sliding up my legs. “It's there. God, JP, I need you.” *His dick. His tongue. His fingers that know how to play my body like his own instrument.*

“Fuck me too. Daddy needs his girl.” And then I *lose it*. I come hard all over my hand again. I vaguely hear JP praising me and then I hear him come with a roar. My name leaves his lips like a prayer along with a lot of less than holy expletives.

My skin is flushed, and there's a thin layer of sweat covering me. I meet his gaze and he's giving me the sexiest smile to match my serene one.

I slide my hand from between my legs and let out a sigh. “Wow.”

A sexy smile slides onto his face as he grabs a shirt from out of view and begins cleaning himself off. His dimple pops out and I find myself getting turned on again. *How was this man so fucking sexy?* “Last night wasn't enough. I need more. I need all the fuckin' nights.”

I tilt my head to the side and I feel tears springing to my eyes at what I assume he meant as a possessive comment but was laced with sweet sentiment. “I love you.”

He stops cleaning himself off for a second and holds my gaze, his blue eyes sincere and shining with nothing but love for me making me believe he's going to return the sentiment.

“What I feel for you is deeper than love, Whitney.” *Oh.* He lies on his back and stares at the ceiling. “Devotion. Obsession.” He sighs. “Telling you I love you doesn't seem to feel enough. The fact that I feel so out of control with need for you when I know I shouldn't. I know it's going to cause a catastrophic response and yet I don't fucking care.” He turns his head toward me. “I just want you. I need you. I feel you underneath my skin every second. I felt you in every painful beat of my heart when we were apart.” *I remember feeling something similar.*

My mouth falls open. “JP...” I trail off. “You chose now to drop these very romantic bombs? Why didn't you tell me this last night? Did you not *want* to stick your dick in my ass last night?”

He chuckles and the lightness in his eyes replaces the heaviness. It's not that I didn't want to hear how deep his love went for me, but I didn't want him telling me this while we were three thousand miles apart. I wanted him to tell me while I was in his arms and he was slowly moving inside me. “I cannot wait to get my dick back in your ass, Whitney. Fuck, the way you squeeze the cum out of my dick.”

“Touch it again.”

He goes to grab it when I stop him.

“If you're going to fuck my ass, it needs to be a little wetter than that.”

He quirks an eyebrow and then I see the spit fly from his mouth onto his hard member.

A gasp leaves my lips even though I knew he was planning to do that but seeing it makes my nipples pebble and my cunt flutter. I bite my lip and his eyes darken as he watches me watch him tug on his dick that was still slightly hard despite having just come.

“You wish I'd just spit on your pussy, don't you?” He leans forward. “Do it yourself.”

“I don't need to, I'm already wet,” I offer. I let out a whimper when my fingers ghost over my clit again, my body still humming from my last orgasm.

“For me then.” He licks his lips. “I want to see it.”

“I'm a lady, I don't spit.” I raise my nose in the air in mock horrification.

He snorts and leans back again. “First of all, you do spit but that doesn't

mean you aren't a lady. If I recall, you do all kinds of unladylike things in the bedroom with me. Or I'm sorry, maybe it's considered ladylike to rim your Godfather in your parent's bed."

My cheeks immediately heat, and I know I have to be bright red. "JP! Okay, one, YOU LIKED IT."

"Fucking loved it. And every other time you did it thereafter."

JP was kinky. *Beyond*. And it opened me up to so many things in the bedroom. JP and I had explored ass play several times on both sides and the space between my legs thumps painfully at the thought of fucking him again.

"Will you let me inside you again?" I raise both eyebrows up and down at him and he doesn't respond at first so I slip my fingers into my mouth and drag them down my body before rubbing my clit.

His eyes follow my hand and stay trained at the apex of my thighs. "What's in it for me?"

"Ummm an orgasm? Or did you forget that you came so hard you blacked out."

"I want something else. Something bigger."

There isn't much I haven't let JP do to me so for him to say bigger, I'm intrigued but also a little nervous at what he's going to ask. "Well, out with it."

He grips his dick and stares me straight in the eyes. "Move in with me."

I stop rubbing my clit and look at him. "What?"

"When you get home... and that better be in a few days or I'm coming out there to get you my fucking self. Move in with me."

"Baby..."

"You want to fuck my ass?" He shrugs. "Fine, you can when you move in."

My heart begins to accelerate at both his sexy and huge words. The way he's talking, he wants me to do it soon.

"I assumed we'd live together soon, but can I get out of my current relationship first though?"

"Does that idea make you wet? Having complete access to this whenever you want?" He nods at his dick. "Whenever you want it, baby, it's yours. You wake up in the middle of the night and that greedy pussy of yours needs me, I'm there. You fucking climb on top of me and ride me until I wake up coming in your wet cunt." He growls and my breath hitches as I pull my fingers away from my clit. "You come home from a long day of classes and

I'm there waiting to slide my tongue through your wet slit."

"You're going to be waiting for me when I get home from classes? Giving up saving the world, are we?"

"For now."

We aren't touching ourselves anymore, we're just staring at each other, our eyes doing all the talking that our hearts still understand. I lay down, pulling the covers over me as a chill sets in and stare at the screen as he lays down to face his.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Jacob

“What is with you? You’ve checked your phone no less than twenty times since we sat down. I thought Whitney wasn’t getting home until tonight?” I pull my eyes away from my phone and they land on my younger brother who’s staring at the screen above us watching Sports Center. It’s been two days since I’ve seen Whitney in any capacity. I haven’t seen her face since we came together on FaceTime two fucking days ago and I was about to fucking *lose* it. Apparently, yesterday her infuriating ex-fiancé *yes ex, I refuse to refer to him as her fiancé regardless of the fact that she hasn’t told him yet* and his pain in the ass mother threw a fit to allow Whitney to stay the night with him last night which is fucked up. Who insists that his fiancée sleeps on an uncomfortable small hospital couch all night? I’d gotten a few texts from her assumedly when she’d go to the bathroom but she says that Parker has been clingier than usual and it’s made it hard for her to get away.

That’s all about to fucking change when she gets home. “I haven’t fucking seen her. It’s been two days and I haven’t seen her. We haven’t Facetimed...” I ball my hands into fists and down the shot in front of me. “And she hasn’t told Parker it’s over.”

“Well, no, obviously. Whitney has manners.” I hear a higher voice speak up from behind me and when I look to the side of me, I see Chloe dropping onto the bar stool next to Trey and planting a kiss on his cheek. “What would that look like breaking up with him while he’s still got a catheter in.” She scrunches her nose and pulls her sunglasses from over her eyes and pushes them into her hair before pulling off her leather jacket.

Annoyance spikes in my veins. “Okay, why are you here?”

“Hey.” Trey glares at me and punches me lightly on the shoulder. “Don’t start.”

“Jacob, I’ve done you quite a few favors over the past few days and really the last few years if we’re getting technical. I could have told Uncle Kevin that you had spent the better part of two years violating his little princess when you fucked up and left her. But—”

“Okay, babe?” Trey casts her a glance and shakes his head before wrapping his arm around her neck and pressing a kiss to her temple. “Not the time.”

“I’m just saying, don’t get your panties all in a twist with me. I’ve been one of the few in your corner.” She flicks a blonde strand over her hair and waves at the bartender. “I’ll take whatever they’re drinking,” she says, pointing at the drinks in front of us.

I swallow my annoyance at this whole situation. “Have you talked to her?”

“Mmhmm.” She doesn’t offer up any information.

“I just... what did she say? Has she mentioned saying anything to Parker? I just, want to know when the fuck I’m going to see her.”

“You know you’re awfully concerned about her telling Parker when I don’t see you telling Uncle Kev and Aunt Michelle.” She eyes me over the beer the bartender places in front of her. Her green eyes narrowed into slits.

“She said she wanted Parker to know first.”

“But then she said you went all ‘I’ll tell them,’” she says in a deep voice as an attempt to imitate me. “Someone worried all of a sudden?”

“I’m not worried, I just... it’s a big thing. Telling them this.”

My phone vibrates with a text message and adrenaline kicks in when I see her name on the screen. My heart begins to race and I realize I’m nervous about what it could say. Her flight was canceled. They decided to stay longer. She changed her mind about everything.

Fuck. I am losing it.

Whitney: I’m coming home.

I let out a breath I didn’t realize I’d been holding.

Me: Thank God. When?

Whitney: Now. And I’m alone.

I immediately pick up the phone and slide off the bar stool to have some

privacy.

“Hi,” she says after only one ring.

My fingers itch with anticipation of having her in my arms. My heart races as I think about pressing my lips to hers. My dick hardens at the thought of being inside her. *How fucking soon?* “When will you be here?”

“I just got to the airport; I should be there around seven California time.” She sighs. “I cannot wait to get the fuck out of this state.”

“What happened, baby?”

“Parker needs to stay another day or two. They haven’t cleared him to fly and I can’t miss any more school. I’ve probably missed too much as it is,” she explains.

“I’ll pick you up.”

“Okay.” I want to ask her where she and Parker stand right now, but she sounds exhausted and like she’s on the verge of a breakdown and I don’t want to be the reason for it. “I haven’t told him. I just... I wanted to get away and get to you and maybe that makes me a terrible person. But I just told him I needed to get back for my exam tomorrow and he seemed to understand. I’m going to tell him, JP. I just didn’t know how to do it.”

“I know, baby, it’s okay.” I can hear the anxiety in her voice and the fact that she’s getting even more worked up makes me want to do anything I can to calm her. “I know you will. Otherwise, it’ll be pretty awkward when you start preparing for *our* wedding,” I say in an attempt to lighten the mood.

She gives me a weak laugh before she continues, “so I’ll see you at seven?”

“I can’t wait to see you, baby. I hope you’re ready to get fucked hard,” I add, hoping that might help her attitude.

“I am,” she responds without missing a beat before she hangs up the phone.

“I’m sorry, did I hear you use the phrase ‘our wedding?’” Chloe asks as I sit back down and nod toward the bartender to bring me the check.

I give her a pointed look. “I walked away for a reason, Chloe.”

She waves me off as if to say *so what?* “She says you asked her to move in.” Trey’s eyes move from Chloe to me in an instant.

His eyes are wide with intrigue but I can see a hint of happiness in them too. “Seriously?”

“Yes.” I nod. “This is real. It was never not real. I’ve loved her for so long and I let fear of so many things get in the way of what I wanted. I’m not

doing that to us again.”

Chloe squeals and claps her hands together. “Okay, so if you’re talking about a wedding then there’s a ring? Tell me there’s a ring.”

“Not yet. But there will be. Soon.”

My thoughts drift back to the first time I had the very real thought that I could marry Whitney Monroe.

Four Years Ago:

Whitney and I have been together for about a year when she asks me that question that I’ve come to dread in the past.

“Where do you see yourself in five years?” She’s seated between my legs as she reads a book on her kindle that I know will have her riding my dick within the hour. Not that I’m complaining. She turns her head to look up at me. I’m watching television so I take a second to mute the sound and press my lips to her temple. Usually that question sends a rush of anxiety through me. Not wanting to tell a woman that I saw myself as potentially chief of surgery at the hospital where I was currently an attending physician. A job that doesn’t leave much time for a woman or kids or any of the things that she may be looking for. I tighten my grip around her.

“Wherever you are.” The words slip out of my mouth without even thinking. I can’t believe I just fucking said that.

She turns in my arms and looks at me. “What?”

Well, no going back now. I let out a sigh. “Wherever you and this pretty pussy are, that’s where I want to be.”

“Don’t... don’t make this about sex. JP seriously? I... You see me in your future?”

I nod. “I know you’re young and you may not—” I’m cut off by her hand over my mouth.

“Stop.” She twists her mouth and I see a rush of tears flood her eyes. “I assumed... I mean, I thought I was your mid-life crisis.”

I narrow my eyes at her playfully. “I am not having a midlife crisis, Whitney.”

She cocks her head to the side and raises an eyebrow at me. “Well, you did get a new car...”

“I hadn’t in like ten years! And I like Porsche’s.”

“And a very young girlfriend. Those are usually the big ones. Not to mention the whole skydiving thing.” I chuckle, remembering how hysterical she was a few weeks ago, when Trey and I decided to go skydiving.

“Well, regardless of the fact that I fit the criteria, you are not my mid-life crisis. You’re my everything,” I tell her and she launches herself into my arms and presses her lips to mine. She slides her tongue between my lips in search of mine and I meet her with the same enthusiasm, holding her to me by the back of her neck.

“So, in five years,” she says after she pulls away and begins pressing lazy kisses down my neck. “Do you see us... you know, like with kids or... you know...” She visibly shakes in my arms and I wonder if she’s nervous to ask me about marriage.

I smile because she’s not looking at me, her face is still buried in my neck except now she’s dragging her tongue along my pulse point.

“Married?” I whisper in her ear. “Do I see myself married to you, Whitney? Is that what you’re asking?” She still hasn’t looked at me but I can feel her face nodding against me and I wonder if she’s embarrassed. I pull her face away and stare into her eyes. “I’ve never felt about anyone the way I feel about you. I see it all with you, marriage, kids...” Her cheeks turn pink as her eyes light up. “I don’t know how I’m going to tell Kevin and Michelle.” I sigh. “But I want to keep you forever.”



I’m leaning against my car when I see her come out of the airport. *God, she’s pretty.* Wearing skintight leggings beneath a flowy T-shirt and a leather jacket, she looked like she’s coming back from a relaxing vacation. Her sunglasses are covering her eyes but as she gets closer, she pushes them to the top of her head when she sees me. She’s still the most gorgeous woman I’ve ever laid eyes on, but she’s far from relaxed. I can see the exhaustion all over her. In her eyes. Her walk. Her posture. When she gets about a step away from me, she drops her bag and walks right into my arms and sinks into them. Her face is pressed against my chest and her arms are wrapped around my back. I hold her tight to my chest, pressing my lips to the top of her head.

“Hi beautiful, I fucking missed you.”

“You have no idea.” She bites her bottom lip and looks up at me. I take her face in my hands and press a kiss to her lips. She pulls back after a few seconds before I can deepen it. “JP...” she starts. “I need you to fuck me.”

“Well, that’s a given.”

“No, now. I need you to fuck me, *now*.”

I raise an eyebrow at her. “Where would you like me to fuck you? Here in front of everyone at LAX?” I say, looking around the sea of people in the pickup lanes.

“There’s a garage.” She points at one of the parking fixtures behind us. She lowers her face and looks up at me with the sexiest pout on her lips. “Please, daddy.”

I lean down so that our faces are nose to nose. “You can’t manipulate me, Whitney.” I brush my nose against hers and a sigh leaves her lips. “Once I start, I don’t plan to stop so no we aren’t fucking in a parking garage where we could potentially get caught by anyone. Now get in the car.”

“But...” she whines and I smack her ass as I open the door for her.

“Get in.”

She rolls her eyes and gets in the car as I put her luggage in the back of my Mercedes. I get in the car and as soon as I do her hands are on my dick. “Didn’t you miss me?” She grabs me through my jeans and begins to rub my dick *hard*.

Immediately, I can feel myself turning to steel in my pants. “Of course, I did,” I say, grabbing both of her hands in mine and bringing them to my lips.

“I suggested sexy, sweaty, delicious car sex after not seeing each other for three days. Three days on top of three years because you and I both know that one night of sex was not enough after being apart for so long. You used to love fucking me in cars.”

“That was when my bed wasn’t an option. My bed is an option. A bed for you to stay in all night tonight.”

She rolls her eyes as I pull onto the highway. I can sense the tension flowing off of her and I wonder if maybe she just needs an orgasm. It’s been a long and stressful day and I know she’s a nervous flier. I look over at her and see she’s staring down at her phone looking through emails. I slide my hand across the car and onto her leg and begin stroking her gently. I can see in her periphery that she looks up from her phone and straight ahead, refusing to meet my gaze.

“Uh uh. Don’t start that shit.”

I don’t respond, as I move inwards and stroke her pussy through her leggings. I can feel the heat through the fabric and I push harder, doing my best to massage her clit.

“How bad do you want to fuck me, baby?”

“JP,” she moans as she squirms under my fingers. “So, fucking bad. I want to ride your dick so hard.”

Fuck. I shift in my seat trying to relieve the stiffness in my dick after hearing her words coupled with feeling the heat between her legs. “Take off your leggings.”

“What?”

“Take off your leggings, Whitney. Don’t make me tell you again.”

“Why?”

I pull my eyes away from the road. “Because I’m going to finger your pussy, and I can’t believe you didn’t know where I was going with this.”

“I did. I wanted to hear you say it.” She slides her leggings and panties down her legs and lifts her shirt, exposing her cunt. She’s already wet and I groan as her scent permeates the air. I lick my lips wishing I was about to put my mouth between her legs instead of my fingers.

I place my hand on her thigh, stroking the skin delicately. I drag one digit lazily along the skin, careful not to get too close to the place I know she wants it and she begins moving to get my hand closer to her.

“JP, touch me, please,” she begs. I run my fingers up her thigh to her knee and stroke the skin and she lets out a moan.

“Spread your legs.”

She obeys.

“Wider,” I command and she opens her legs as far apart as they can go.

I keep my eyes on the road, knowing that even if I cast a glance at her while she’s looking like this: wet and wanting and panting, I’d pull over on the side of the highway and fuck her mercilessly. I drag my finger back up her thigh until I’m at her sex and I cup her possessively.

“I cannot wait to put my dick here. I’m not going to fuck you at first. I’m going to drag it through your slit and tap it against your clit over and over until you come all over it and then I’m going to slide my cock in you and fuck you while you’re still climaxing.” I drive my words home by pushing a finger inside of her while lazily rubbing her clit.

She clenches around me the second I slip a second finger inside of her.

“Oh god!”

“Do that again. Squeeze my fingers with that sweet pussy again. My god, you’re so fucking tight,” I say through gritted teeth as I try to calm my dick that’s hardening with each passing second. “Tell me who gets you this wet, baby.”

“You.”

“Say my name. Tell me who the fuck you belong to.”

“Jacob,” she pants. “JP,” she says after. “Daddy!” she cries, not sure which name I want to hear and I harden hearing all three of the names spill from her lips.

And fuck if they didn’t all make me hard.

“Yes, baby.” I continue rubbing her, alternating between stroking and pinching her clit every few seconds. Her pussy flutters around my fingers and a growl rumbles in my chest at the feeling. *I want to feel that around my tongue.* “Does that feel good? You like the way I’m touching you?”

“Fuck yes,” she breathes out. “JP, I’m close.” She moans as her left hand reaches up to grab my shoulder. In my periphery, I see that she looks down to stare at my fingers stroking her and she lets out a whine. “God, right there. Don’t stop.” Her voice comes out rushed and breathy and I know she’s seconds from coming.

“Good girl. Tell me when you’re coming.”

“Like... right... there...” She starts coming, just as her phone that’s sitting in my cup holder begins to ring. Her orgasm is already moving through her but I watch her eyes flutter open.

“Ignore it,” I growl at her, seeing Parker’s name on the screen.

“Oh God!” She grinds her pussy against my hand. “I’m coming, fuck that feels so fucking good.” She moans as she rolls her hips the best she can to hit all of her favorite spots.

The wet space between her legs gets even wetter as her climax takes over, and it’s so fucking sexy. I turn my gaze for a second and watch as a serene smile finds her face, and she turns to meet my eyes.

“Beautiful.” My voice is low and full of arousal after having watched, heard and felt her come all over my hand. I pull my hand from between her legs and run my tongue over my fingers, sliding them into my mouth and tasting her flavors.

“I can’t wait to blow you the second we’re in the house.” My nostrils flare at her words and I turn my concentration fully back to the road so I can

get us there safely. In the high of the sex haze around us, we'd both forgotten about the phone call until her phone starts to ring again.

"Fuck." She picks up the phone with a sigh. "Hey, I just got here." I can't hear exactly what he says on the other line but I can tell she glances at me before looking out the window. "I took an Uber." More silence. "Well, I was actually thinking of going to my parent's house tonight." She puts a hand over her eyes and pinches the bridge of her nose. "Sure... Did they say when you're being discharged and you can come home? Tomorrow? Great." She lets out a sigh. "I'll see you then." I can feel her eyes on me and when I turn to look at her, she mouths *sorry*. "Love you too," she says before ending the call.

I see fucking red.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Jacob

“JP...” she starts as soon as she gets off the phone, probably sensing my irritation over hearing her tell anyone she fucking loved them but me.

“Not now, Whitney.” I grip the steering wheel harder and I feel her hand on my shoulder.

“I don’t mean it. I just don’t know what to say when he says that right now.” She tells me as she pulls on her discarded underwear and leggings.

“I still have the taste of your pussy in my mouth and you just told another man you loved him? For fucking what?” I understood formalities and maybe I was being unreasonable but the reality of the situation hits me in the fucking face *again*.

She is not mine, yet.

She winces and I can see the guilt written all over her. “What was I supposed to say?”

“Nothing? ‘You too’? ‘Ditto?’ ‘I met someone else, and it’s over?’ I don’t fucking know, Whitney but not fucking *love you too*.” I knew things were complicated. I knew she was continuing to put up a facade for now, but hearing *those* words fall from her lips just seconds after my name had fallen from them felt like a dagger to my heart.

Christ, how am I back here again? Completely over the line obsessed with her.

She lets out a shaky breath. “I’m sorry. I...I’m just so sorry.” She lets her hand slide off of me and drops them into her lap and instantly I want her hands back on me. “I know it probably feels like shit, but I don’t love him. Part of me thinks I never did and that’s not your problem. It’s not your fault

or your problem that I got myself into this mess. But I just hope you know how much I love you. Despite all these mistakes, you're who I want to be with. I just need some time, JP. First and foremost, I need him to get out of the hospital." She shakes her head. "I was going to tell him the second he got home. I was going to tell him it was over. By then, maybe we would have told my parents, and I could have been honest about everything. I would have told him about everything between us and that I never got over you. That you've been the love of my life for all of it, and I'm sorry that it was unfair to him but now you're back and I can't marry him." She sighs and puts a hand over her eyes and when she snuffles, I know the tears are falling and all I want to do is pull her into my lap and make them disappear. "But now everything is complicated and what kind of person does it make me to break up with my fiancé while he's in the hospital?" Her shoulders sag. "I guess the kind of person who cheats on her fiancé while he's in the hospital."

I don't say anything for the rest of the ride, letting her words sink in while also trying to rid those three words she said to Parker from my brain. I take the exit toward my house before turning down a busy street with a few restaurants.

"You want to get something to eat?" I ask her.

She nods. "Are you mad at me?"

I pull into a garage and put the car in park and rest my head against the headrest while letting out a sigh. "Of course not, Angel. But I'm not happy. I'm not happy about any of this. We're right back where we were three years ago."

"What do you mean?"

"Lying to everyone and sneaking around and I think that's the problem I had with us all those years ago. And yes, much of that is my fault, for being too much of a pussy to tell your parents but now we're older and we can't move forward until we tell them."

"I know."

"And we can't tell them because you want to tell Parker first and I get that. I do. I respect that. But telling him you love him is not preparing him for what's coming. It's not preparing *you* for what's coming." I turn to look at her and put my hand on her cheek and she presses her hand against it. "And no, it's not particularly my favorite thing to hear you tell another man that you love him. It's a bitter pill that he even exists at all." I press my finger to her lips to stop her rebuttal. "And I know I didn't ask you to wait for me. I

know.”

She nods. “I love you, only you.” She pulls my hand away and leans across the console presenting her lips to me and I oblige, pressing my lips to hers. I kiss her with an intensity that makes me hard instantly. I kiss her the way my mouth makes love to her cunt, soft gentle strokes against her that leaves her panting when I pull away. Her brown eyes are bright when she pulls back and the tint in her cheeks leads me to believe that she’s wet all over again.



After dinner, I take her back to her house because she isn’t sure if Parker is monitoring the cameras and it would look odd if she didn’t go home at all. “This is why I suggested sex in the car,” she says as we pull up to her house. I’m not in the driveway, so hopefully out of sight of cameras.

“It doesn’t matter, you’ll be at my house within the hour.”

She nods just as her phone begins to ring again. This time her mother.

“Hey Mom,” she answers.

“You’re home?” I hear through the phone and I watch as Whitney winces slightly.

“Yeah, I just got here. How did you know?” She looks at me in question and I shake my head. She puts the phone on speakerphone for me to hear clearer.

“Your future mother-in-law called me.” She rolls her eyes just as annoyance washes over me. “Imagine my shock when she told me my daughter was on her way here and I had no idea that she was coming.”

“Uhh yeah, I really needed to go to class tomorrow.”

“I see. Honey, your father or I could have picked you up.”

“No need, I got an Uber.”

“Alright, well are you home now?”

She rubs her forehead and I can sense her irritation. “Ummm no.”

“Well, where are you? You said you got an Uber?”

I watch as she becomes panicked and I grab her hand, running my fingers over the skin in an attempt to calm her nerves. “I went home first. I went

back out to get food.”

“I see. Well, I’m glad you’re back safely, sweetheart.” Almost thirty years of friendship with Whitney’s mother, allows me to hear all the things she didn’t say. *Why didn’t you tell us you were coming home? You really couldn’t wait another day and fly back with Parker? How are you and Parker? Where exactly are you now? Is there anything you want to tell me?*

She finishes the conversation and looks at me. “I hate lying to her. Lying to everyone about everything.” She shakes her head and lets out a deep sigh, twirling a lock of chestnut hair around her finger. “I’ve lied about so many things I don’t even know what the truth is anymore.” She looks up at me and I can see the defeat all over her. “The only thing I know for sure is that I love you.”

I brush my hand down her face, grazing her cheeks with my knuckles. “So maybe no doing *this*,” I say, pointing between us, “while we sort everything out.”

Her eyes widen. “You mean…”

“Not breaking up, baby. I just mean so we don’t have to tell so many lies about our whereabouts and what we’re doing.”

She sighs and I can tell she’s not into the idea. *That makes two of us, but I wasn’t about to sacrifice her inner peace for orgasms. Hers or mine.* “You’re right. As much as it pains me to say it, maybe we shouldn’t.”

“After tonight,” I add and a smile finds her face.



I’m pounding into her gorgeous body from behind as she’s on all fours in front of me on my bed. The bed banging against the wall with each thrust mixes with the sounds of our flesh slapping together and it makes me even harder. I have her hair pulled into a makeshift ponytail and my grip tightens with each thrust. I dropped her off at home so she could get her car and come here just as we’d planned.

“Fuck. You’re going to make me come,” I grit out as I fuck her harder, rutting into her harder than I did the last time we had sex. “I’m going to come. I’m going to come.” My voice is strained, feeling so close to the edge

and ready to empty my dick inside her.

“Jacob,” she moans as I begin to fuck her harder, my nails digging into her hips as I begin to pound faster. “Fuck, that feels good.”

I’m pulling her onto my dick harder each time and she clamps down around me each time I bottom out inside of her. We’d forgone condoms this time after she’d surprised me by telling me she took a pregnancy test while she was at the hospital that came back negative.

She grabs a pillow, putting it in her mouth and biting down and I hear a muffled moan escape her. “You’re so fucking beautiful. You look so good taking my dick, baby. Fuck. Your pussy is soaking me. I’m going to fuck you until you come all over daddy’s cock. Fuckkkk,” I groan.

I pull out of her, feeling my orgasm near but not wanting it to be over and she whines at the loss of contact when I flip her over and put my face between her legs. She’s already wet, but I want her wetter and she loves it when I do it, so I spit on her pussy. She gasps and bites down on that plump lip just as her sex clenches.

I press my lips to her sex eating her hungrily, tasting the mixture of her cunt and the precum that leaked into her while I was fucking her. I look up at her and as our eyes lock. “Your pussy tastes so fucking good,” I tell her. I lick her obscenely, the noises that her pussy and my mouth make is erotic and sexy and makes my dick even harder. She finds my hands instantly gripping them in hers and tugging on me gently.

“You want to kiss me while I’m inside you? You want to taste your pussy that’s still on my tongue?”

She nods and I reluctantly pull my lips off of her sweet clit and move up her body, dragging my mouth along every body part I pass on the way before finding her lips and sliding my tongue between them just as I push my dick inside of her. I begin driving into her, pushing myself as far into her as I can go as her nails drag down my back.

“You feel so fucking good.” I drop my head into her neck as I push all the way into her slowly. “So beautiful,” I murmur in her ear.

“Oh my God, JP. *Please*. Please make me come, daddy.” She moans low in my ear and it makes my cock throb harder inside of her hearing her beg for her orgasm.

“I want to get you pregnant,” I tell her as the need to have her in every way possible including as the mother of my children pulls me under what feels like a tidal wave.

She gasps, and she squeezes my dick. I chuckle at her response. “I want it too.”

“The second I fucking can.”

“Please,” she whimpers.

“Fuck,” I whisper in her ear as pleas and whimpers leave her lips letting me know her climax is looming. “This has been what’s been missing. You were the missing piece.”

“JP.”

I stop thrusting, I just hold myself inside of her, my dick pulsing with the need for its orgasm as I stare into her brown eyes. I study her face, her cheeks, her nose, the way her lips form such a perfect pink pout. Her tongue peeks out as she stares up at me with that look that made me believe she was sharing my exact thoughts. “I love you, Whitney.”

Three Years Ago:

The alarm blares through my room and I sit up wishing like hell I hadn’t decided to go into work at four a.m. today after coming off a twenty-hour shift. I was still exhausted and I spent half the night dreaming of teary brown eyes begging me not to leave her. I’d been in Mexico for less than a week and I was already feeling the absence of Whitney with every move I made. My neck and back ached from the constant tension in my bones, I’ve had an ongoing headache probably brought on by stress and my heart ached every time I thought about her. So did my dick for that matter. I thought about her in the mornings, the afternoons, the evenings, every free second I had when I’d normally reach to text her. To be fair, she had been in contact several times but I hadn’t answered. It was killing me not to respond, but I needed to be strong for her. For me. I left and I needed her to try to move on.

Part of me wanted to call her. Text her. Fly home and show up at her doorstep on my knees and beg for her forgiveness. I was in love with her but I didn’t know how we could move forward. Her parents wouldn’t understand. Hell, I barely understood. A relationship that blossomed out of eighteen years of pure innocence?

I look at the text she’d sent just a few hours ago, making me believe she might be drunk again. I wince thinking about the fact that she’s soaking her liver in vodka and whatever else as an escape from the pain she’s in that I

caused.

Whitney: I miss you so much. Please promise me you'll come back to me one day. Whenever you do, I'll be ready. I will always love you.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Whitney

Five Years Ago

I roll over on my stomach and let out a groan trying to shield my eyes from the light pouring in through my curtains. I was pretty hungover but the pounding behind my eyes was no match for the humming between my legs. I sit up in bed, my mouth falling open as all the memories come flooding back about JP.

Holy shit.

I touch my lips. My very swollen lips that JP had kissed last night. I drag my fingertips over them and down my neck, between my breasts and down to the space between my legs that was still wet. We hadn't gone farther than dry humping on my couch, even though I pressed for more. But the kiss he gave me before he sent me upstairs had so much promise in it. The promise for more. The promise for everything.

I'd had a crush on Jacob since I turned fourteen and he'd gone on vacation with us to the Bahamas. A lot of time with a tanned, shirtless Jacob had turned me into a lovesick teenager and it only got worse as I got older. When I was fifteen, I began to fantasize about him. When I was sixteen, I thought about him when I touched myself. When I was seventeen, I'd drunk text him but I was always too scared even in my drunken mind to cross that line. I'd type out the words. 'I want you' over and over before deleting them. And then last night, I finally did it.

I grab my phone prepared to text him even though it's eight in the morning and I'm shocked to see he already has.

JP: How are you feeling?

It's a loaded question. Is he asking about the potential hangover I have? Or about what we did last night? Probably both.

Me: A little hungover but amazing.

JP: Drink some water. I'm still downstairs, do you want to go get some breakfast? And talk?

Me: Yes please.

JP: Ten minutes.

I get dressed quickly, brushing my teeth, running a brush through my hair and applying some concealer and mascara so I'm not looking like an actual train wreck before I tiptoe down the stairs careful not to wake anyone in my house. It's not strange that JP and I are getting breakfast together alone but I didn't want anyone to wake up and have them invite themselves to go with us, disallowing us any privacy. We needed to talk and I needed to come again. Fingers crossed on the latter.

As soon as we're in his car, I don't waste a second before I break the tension. "So about last night..." I look over at him and I honestly wish I hadn't because I get caught up in how unbelievably gorgeous he looks. He's wearing different sweatpants than he did last night, my guess for obvious reasons, a black T-shirt and a black baseball hat worn to the front making him look at least ten years younger. His biceps flex under the shirt and I see those familiar tattoos peeking under the sleeve. I reach out to drag my fingertips over the familiar numbers. My birthday. His muscles tighten and I smile at the thought that I affect him so much. JP had tattoos of both Mason and my birthdays that he'd gotten right after we were born and that fact hits me harder than it usually does.

"What about it?" He looks over at me and I can see a smile pulling at his lips but he doesn't say anything else.

"I liked it."

He doesn't say anything for a minute; he just continues to drive. "So did I." My cheeks heat and I resist the urge to squeal because Oh. My. God. What does this mean? "It doesn't mean I think we should do it again."

Fuck. And just like that, the excitement leaves me and I'm flooded with rejection and annoyance. "Why? Did I do something wrong?"

His hand grabs mine for a second but he drops it just as quickly, probably thinking he shouldn't touch me at all right now. "No, of course not."

You did everything right. Fucking too right. It's my fault. I knew better and... I shouldn't have touched you like that."

"JP..." I turn toward him and cock my head to the side.

"I'm your godfather, Whitney. I was there the day you were born. I was there for so many of your firsts. I can't be this person."

"Why?"

"You know why."

"I know why in theory but... didn't you see how right that felt?"

"Do you know how this looks?" he answers without responding to my question.

"Do you care?"

He shoots me a shocked look before turning his gaze back to the road. "What your parents think? Yes."

"I wasn't suggesting we tell them." I roll my eyes and prop my feet up on his dashboard. "I'm going to college in the fall." I shrug. "Everyone goes a little crazy the summer before college. I want to have some fun. It's not a big deal." I try to appear as unfazed as possible at the idea of going down this road with JP but truthfully, I was freaking the fuck out.

"You told me you had feelings for me, Whit. That's not just fun. I don't want to fuck our whole relationship up more than it probably already is."

"You could never fuck things up with me, JP. Even if we don't go back down this road. Or if... hopefully," I poke his cheek, looking for that dimple that makes me melt and sure enough, he smiles and it pops out. "We do. It wouldn't ruin anything between you and me." He doesn't say anything, he just continues to look straight ahead as he pulls into the parking lot of the small coffee house that serves the best breakfast sandwiches in town. "Didn't you like kissing me?"

"Too fucking much. I can't get it out of my head. Or your body on top of me, humping me." He rubs his forehead. "How did we... Where did you..." He rubs his forehead before looking over at me. He unashamedly runs his gaze over my bare legs and up to my face meeting my eyes. "You are unbelievably sexy, Whitney."

I beam under his praise. "Thank you."

"And I just don't know where that came from. How you went from this young girl who I used to drive to soccer practice and pick up from school when your parents were out of town to this." He sighs. "I sat awake last night actively telling myself not to text you to come back down."

“I would have come running.” I look up through the sunroof of the car and up into the clear, bright sky. “Pun intended?”

He chuckles and shakes his head before putting the car in park and turning it off. “What am I going to do with you?” I start to respond with something cheeky and flirty when he puts a hand up. “Do not answer that.” He stares out the window, his face getting more serious before he starts to speak. “In all honesty, how did this happen? These feelings for me? Did I do something? I swear I—”

“No, Jacob...” I say, the word feeling foreign as I’ve always called him JP. “It just happened.” I contort my lips trying to prevent myself from tearing up. “You just always looked out for me. You were always there in ways my dad and my brother weren’t. You were the person I could talk to. The person I could be myself with, tell my thoughts and feelings and fears to and you never judged me or made me feel bad about anything. You were always the one person I knew I could count on, and also the one that would never ground me. So, you were different than my parents even though you all seemed to think you were.” I roll my eyes. “I know it’s big, JP and I totally understand if you can’t or don’t want to.”

He’s still staring straight ahead, not looking at me even as he begins speaking. “I fucking want to. It’s unbelievable that you, of all women, do this to me. That last night happened and all I can think about is doing it again.” He finally turns his gaze to me and grabs my face with his large hand. “We’ll take it slow.” He rubs his nose across mine once. “Very slow.”

I smile just before he presses his lips to mine gently.

Two weeks later, I lost my virginity to Jacob Price.



I’m staring at Jacob as he sleeps soundly on his stomach with both hands under his pillow facing me and I can’t help but study him. He’s got a bit more stubble, probably meaning he didn’t shave yesterday which feels amazing between my legs so I’m not complaining. His lips are slightly parted and his soft breathing seems to calm me. His wavy brown hair is messy and sexy definitely from my incessant pulling last night and I drag my fingers through

his strands. I stroke his forehead, trying to rid the worry lines that seem to be forming in his sleep. I press a kiss there and then to his temple. The one cheek I can access. The tip of his nose. I brush my lips against his as best I can and then he moans and pulls me closer to him. We are both completely naked so I rub against his cock as he pulls us closer and I whimper when I feel him hardening against my leg.

His eyes open slowly and a sleepy smile finds his face when he sees me looking back at him and pulls me deeper into his arms. “I want to wake up to this face every day for the rest of my life.”

I melt. “Me too.” I rub my nose down his neck and press my face into the space where his neck meets his shoulder. I inhale his manly scent and let out a sigh. “I want to stay in this bed with you forever and hide out from everyone.”

He pulls back to make me look at him, stroking my face with one hand. “We can’t hide anymore.”

“I know. I just feel like hell is about to break loose.”

He sits up and pulls me up with him and brings me into his lap. “Hey, everything is going to be okay.” He presses his forehead against mine. “It’s going to be you and me in the end.”

“You and me,” I repeat.



I finally left the safety and comfort of Jacob’s bed to go to class a few hours later with the promise to return later that night. It’s around five o’clock that evening when I get back to my house. I’m planning to change and drop off my things before leaving to meet Chloe, Trey, and Jacob for dinner. I had finished my paper earlier today and turned it in and managed to take my midterm and despite the tumultuous current state of my life, I was able to focus for the ninety-minute exam. My phone begins to vibrate just as I’m walking into the house and I know without looking that it’s Jacob wanting to know how the rest of my day went and what time he should expect me at his house. My finger hovers over the button to accept the call when the sound of the television in my living room catches my attention.

I walk into the living room and my eyes widen when I see Parker lying on the couch under a blanket and surrounded by mountains of pillows. He's wearing a black hooded sweatshirt with his hood pulled up over his head making him look younger than usual. Almost like a teenager that's home from school because he's sick with the flu. Snacks and drinks cover the coffee table and I wonder if his mother has already made a trip to the store for him. I look from the television to him and back again in shock that he'd flown back without even telling me that he'd been discharged.

"You're here?" It's a statement but I know it comes out more like a question as my eyes blink several times. *Am I hallucinating?*

"Nice to see you too, dear," he jokes before holding up the remote to mute the sound. "I got home about an hour ago, Mom went to the hotel."

Wow, I'm shocked she didn't insist on staying here.

"She didn't want to step on your toes by staying here." He rolls his eyes and I frown like I'm the difficult one.

"She wouldn't be."

"Oh, come on, Whit, she knows you don't like her."

"What! She doesn't like me. I... have no problems except for the fact that she hates me and wishes you were with your ex-girlfriend and I even try to be cordial in spite of that!" I shake my head, not wanting to go down the road of his mother *again* when there are bigger things here. "But that is not the point here. You're home? I mean... why didn't you tell me you were coming? I could have picked you up from the airport or..." *Not made plans to meet up with Jacob.*

He shrugs as if not knowing my injured fiancé was flying home today after being in the hospital the last few days was not a big deal. "I knew you had class and a lot on your plate today." He drags a hand through his brown hair. "I thought you'd be happier to see me to be honest. Are you going to kiss me or what?"

Awesome.

I give him a weak smile and make my way over to the couch prepared to give him a short kiss. Guilt flashes through me and I feel lightheaded at the thought of kissing someone else after the last few days with Jacob, *even if that person is my fiancé.*

Wait. I should just... do this now. I drop to the love seat and stare at Parker. He wasn't a bad person. He'd been kind to me and while I didn't feel the same things that I felt with Jacob, I had cared for him. You never expect

the person you meet after the relationship that breaks you to compare. Nothing could have compared to Jacob. No one could measure up. He'd set the bar so high leaving impossible shoes to fill.

I let out a sigh and I shake my head wholly unprepared for this conversation but knowing I had to have it. *Where the fuck do I even start? I've never broken up with anyone before. It's not you, it's me? That's a lie, it's definitely you. You're not Jacob Maxwell Price.*

"Parker, I think you are a really wonderful man."

Tears prickle in my eyes and I can feel them building in my throat. *Fuck, I thought this would be easier.* I can hear my phone vibrating in the distance. I'd left my purse on the wooden credenza at the entrance to the living room and now I'm sure Jacob is calling me again after I missed his first call.

"But I'm not being honest with myself or with you."

He frowns and I can feel his eyes on me as I stare at my hand and the ring sitting on my left hand.

"I said yes because you were sweet and loved me and we'd been together a reasonable amount of time and that's what you do when the man you're living with asks you to marry him, right? You say yes." I pull my gaze away from my hand and up to the man who's staring at me with a look of horror. "But that's not enough for a marriage, Parker. That's not enough for a life together."

"What are you talking about, Whitney? We *have* a life together. We love each other." His brown eyes narrow and I can't remember them ever looking so cold. I don't respond, trying to allow Parker to draw the conclusions without me having to explicitly say them but that's not fair.

"I haven't been fair to you, Parker." The words are on the tip of my tongue when his face morphs into what I assume to be realization and he speaks them for me.

"Is there someone else?"

My heart feels like it's going to beat out of my chest as I prepare to speak the truth. I drop my head in shame as I gather the courage to begin the long story about my relationship with Jacob when I hear his soft yet dangerously sinister voice.

"Get out."

My eyes look up to meet his and I furrow my brows. "Parker..."

His hands ball into a fist and his face hardens angrily. "I said get the fuck out of my house."

“I want to explain—”

“Explain what? How you’ve been playing me for a fool this whole time? How long have you been fucking him behind my back?” He puts a hand up before I can speak. “You know what? I don’t want to fucking know. I can’t even believe you. Everyone was right, you really aren’t worth shit.”

My eyes widen at his cruel words and part of me wants to reply with something equally ugly but in this moment, he’s hurt. I’d hurt him, so maybe I was deserving of him hurling nasty insults at me. If this was the extent of it, maybe this was the trade off because I’m in the process of breaking his heart. I was leaving him for another man.

Maybe I really wasn’t shit.

“That’s fair,” I tell him and he narrows his gaze at me.

Fury blazes in his eyes and his lips form a snarl. “That’s fair? Are you fucking serious? Fair? So, you get to embarrass me and ride off into the sunset with whoever the fuck and you think what I just said is ‘fair?’ Fuck you, Whitney.”

“I feel like I owe you an expl—”

“No. I don’t want to hear shit from you.” He shakes his head. “All the pussy I turned down for you? All the shit you put me through after I made ONE mistake? I know you’re not leaving me for some guy you fucked once while you were drunk. So, that means that this has been going on for God knows how long.”

I wince, hearing him talk about the other women that may have propositioned him while we were together and referencing the time that he cheated on me. I want to retort that it hasn’t been going on for that long, but *hasn’t it?* My relationship with Jacob wasn’t as simple as something that could be defined by anything we’ve done this past week. “I didn’t do this as some sort of retaliation, Parker. I was really hurt by what you did, just as I’m sure you’re hurt now. I just... it’s complicated.”

He chuckles darkly. “That’s what people say when they try to rationalize the shitty things they do to other people. It’s not fucking complicated not to screw someone else over, Whitney.”

“I know and I—”

“I think I already advised you to get the fuck out of my house, why the fuck are you still here?”

I hear my phone begin to ring again and I know we are probably one more missed phone call from Jacob coming to look for me and if I didn’t

know Parker came home early, Jacob surely wouldn't expect it.

"I really am sorry, Parker." Tears slide down my cheeks and I'm not sure if it's out of guilt or sadness or anger. Anger at myself for getting myself in this situation, anger at Jacob for leaving me in the first place and anger at Parker for being at the wrong place at the right time and falling in love with me. For convincing me that I was capable of loving anyone as wholly and completely as I loved Jacob. Parker and I were always on borrowed time because somewhere in the depths of my heart, I knew I would find my way back to Jacob.

I swallow down the tears that I feel coming on knowing that I've changed Parker's life only to turn it upside down in the blink of an eye.

Guilt.

Hearing his visceral reaction to this and the hatred he's spewing right now is a bitter pill. I wasn't someone that would normally take this kind of nastiness, but I'm struggling with fighting back when I did this. I broke us. Him.

Sadness.

"Don't even try to start crying, Whitney. Just go." He growls and I stand up, preparing to grab my purse and my bag with my laptop, not knowing what to do about all my clothes and belongings upstairs. I look toward the stairs, contemplating packing a bag when I hear his voice again.

"Leave your shit."

I turn around and look at him. "What?"

He nods toward the bag in my hand that has my laptop inside. "I bought you that MacBook."

I blink at him. "Okay?" I ask, wondering how that was even relevant.

"That watch on your wrist." He points.

"You... want all the stuff back that you gave me?"

He nods.

"Are you joking?"

"Does it look like I'm joking?"

"Wow." I slide the Cartier watch off my wrist that he'd bought me for my birthday and put it on the coffee table along with my engagement ring. "I'll leave you this and any of the jewelry, but my MacBook was a Christmas present and I'm in law school. If you think I'm leaving you a year and half's worth of papers and research and homework, including a paper that's half written that's due at the end of the semester, you're crazy."

I walk up the stairs, preparing to pack some of my clothes as it seems he might trash all of my things the second I leave. I hadn't expected this level of petty but I suppose it might just be a knee-jerk reaction to the pain. I toss a suitcase on the floor and begin throwing clothes into it. I pick up my phone just as it begins to ring again and I silence the call. I notice I have three missed calls and a text message from Jacob.

Jacob: Baby, you're worrying me. You said you'd call me in ten minutes and now you're not answering. Talk to me.

Me: I got home and Parker was here. I told him. Not about you specifically, just that it's over. Now, I'm packing.

I give him the bullet points so that he's not left completely in the dark but I hope he's not going to ask me to go into more details while I just want to get out of here as soon as possible.

Jacob: Are you serious? Whitney, are you okay?

Me: Yes. Just let me pack some of my stuff.

Jacob: Call me when you get in the car.

I thumbs up the comment and continue packing in a haste because I wasn't sure what would happen the longer that Parker stewed in his anger. I turn toward the door when I see a figure there and I see Parker on his crutches staring at me angrily.

"You're really doing this?"

My shoulders slump and I hate how this looks. Like I'm just leaving him on a whim.

"After everything we've been through together? Why the fuck did you even agree to marry me?"

I tuck a hair behind my ear and twist the end of it around my finger nervously. "I... I don't know." I bite my lip preparing to tell him a little bit about my past but also not wanting to give him the full scope of the truth because truthfully my parents did need to hear that part first. "I fell in love a long time ago. Things didn't work out and..."

"You weren't over him when you met me."

I lower my head to avoid his judgmental gaze and shake it gently. "No. I had spent almost a year trying to get over him and then you came along and you were kind and funny and smart and different." I look up at him. "I'm sorry. I pushed him out of my head. Please don't think I've been waiting

around for him. I thought I'd moved on. I told myself I had moved on."

"This is fucked up, Whitney." He shakes his head and I can't deny it. This whole situation is fucked up and I caused it. He takes a step back out of the room and shakes his head. "Take whatever, Whitney. I just hope you remember what goes around comes around."



Jacob is waiting in his driveway when I get there and the car is barely in park before I'm in his arms and he presses his lips to mine. "You, okay?" he murmurs in my ear and I nod. I relayed everything to Jacob while I was on my way over and I could sense his uneasiness about how well Parker seemed to take it. "You're sure?" I can hear the question in his voice if I thought Parker may retaliate in another way and I shake my head as he guides me into his house, leaving all of my things in my car. "You're not speaking, use your words Whitney," Jacob commands and I look up at him with watery eyes.

"He looked so hurt." I sniffle, hating that I broke someone's heart. I remember all too clearly what it felt like to have mine broken and I can't believe I was capable of doing that to another person. He guides me up the stairs and pulls me into his bedroom where I can see the lights off in his ensuite bathroom but I can tell that there are candles lit.

"I ran you a bath and I poured you a glass of wine. Go." He points to the open door. "I'm going to get your things from the car."

I stare into the bathroom. I think I'm going into shock, the weight of what I've done coming crashing down around me. He follows me into the bathroom and I can see that he'd lit several candles that were lining the bubble filled bathtub and the tub was large enough that he could set a glass of wine on the side of the tub without fear of it being knocked over. Lavender fills my nose and I immediately feel myself relaxing under the scent.

"Will you join me?" If I were stronger, I'd ask for space. Space while I mourn a relationship before jumping into another one. But I wasn't stronger and this was the man I'd loved since I was fifteen, *fourteen* if we are counting the crush I had.

"As much as I would love that, I think maybe you need some time to

yourself.” He drops his forehead to mine and I relish in the minor contact. “If I get in this tub with you, you’re going to wrap your naked, wet body around me and then I’m going to fuck you and taste you, and I don’t want you to use that as an escape right now.”

“What if I need an escape?” I pull off my sweater and slide my jeans down my legs leaving me in only my lacy bra and thong and he glides his eyes down my body letting them hover between my legs. He bites his lip, stifling a groan. “Let me get your stuff and then we can talk about it. I’m open to negotiations.” He smiles and I know I’ve got him.

“Sure.” I shrug as I unclasp my bra, letting my breasts spring free and his eyes zero in on the nipples which also happen to be pebbling under his gaze. I turn my back to him just as I bend over to remove my thong and I hear a ‘fuck me’ whispered behind me. When I turn around to meet his eyes, he’s backing out of the room like he’s scared to make any sudden movements. I chuckle as I slide into the warm temperatures letting them soak my tense muscles.

I was anxious about what tomorrow would hold, wondering how my parents would take the news and all the questions they’d inevitably have. They may not be necessarily heartbroken over learning the news as they weren’t his biggest fans but I can already hear the Michelle Monroe inquisition now. I rub my forehead and take a large sip of the red wine and I shoot Jacob a text to bring the bottle up when he comes because I’m already halfway through the glass.

I close my eyes and allow myself to think about months from now where everything’s out in the open.

No more lies.

No more secrets.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Jacob

I chuckle at the text message Whitney sent me about bringing up the whole bottle of wine as I make my way out my front door to grab her things. I open the back seat to Whitney's car when headlights pull into my driveway and begin making their way up toward me. *Who the fuck?* I squint my eyes but it's dark and their headlights are making it hard for me to tell who it is. The truck gets closer and my eyes widen when I realize it's Kevin. *As in the father of the wet, naked woman in my bathtub who also happens to be my goddaughter.*

Jesus fucking Christ.

"Hey, hey," Kevin says as he gets out of the car with a six-pack in his hand and I realize this is just a social visit. It wasn't unheard of for either of us to just show up at each other's house unannounced but it was usually me showing up at his. "Michelle is at her sister's and I was bored as fuck. I assumed your ass was home." He explains as he notices the car that is definitely not mine. "New car?" He takes a few steps closer and I can see that he's taking a closer look at the unfamiliar vehicle parked in my driveway. His eyes narrow when he takes in more about the car, looking at the license plate and more importantly the holder around it from Whitney's alma mater. "Wait what? Whitney is here?"

It's not that strange that she'd be here. It's innocent. Nothing out of the ordinary. I suppose now would be a good time to tell him, but I want it to be on my terms and not because we're caught.

Tell him. Do it now.

"Is she okay?" he asks before I can reply and then he's moving into the

house past me.

“Yes. Well... Kevin...” He turns to look at me, his face angry and worried and confused and I pussy out. “She broke up with Parker.”

His eyebrows shoot up to his hairline and his mouth drops open in shock. “Shut the fuck up. She did not.” I nod. “Why? What? I didn’t realize you guys were still that close that she’d tell *you* before Michelle.” We are in my house now so he pulls me out of the foyer and into the living room. “Where is she?” he whispers, his eyes concerned about why his daughter would be here.

“She wasn’t sure where to go, she knew Michelle would have a million questions and Chloe is still attached to my brother’s dick. She just needed a second of peace before she started telling people.” The lie falls out of my mouth easily. “She just wanted to get herself together.”

A flash of anger crosses his face. “What did that little prick do to her?”

“Nothing, to my knowledge. I think she realized he just wasn’t the one.” I shrug. *And I fucking am.*

He nods. “Where is she?” he repeats.

“I think she’s taking a bath. She was so worked up when she got here. She wanted to relax.” I pick up the phone preparing to call her in front of Kevin so I can tell her that we have an unexpected visitor. I also didn’t want her to yell for me in a way that was *not* appropriate to do in front of her father.

“When are you coming up to join me?” she asks as soon as I answer the phone and I’m so glad I have the foresight to turn the volume all the way down.

“Hey, come down when you’re done, your dad just got here,” I say nonchalantly and not like she was enticing me to come upstairs and fuck her in my Jacuzzi bathtub.

“That’s not funny,” she responds.

I force a laugh. “Yeah, you know how he gets when your mom goes out. Can’t fend for himself.”

She gasps. “You’re serious.”

“Yep. Say hi.” I put her on speakerphone and Kevin speaks up.

“Whit, hi hon, you okay? Jacob said you broke up with Parker? I can’t say I’m super upset about it but are *you* okay?”

“Umm yeah... I mean, I don’t know...” She’s silent and I know she’s probably in a little bit of shock that suddenly her father is here and thereby she will not be getting fucked any time soon. “I need to somehow get the rest

of my things. Can you help me with that?”

I try to hide the frown crossing my face that she didn't ask me to help her with that, but I guess she's trying to keep him distracted so he doesn't ask her any questions about why she'd come here instead of to him and her mother. “Of course, honey. Just come down when you're done and we can talk. Whitney, did he do something?”

“No, no, this was me. I just realized he wasn't the one for me. I'll be down in a little,” she says and Kevin looks at me.

“She just up and decided this? A week ago, she was talking to Michelle about the venue and now she's calling off the engagement. Do you think something happened?”

“I don't know, Kev... she literally just got here.” He moves into the living room and sits on my sectional L-shaped couch, placing the beers on the coffee table and popping one open before taking a long sip. Part of me wants to tell him about his infidelity. That he'd cheated on her and she never got over it but I know that's not my story to tell even if it does piss me the fuck off. I hadn't looked at another woman in the three years we've been apart because she still consumed me on the deepest levels and he fucked some other woman under the guise that he can't handle his liquor?

Not why she broke up with him though.

“This is strange as fuck and seems just so out of character for her. I wonder if Michelle knows.”

“I don't think so and I know you can't do or say or think anything without telling her but can you just please keep this to yourself for now. Just give Whitney a second, man.” I know I'm coming off a little aggressive about it but I can already see Kevin texting Michelle and then her showing up and that is not at all what Whitney needs right now when she's already overwhelmed.

“I'm not going to tell her, sheesh.” He chuckles before shaking his head and picking up the remote and turning on the television. “I can't believe she broke up with him. I mean, I guess I can and now that it's over, I can be less diplomatic. He was the fuckin' worst.” He leans back and props a foot up on my coffee table and I hate that he's getting comfortable which means it's going to be impossible to get rid of him.

My phone vibrates in my hand and I know without looking it's Whitney. I look down at my phone when Kevin turns his attention to the television.

Whitney: What the fuck

Me: I know.

Whitney: Get rid of him!

Me: How would you like me to do that? Do you want me to tell him?

Whitney: No! I don't have the energy for that conversation right now. I need you right now, JP I want to be alone with you.

Me: What would you like me to do, baby? Tell me and I'll do it. But I can't just kick him out because you and I want to be alone to talk without that raising a hundred questions. Let's be real, Whitney.

Whitney: Ughhh. I'm coming down in a second. I rang the alarm to Chloe, she should be here soon to run interference.

I don't respond. I just drop to the chair with a sigh of relief. I was happy that she'd called her, it makes it look a little less odd that she's here. If Chloe is here, then I just serve as a place for them to talk in peace. Trey doesn't live far from here so I anticipate Chloe in the next twenty minutes or so.

When I pull my eyes away from my phone, Kevin is eyeing me over his beer and almost thirty years of friendship allows me to read his look easily. *The wheels are turning.*

"What?" I ask as I reach for one of his beers that I don't even want and crack it open. I was in the mood for wine or something harder. I know Whitney would have eventually worn me down. I would have had a glass of wine with her and then another and then a whiskey neat and then my dick would have been inside her for the rest of the night.

"It's just odd. You haven't seen Whitney in three years and I'd know if you guys had kept in touch."

"Would you have? I didn't realize I needed to run all my conversations by you."

"This isn't *conversations* with just anyone. It's Whitney and she never mentioned talking to you either. It's just strange. She's comfortable enough with you to show up here after she broke up with her fiancé after not talking to you for years." He leans forward and shakes his head. "Never mind." He looks me up and down quickly before turning toward the window and then back to the television that he turned on but I can tell he's not actually paying attention to what's on the screen.

I know what exactly that never mind is about and part of me wants to press it. Reassure him that it's not what he's thinking. I don't because it's exactly what he's thinking and I can't lie right to his face. I think if I were anyone else in the world, he'd ask. He'd ask the words that floated through his brain when he looked at me. But I'm me and *I wouldn't*.

Fuck.

I think he's going to speak up again when Whitney walks into the room. She's wearing sweatpants and one of her hoodies, and I'm grateful that she didn't put on any of my clothes.

"Dad." She nods as she sits next to him on the couch and leans her head on his shoulder.

"Daughter." He chuckles. "You going to tell me what's going on? Why you're here?"

She lifts her head and her eyes dart to her left, finding mine before moving around the room as if she's not sure where to look when I know she just wants to look at me. "I wasn't happy."

He frowns. "Since when?"

"This is exactly why I didn't come home, Dad. I made a decision, give me a second to sit with it before you start asking a million questions!" I can feel her agitation flowing off of her and I wish I could pull her into my arms and hold her.

He opens his mouth to respond when my doorbell rings and then Chloe is coming through it with Trey right behind her.

"Hi, I'm here, I'm here." Chloe rushes into the room with freshly fucked hair and clothes that look like she just threw on in a haste to help put out whatever fire is happening here. She plops down next to Whitney and puts a bottle of tequila in front of her. "We are so getting drunk." She looks at Kevin. "Uncle Kev, what are you doing here? A girl breaks up with her fiancé, she doesn't need her father right now. She needs me." She puts a hand under her chin and smiles.

"I didn't even know she was here. I came over to hang out with him," Kevin says, pointing at me. "I still don't know why you came here in the first place. You could have come home." He looks at Whitney with a face of concern but also a little bit of skepticism.

"You've been here five minutes and have already asked me the same question more than once," Whitney responds.

"She wanted space and she knew I'd meet her here." Chloe interrupts

before grabbing the tequila and pulling Whitney off the couch. “We’re going to go talk,” she says, and I try not to follow her with my eyes out of the room. Trey grabs one of Kevin’s beers, turning the attention to him and away from the tension flowing off of me.

“Looks like I’ll be here a while.” He grabs the remote and puts on the ESPN channel and I’m glad that seems to catch Kevin’s attention pretty quickly.

For now.



I’ve looked at my phone no less than a hundred times in the last hour trying to wait enough time before I get up to do something that would allow me to check on Whitney. *Fuck this.*

“I’m going to take a leak.” I get up and I don’t miss the look Trey gives me. I’ve known Trey his entire life so I know how to read what he’s saying in the fleeting look he gives me before turning back to the television.

Do not be fucking reckless.

I don’t respond to the look before I make my way up the stairs and hear giggling coming from my guest room. I hover outside of the door for a moment but I think they’ve actually managed to get a little tipsy in the last hour because all I hear is giggling. I enter the room and Whitney’s eyes widen over the shot glass she has hovering near her lips.

“JP!” She cheers and some of the liquid sloshes over the side of the glass.

“Oops.” She sets the shot down on the floor. “I spilled. Sorry.” She gets up and I think it must have been the first time she’s stood up because she stumbles slightly before she’s in my arms.

I brush some hair from her face. “How many have you had, baby?”

She turns to Chloe and I watch as they both seemingly try to count the shots on their fingers. She turns back to me and I can see her eyes getting hazy. “Five?”

My eyes widen at her drinking that much alcohol in a short period of time. “Whitney.”

“I know but my *dad* is here. And... why is my dad here, JP!” She puts her

hands on her hips and I can't help but think she looks fucking adorable. "Have you gotten rid of him yet? Are you here to take me to bed?"

She bounces on the balls of her feet in excitement before she moves into my arms and grips the back of my neck pulling me closer to her lips. I cup her face before pressing my lips to hers and it hits me that it's the first time, I've kissed her since she got here. Maybe she realizes it too because she whimpers in my mouth before pushing herself closer to me. Her tongue slides in my mouth and she tastes of liquor and limes and sex and I want to lick my way down her body to the space between her legs. Her hand tightens on the back of my neck and my hands slides through her hair and I meet her tongue with equal enthusiasm.

"Okay, hello?" I vaguely hear Chloe speak. "I am still in the room." I try to pull away but she holds me tighter and bites down gently on my bottom lip to keep me from moving. I finally manage to remove my mouth from hers and she pouts.

Whitney turns around to look at Chloe. "You could have just looked away. I normally have to pry your eyeballs away from your phone."

"I'm stopping you before things get carried away and Uncle Kevin comes strolling through the door."

Whitney crosses her hands in front of her chest. "I'm telling him." She passes by me toward the door and I scoop her in my arms before she can open the door.

"Uh uh."

"What do you mean?!"

"I'm not going to let you drunkenly unleash everything on your father just because you're horny, Whitney. No."

"We said we were going to tell him anyway!"

"We said we would tell *them* as in with your mother as well who your father is going to need to keep him calm and potentially keep from killing me," I joke though I'm not sure I'm kidding. "We can tell them tomorrow when you're sober. We can get everything out in the open when you tell them about Parker and me and... it'll be a fresh start."

"Okay..." She nods. "But get rid of him now!"

"I can't just kick him out, Whitney. For what reason? It's not like I could even say I got called in for a surgery, I'm not back at work yet." Back when we were much better at sneaking around, I used to say that whenever I wanted to get away from someone and back to Whitney. I was called in for a

consultation or an emergency surgery. I would get rid of my company, leaving right behind them to really show the urgency of the situation and then I'd usually pick up Whitney from wherever she was and then come back to my house. "We're just going to have to wait him out."

"Where are you even supposed to be right now? You've been gone for a while," Chloe says and I nod in agreement.

"I said I went to the bathroom but I'll just say I came to check on you two." I press my lips to hers again before moving toward the door. She follows behind me. "But I should get back. Actually, I'm going to bring you guys some water. Are you hungry?"

"Yes, but not for food." Her back is to Chloe, so she doesn't see the obvious look she gives my groin.

"I'm hungry!" Chloe chirps from the other side of the room. "And for actual food not for JP's dick."

"It's Jacob to you and don't talk about my man's dick." She glares at Chloe and gives her the middle finger and Chloe snickers in response.

"I'll bring you guys some food and some water."

"And beers!"

"How about no." I give Chloe a pointed look before turning out of the room and heading back downstairs. Trey and Kevin appear to be in a debate about something when I enter the room. "I went to go check on those two who, if you can believe it, have made a significant dent in that bottle." I chuckle.

"Oh lovely. Chloe on tequila is a real treat if she's had too much." He rubs his forehead and lets his head fall back against the back of the love seat.

"I'm going to take them some food and some non-alcoholic beverages." I chuckle and it's not lost on me that Kevin hasn't said anything since I entered the room.

I grab some water and decide to make them one of those terrible frozen pizzas Whitney actually likes even when she's sober. I'd gone to the grocery store when she was in New York and got her some things I know she used to like. I'm sure her tastes have changed somewhat in the last three years but I took a chance that some stayed the same. I grab some water and chips while the oven preheats and make my way up the stairs. When I get to the guest room, I only see Chloe and she's watching television on her phone despite the flat screen mounted on the wall.

Her eyes light up when she sees me, grabbing the chips from me. "I'm

making you guys a pizza, unless you want me to order you one? I just figured cooking one would take less time.”

“You’re the best, Jacob!” She squeals before ripping open the bag of Doritos.

I shake my head as a laugh leaves me. “Where is she?”

“Bathroom, I think,” she says without pulling her gaze away from what I think to be *Grey’s Anatomy*. I chuckle, remembering all the times Whitney would ask me if things were accurate when she’d make me watch it with her.

I make my way out of the room and I notice my bedroom door is ajar. *Fuck. Whitney, what are you doing in there?*

I push the door open and close it quietly behind me. The lamps on my nightstands are still on so the room isn’t pitch black. “Looking for me?” I hear from behind me and when I turn around all of the air leaves my lungs in a gush as my eyes fall on a completely naked Whitney.

“Fuck,” I whisper and despite the horrible idea it is, I fall to my knees in front of her and pull her naked cunt to my face. I nuzzle the smooth skin and press a kiss to the top of her mound before spreading her lips and tonguing her clit, desperate for a taste of her. “What are you doing to me, baby?”

She grips my face and strokes my beard softly. “I need you.”

“I need you too, Whitney but—”

“Fuck me,” she interrupts me. “Please.”

“Now?” I speak, but the rest of me is already on board with being inside her.

She nods her head and I look at the door behind her. The door that led to a hallway and a flight of stairs that led to a room where her father was sitting drinking beer and talking to my brother. I look up at her. “Can you be quiet?” A smile finds her face and a warm feeling spreads throughout my chest that I’m the one that put it there. She nods enthusiastically. “Can you be quick?” I ask her and she nods again.

“I’ve been wet since I got here and now, I’m kind of drunk and even hornier. And your mouth is pressed up against my pussy, what do you think?”

I stand up, unbuttoning my jeans and pushing them and my briefs down my legs.

“God, you have such a nice dick.” She runs her hand over it which is getting harder by the second. She bites her lip and if I had more time, I’d already be shoving my dick down her throat.

“I’m glad you like it.” I lift her into my arms and press her against the

wall, knowing that if I fuck her on the bed, it'll make noise. She lets out a quiet moan the second I get inside her.

So much for not making noise.

“You said you could be quiet,” I murmur in her ear. I whisper against her neck as I pull her up and down on my dick harder but slowly so as to not make any noise. She locks her ankles behind my back trying to push me harder into her.

“Mmmm sorry, daddy,” she whispers so quietly; I know there's no way anyone could hear her.

Fuccccck. My mind thinks as it processes her words. “You're such a good fucking girl taking daddy's cock like this.” She wraps her arms around my neck and our eyes lock as I continue to fuck her like we aren't on limited time and there isn't someone downstairs who may not ever accept this. With the angle and the speed in which I'm fucking her I know she can feel every ridge of my cock as I move in and out of her painfully slow.

She lets out a sigh so sexy and breathy it makes me almost come on the spot. “I think I'm going to come.”

“Hearing that leave your lips is my favorite sentence in the fucking English language.”

She gasps and then she bites down on her bottom lip and I want nothing more than to do the same. “I love how you love me.”

I brush my nose against hers and capture her lips in a kiss that's hungry and aggressive and loving and I'm fucking ecstatic that I get to kiss this woman every day for the rest of my life.

“Come for me, baby,” I tell her, knowing that my orgasm isn't far away and I want to give her one first.

“Touch my clit,” she whispers. I oblige her request and with the first swipe of my thumb over her clit, she detonates. Her fingernails dig into my flesh and her eyes flutter closed and she lets her head fall back against the wall quietly as she bites her lip trying to quiet the scream, I know bubbling inside of her. *Fuck.* She mouths.

Holy shit, she's sexy.

My orgasm comes not far after, and I spill into her. “Fuck, that's so fucking good.” I growl in her ear. “You are so fucking amazing.” I press a kiss to her neck and then her lips as I let myself fall out of her and set her on shaky legs.

“That was so hot.”

I let out a breath as I pull my pants up over my dick. I hadn't pulled my shirt off in my haste to get inside of her so I'm fully dressed which is a stark contrast to her nakedness. "I can't believe we did that." My eyes zone in on the space between her legs which is glistening from our lovemaking and I want nothing more than to drag my tongue through her slit.

"You're staring at my pussy."

"Because I want a taste and I don't want to run the risk of the scent lingering behind." I bite my fist. "I'm going back downstairs. God knows how long I've been up here. Time seems to stop when I'm inside of you." I cup her face and press a kiss to her lips. "I'll be back with your pizza in a bit."

I make my way into the hallway and I go into the guest room to see Chloe lying on the bed still watching television on her phone, swinging her feet behind her. Her eyes find mine and then drop to my hands. "You're back with no pizza?" She whines.

"Just checking on you, that's all." I leave the door open so maybe they'll assume I've been talking to Chloe or maybe both of them this whole time and not railing Whitney against the wall of my bedroom.

"I'm dying of hunger, Jacob!" I roll my eyes as I make my way out of the guest room and head downstairs. When I enter the living room, Trey is on his phone and Kevin is nowhere to be found.

Where have you been? he mouths and I wince and shake my head as if to say *not now*.

No fucking way. With Kev here? He points toward the kitchen, and I scratch my beard before heading toward the kitchen. I'm almost to the kitchen when I see him in my office, looking at the cluster of pictures I have hanging on my wall. I have a brief moment of irrational panic that he'd somehow seen the pictures I have of Whitney on my computer, but not only is it in a very password protected folder, but my computer is also turned off.

"What are you doing in here?" I ask him as I push through the door.

"I remember this trip." He points at the picture of me, him and Michelle in front of the Statue of Liberty.

"Do you?" I joke, because there are definitely pieces of this trip that are a blur. We'd gone to New York right after we graduated college and spent the week getting drunk and sightseeing. We'd met up with some friends from college but for the most part it was just the three of us. That's how it was for so long.

“The Three Musketeers in New York.” He runs his hand over the frame. Kevin had proposed to Michelle our senior year and was planning to get married the following year. He’d already asked me to be their best man and I remember Michelle crying when she got drunk that it wasn’t fair that I couldn’t stand on her side too. “This trip was when Michelle and I decided to make you our first child’s godfather.”

Shit. He suspects something. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.

“I can still remember her words clearly. ‘A baby is going to be the best part of you and me, and our friendship with Jacob is one of the best parts of us. He has to be our baby’s godfather.’”

“Kev—” I start and he turns his gaze to look at me.

“Is there something...” He puts a hand over his eyes. “Never mind. I’m fucking losing it. I’m going to head out.”

“You sure? I know you came over to hang out and then we didn’t even —”

“Yes, because my child is evidently in a crisis and ran to you.” He jokes but I can hear the hurt in his voice and maybe something else that he’s never used towards me.

“Kev, it’s not like that. She called me and I think she’s in shock.”

Tell him. Tell him. Tell him.

Words come out but they are different ones entirely. “But I was actually thinking I could come by tomorrow? Maybe in the afternoon?”

“You make plans to come to my house now? Usually, you just show up and let yourself in even if we’re not home.” Kevin stares at me incredulously.

“Sorry for asking?”

“You don’t usually ask.” This is the first time I don’t think I haven’t been able to get a read on Kevin. I can’t tell what he’s thinking. He’s quiet and it reminds me of a ticking time bomb. It’s faint and that quiet noise is the only warning you have that something’s about to explode.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Whitney

Kisses down my neck and across my cheek rouse me out of a deep sleep and I'm pulled to a hard chest. I snuggle against it, as I'm straddling the faint line of sleep and awareness when I hear his words in my ear. "I love you so much."

My head is fuzzy and I feel disoriented from the alcohol and I wonder how long I've been asleep after Chloe and I took back-to-back tequila shots in his guest room. I don't know why I thought that was a good idea or why Chloe encouraged it. I had just broken up with my fiancé, I had made the somewhat reckless decision to come to my boyfriend's house who also happened to be my parent's best friend and then my father showed up. I felt like my life was spiraling out of control and although I had been the person who set all of these things in motion, I had no power to stop the course it was taking.

"JP?"

"Yes, baby?" He strokes my arm gently and I snuggle further into his arms.

"Where's..."

"Everyone left," he answers for me and I let out a sigh of relief.

I finally open my eyes and I bury my face in his naked chest to avoid the light from his nightstand. "What time is it?"

"A little after midnight." He presses his lips to my forehead and gives me a gentle kiss. "Do you want to take that bath now?"

"I'd rather make love again," I tell him as I pull off the sweatshirt that I'd put back on after he'd taken me against the door. I slide my sweatpants down

as well leaving me completely naked under his soft sheets. He pulls it back and eyes down my body.

“Fuck.” I take that as a yes and kneel between his legs, grabbing his naked cock and sheathing my mouth around it. I move up and down on him, letting spit drool from my mouth around him to serve as a bit of extra lubrication when I slide my pussy down on him. “Slow down, angel, I don’t want to come in your mouth.” His hand finds its way into my hair, gripping the strands as he tries to slow me down. His dick is long and thick and I remember struggling with spit control and breathing the first time I took him in my mouth. I pull him out of my mouth, allowing a trail of spit to connect his dick to my lips and I notice his abs flex in restraint.

I drag my tongue up his shaft and circle the tip, licking the creamy bead that forms and sliding my hand up and down while I suck just the tip into my mouth.

“In your cunt,” he growls and when I look up into his blue eyes, they’re dark and wide and unblinking. He grips my forearms and pulls me off of him and holds me above his dick. “Are you wet?” he asks and I reach a finger down and rub it through my slit. I’m wet but I haven’t been awake long and not as wet as Jacob likes me to be when he’s inside of me. “On my face.”

I do as he says, knowing that it’s the fastest way to get me wet and wanting and sure enough, after three swipes of his tongue over my clit, I’m panting for his dick inside of me. I look down at him since I’m facing the headboard and our eyes meet as he flicks his tongue against me over and over. His eyes are hungry and I can see the heat and feel the heat in them. “Daddy, you’re so fucking good to me. You always take such good care of me.” I drop my hands to either side of his head and grind my pussy harder against his mouth, chasing the orgasm I wasn’t anticipating having on his tongue but now I’m desperate for it.

“Mmmhmm,” he groans against me and the vibrations set my whole body on fire. He grips my ass, digging his nails into the flesh and I feel a finger travel inward toward my asshole. He pushes a finger there and I whimper at the fullness, his tongue in my cunt and his finger in my ass. I was no stranger to the feeling, having been very familiar with butt plugs and other types of anal stimulation while he was inside me. But there were few positions that allowed our eyes to lock while he was stimulating me in both places and a feeling of vulnerability washes over me. I look away, the intensity too much when he nips at my clit and I cry out. “Eyes on me.” His

words are soft but demanding and when I look back down at him just as he pulls his face away from my pussy to show the slick evidence of my arousal. His beard is wet and his lips are shiny and I watch as he slowly drags his tongue through my seam and flicks my clit before he shoots me a wink that makes my knees weak. I fall forward, dragging my pussy along his mouth and back down his body.

My sex is wet and pink from the rubbing against his facial hair and my needy clit is throbbing and peeking through the lips of my sex. I brush his dick against my slit, dragging the blunt tip through my wetness and Jacob releases a shaky breath.

“Fuck, that feels good, sweet girl. Do that again.”

“Like this?” I do as he says, dragging the head of his thick dick through my sex and tapping my clit each time, making me shudder with pleasure.

“Just like fucking that,” he grits out. “You feel so good, baby.” I eventually give up the teasing and slide his dick inside of me and begin moving up and down instantly. My head falls back and I grab my hair pulling it off my neck and holding it up as I start to move faster on top of him. “I love when you ride me,” he tells me as he grips my hips to help set the pace. My head falls back down to meet his gaze. “I love watching you. Watching us. I think it’s the way I can see all of you full of me.” His eyes drop to where I’m sliding up and down on him, where my pelvis presses against his, his dark pubic hair rubbing against my creamy flesh every time I slide down. It’s a stunning visual that I never want to forget.

And if I’m honest with myself, the whole time we were apart, I never did.

I press my hands to his chest as I begin to ride him harder and his hands find my hips. “I love you,” I tell him as the beginning of my orgasm begins, my body trembling with the anticipation of a powerful climax.

“I’ve never loved anyone or anything the way I love you, baby. Ever. I’ve loved you from the second I knew you’d exist.” He cups my face and lowers me to press his lips to mine. “And I’ve never stopped loving you since. The love has changed and morphed into different kinds of love but you’ve always been here from the second you entered the world.” He grabs my hand and presses it to his heart and then I come with a cry and his name falling from my lips over and over. I come all over his dick at the thought of how much he loves me and has always been a constant in my life. I slow my strokes as I try to calm my racing heart when he begins to speak again.

“I’ll protect you always, baby. From anyone or anything that even thinks

about hurting you.” Realizing that he hasn’t come yet, I begin moving up and down on him again, knowing that he’s nearing his climax as well. Our eyes lock and a smile finds his face revealing that sexy dimple that never fails to make my sex throb. “Fuck baby, right there. Right fucking there. God, you’re mine. You’re fucking mine again. Finally,” he sputters as he spills into me.

We end up in the bath as we were both sticky and sweaty from our lovemaking facing each other on opposite ends of the tub, my feet resting in his lap as his thumbs massaged the soles of my feet.

“I want to tell your parents tomorrow.” I stretch my foot, flexing it and he massages it harder, trying to get me to calm down. He lifts my foot from the water and kisses the bottom of it and I smile. “Don’t be nervous. If you don’t want to be there, I understand. Whatever you need.”

“No, I want to be there. I think I should be there. It will also help fill in some of the blanks about why I broke up with Parker.”

“So tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow.” I nod.



We arrive at my parents’ house around noon the next day. It’s raining, which is rare for LA and I can’t help but take it as a bad omen of sorts. Like the universe knew there was a storm brewing in my life and sent a physical one to match it. I’d called my mother in the morning and told her we were coming over and also that I invited Mason and Chloe over so that I could talk to everyone together. As the only two people that were privy to me and Jacob, I hoped they could help soften the blow.

Or maybe I was just praying that they could keep things from getting too ugly.

We’re sitting in the car outside of the house, my eyes glued to the front door that we will have to walk through and effectively change my family forever.

I’d been a nervous wreck all morning, antsy and jittery and jumping every time my phone buzzed with any type of notification. JP had tried everything to calm me down and I still couldn’t shake the anxious feeling.

His hand finds mine and gives it a gentle squeeze. “Everything is going to be fine, baby.”

“Is it?” I begin chewing on my thumbnail, a habit I gave up years ago that suddenly seems to bring me a bit of comfort.

“Okay, or it’s going to be as bad as we think.”

Absolutely not what I want to hear right now. “JP!”

His voice is soft but even and it calms my racing heart a little. “Either way, we have to tell them.”

“I know.” He gets out of the car, putting up the umbrella even though we are only twenty or so feet from my house and opens the door for me, holding the umbrella over my head. The small act of chivalry makes me smile and I remember exactly why I’m doing this today. I can’t go another second hiding how much I love Jacob Price.

“Thank you.”

He smiles down at me. “I would kiss you right now, but just in case your mother is waiting at the window for us, I’ll refrain.”

I laugh because it’s a very real possibility. I see Mason’s car in front of us but I don’t see Chloe’s but given her track record of tardiness I didn’t expect her to be here yet. We enter the house to the sounds of laughter and it puts me at ease that it seems that everyone is in a good mood *for now*. We walk down the foyer toward the living room to find my parents and Mason talking and they all stop when Jacob and I enter the room. My mom hops up from her seat, the only person in the room not privy to some piece of information regarding me and I hate that I’ve kept her in the dark. My biggest supporter and probably the person that’s going to be caught most in the middle of this situation and she has no idea the bomb I’m about to drop.

“Whitney!” She pushes her glasses into her blonde curly hair that she has pulled into a bun and makes her way over to me and pulls me into a hug, kissing me on the cheek and pulling me to sit next to her on the love seat. “I made brunch, it’s that time you know? So, we can eat when Chloe gets here,” she says and I briefly wonder if like our normal brunches and if she’s already had a mimosa but I don’t see anything on the table except one of her sparkling waters and a bottle of water in front of my father.

My eyes move to my father for the first time since I walked in, eyes that are sad with maybe a hint of comfort. Like he knows this might be difficult but that he understands.

You do not know the half of it.

The sounds of the door opening stop me and I'm grateful to see my cousin walk into the room and her eyes fall on me immediately. *I'm here*. Her eyes tell me with a nod.

"Oh lovely, you're here! We can all eat. Unless you want to tell us your news now!" My mother claps her hands together in excitement. "You said you had something big to tell us."

"I said important...?" I wince, not understanding how she's excited when I'm fairly certain I did not sound enthusiastic about this news I'm about to deliver.

"Tomato, tomahto." She waves at me. "Are you pregnant?" Her eyes widen. "I know you drank with us last weekend, but if you just found out, it's early enough that it's okay, sweetheart." She pats my arm and I shake my head.

"No. Not pregnant."

"Oh." She frowns. "I could have sworn that was it. Although, I was expecting you to show up with Parker though, not Jacob." She moves around me to hug him and reaches up on her tiptoes to kiss his cheek. "Hi hon. Did you guys come together?" she says, looking more confused before moving toward the kitchen. "Well let's eat, and you can tell us your news. Or... are we waiting for Parker?"

"Parker and I broke up," I blurt out and given that everyone in the room besides my mother is aware of this fact, no one reacts. Everyone is silent while they wait for my mother to get on the same page.

She turns around and looks at me and blinks her eyes several times. "What?"

I let out a sigh and take a step closer to her. "Parker and I broke up."

"*That's* the story you're going with?" The voice is cold and angry and isn't from anyone in the room that was previously here. But it's a voice I know well.

Fuck.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Whitney

Parker is standing at the entrance to my living room, being held up by his crutches staring at me with a look of rage that I'd never seen before. He looks unshowered, wearing jeans and that same black hooded sweatshirt from last night making me wonder if he's been up all night wondering how best he could set fire to my life. His posture is tense, his hands balled into fists and a scowl so intense on his face that I actually feel that saying *if looks could kill, I'd be dead*.

Jacob wasn't as close as he'd been before after my mother hugged him and inadvertently put space between us and I can already sense him moving back toward me even though I'm sure he won't touch me given the precarious situation we're currently in.

"Parker, please don't do this." My heart is pounding in my chest and I feel my knees buckling. *Why is he here? How did he even know we'd be here? FUCK!*

"What's going on?" My mother snaps her head back and forth between me and Parker before realizing that she still needed to be a good hostess even if it is to my injured ex-fiancé. "Please sit, I... I am so sorry about the accident. Are you okay? How are you feeling? Would you like something to drink? Or food? We're about to eat."

He leans against the wall, foregoing my mother's invitation to sit. "Oh? Well, I would love to join you." Chloe and I lock eyes and I feel like everything is happening in slow motion. *Brace for fucking impact.* "But I do feel like some things need to be cleared up first."

"Parker, can I talk to you alone?" I stop him and begin moving toward

him despite hearing a growl from behind me.

“No. The time to talk to me would have been before you were cheating on me, with whom I assume to be this guy.” He points at Jacob and my eyes widen and a hand goes to my chest as it feels like my heart might just fly out of it.

“With who!?” My mother’s eyes widen in shock before she shakes her head. “Whitney, cheating? Impossible and...” She looks at Jacob and then me and then back to Parker. “You’re mistaken, that’s Whitney’s godfather, Parker. And to shoot off such baseless accusations, is unbecoming.” She looks at me. “Did you guys really break up?” She gives me a sad look even though I know she’s thinking something along the lines of *‘thank goodness, he was not right for you, honey.’*

“*She* broke up with *me*. For... JP, right?” A smug grin finds his face as he points at Jacob and I can tell JP is trying not to react until we get some emotions under control, most importantly my parents. But for him to know that I call him JP... *fuck fuck fuck*.

“What? Parker? I know you might be feeling some anger toward Whitney right now, but please,” my mother says, putting a hand up toward him. “You do not know what you’re talking about.”

“I will fucking murder you.” The words are quiet and my eyes snap to my father who’s staring at Jacob. His hands are shaking as he stands to his feet and I don’t think I’ve ever been as afraid of anything as I am at this moment as my father crosses the room and makes his way toward us.

“Honey, what...?” My mother looks at him before me then Jacob. “Baby, that’s Jacob. You’re really going to take the word of Parker, who you don’t even like?”

“Well finally someone admits it.” Parker scoffs.

“You shut up.” I growl at him before turning back to my father.

“Dad...” I move to stand in front of Jacob. “I need you to take a breath and let me talk.”

“Move, Whitney.” His eyes are cold and hard but they’re not directed at me. They’re directed about a foot over my head.

“Dad... can we please just talk about this?” I ask. “I want to clear up a few things.”

“Yeah, Dad... let’s just take a second. Take some deep breaths,” Mason interjects and I see the moment in my father’s eyes when he realizes that Mason saying something means there’s some truth to what Parker said.

My father's eyes dart to my brother, his eyebrows furrowing and I watch the pain flash across his face. Like my brother had betrayed him by not telling him. *You knew?* I can almost hear the words just in the brief look he gives Mason and I hate that I've irrevocably changed their relationship in the blink of an eye as well.

"Talk about what?" my mother exclaims and when my eyes meet hers, I can see the tears flooding her eyes. "No fucking way." I have rarely heard my mother swear and it feels foreign in my ears, hearing her sweet, soft voice speak something so harsh. Her chest is heaving up and down, her nostrils flare and when she opens her mouth a startled cry escapes it.

"Mom..."

"Okay, so we're all on the same page," Parker continues. "Didn't realize JP and the godfather were the same person. Well, that's something." He snorts.

"Parker," Mason growls. "Shut the FUCK up," he says as he and Chloe both start making their way toward him.

Chloe points at the door. "Okay, seriously? Get the fuck out, Parker."

"I seriously do not want to have to hit you after what you've been through, but you are fucking tempting me," Mason snaps as they both stand in front of him.

"Well wait... so that everyone gets the full scope of the story, Whitney told me that the guy she was fucking behind my back is an *old* flame. As in *before* me." *No no no no.* "And if everyone here is well versed at basic math, that would have put her at the ripe old age of *jailbait* the first time these two got together. What did you wait for the stroke of midnight on her eighteenth birthday? Love that for you. And you, Kev," he says, pointing to my father.

"Mason, NO," Chloe exclaims and holds him back because he is a second from taking a swing at Parker. "So that he can press charges? No. This jerk off isn't worth it. He was *never* worth it." She spits out before she looks at Parker. "RUN. Or whatever the fuck, just GO!" she screams at him, but I can't even be bothered to care because my father has stormed past me and has Jacob by the throat against the wall.

"Dad! Oh my gosh, Dad, please stop! Oh my God. Mom!" I yell for her because I've never seen him like this. My father, the giant teddy bear that I've probably heard yell on less than ten occasions and has never put his hands on anyone, currently has his best friend by the throat.

"Kev..." Jacob says through sputtered breaths and I'm wondering if he's

letting him do this until he really can't breathe because Jacob is stronger than my father even on his worst day. "Please, let me..."

He squeezes harder. "FUCK YOU. ARE YOU KIDDING ME?" he roars. "WHAT THE FUCK IS THAT LITTLE ASSHOLE TALKING ABOUT?" he says, referring to Parker who I see is no longer in the room.

Not that there was any more damage he could have done. He destroyed my life in three minutes.

His final words to me come charging into my brain. *What goes around comes around.* I want to go after him and ask why. And how? How could he do this to me? I hadn't intended to hurt him. It wasn't malicious. It just... happened. But I couldn't leave JP here to fend for himself against the only two people that he ever loved more than me. Two people that are looking at him now like they hate him.

"Honey, stop." My mom touches my father's arm and I watch as he visibly relaxes, turning to look at her and for a moment I'm lost in how they look at each other. How they love each other. The conversation they're having with just their eyes right now. The moment quickly dissipates when my father lets go of Jacob's throat allowing him to take a breath. Coughs escape Jacob's throat as he rubs his neck and no more than a second later, my mother's hand comes flying through the air and slaps him hard against the cheek.

I let out a cry and I move in front of Jacob, putting myself between him and my dad in case he decides to go for round two. My back is to my dad as I put my hands on his neck to see the marks from my father's hands. "Shit! I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry," I cry and I can see the hurt, pain and devastation in his eyes. I drag my fingertips over the marks from his fingers, wanting to run my lips over them instead.

I'm sorry I did this, his eyes say.

"YOU'RE SORRY!?! Whitney, move," my father growls and Jacob tries to move me gently out of the way.

"No!" I spin around, planting myself firmly in front of Jacob. "Can you stop acting like a psychopath right now? This is your best friend!"

"Was my best friend, not anymore. Not after this," he snaps as he takes a step back, probably realizing that I'm not going to move. "My best friend wouldn't have touched my daughter behind my back." I look at my mother, who's shaking her head at me, the tears still pouring from his face.

"And you all just fucking knew!?" He points at Chloe and Mason. "You, I

give a pass.” He says to Chloe. “Because you do whatever the fuck Whitney tells you even if it is idiotic.”

“Kevin,” Jacob speaks up. “Don’t do this. Don’t take your anger with me out on anyone else.” His voice is calm and even despite having just been choked by the very man he’s attempting to reason with.

I chance a glance at Chloe and I see the hurt on her face at my father’s harsh words.

“Are you kidding me? Fuck you, Jacob.” He looks away from us and then back to me. “How fucking long and don’t you dare fucking lie to me, Whitney?”

Jacob presses off the wall and gets in front of me. Jacob and my father are about the same height so they’re now staring at each other eye to eye. “Do not use that tone with her. I let you do that bullshit choking move but you and I both know I *let* that happen. Do *not* push me.”

“Then you tell me, tough guy. When did you touch my daughter for the first time? Was it even consensual or—”

“How could you even ask that?!” I interrupt. “Dad... what makes you think JP would ever do *anything* to hurt me?”

“You hear that, *JP*?” he snarls, looking at Jacob. “That name she called you because it was easier than saying Jacob when she was learning to talk?” His eyes well up with tears as he shakes his head in disappointment. “Almost thirty years we’ve been best friends. You were there when she was born.” I feel like the boiling anger is slowly starting to fall away and we are crossing into pure hurt. “That’s my little girl, man. And... you! YOU! Of all people!”

“I know.” Jacob’s voice breaks and I wonder if seeing my dad cry is triggering something in him. “I know... but I love her. She’s everything to me.”

“YOU CAN’T LOVE HER!” my mother screams with a look of horror. “SHE’S NOT FOR YOU TO LOVE!” She lets out a sob and takes a breath. “Answer him,” she grits out before gesturing toward my father. “How long?”

“I was eighteen. I was eighteen.” I look back and forth between both of them. “I swear. I... swear.”

“And this... whole time?” My mother asks. Her eyes are narrowed as if to say *how did you hide this from us for so long?*

“No. No. He left. He went to Mexico, and we broke up. He said we couldn’t be together because of you two.” The tears have started flying down my face rapidly. “It crushed me.” I let out a shaky breath. “He chose you two

over me and it crushed me!” I scream.

My mother’s eyes widen and I think she’s connecting the dots of when this all happened. “Oh my God... you.” She points at Jacob. “That’s why you were so depressed! You weren’t eating or sleeping.” She puts both hands over her eyes. “YOU BROKE HER! You sick, twisted ASSHOLE!” She screams at Jacob. “Get out.” She points toward the door. “I never want to see you again, Jacob Price, so help me GOD!” she yells and then she storms out of the room and up the stairs before slamming a door to what I assume to be her and my father’s bedroom.

“You know how this looks to us, right? Like you preyed on her,” my father asks, his voice quiet but full of venom.

“You know it’s not like that, Kevin. I swear. I... I know how this looks but I never saw her like that before she was eighteen.”

“Oh? Then what the fuck is it like Jacob because I don’t know how you go from being her godfather to her *whatever this is* overnight,” he spits out angrily. “From evidently seventeen and three hundred and sixty-four days to all of a sudden when she’s eighteen just... what a whole new person? Fuck you for trying to rationalize this bullshit.”

“Dad, I came onto him. I... I told him I had feelings for him. I always did, Dad. And... if you thought about it, you’d know. Think about how I was, how I always wanted to be around him. There were signs!”

“Of course, I knew. Your mother and I both did. Of course, I saw how you looked at him, how you idolized him. I thought it was an innocent crush! And I surely didn’t expect him to reciprocate these wildly inappropriate feelings you were having!”

“So, I went to him...” I bite down on my lower lip, knowing that I need to come clean about all of it. “I was older, and I looked different and he hadn’t seen me in over a year and... *I preyed on him*, Dad. He was kind of drunk and... I did it. I kissed him that first time and then things changed and I’m sorry. I am so sorry,” I choke out. “But please, do not blame him for this. You can’t hate him! You’ve been best friends forever.” I wrap my arms around myself suddenly freezing and I wonder if my body is going into shock.

“He betrayed my trust, Whitney.” His eyes look at Jacob. “Michelle and I trusted you. We let you around our kids. You helped raise them! Just to... do this?” He shakes his head, the tears in his eyes have started to fall. “Last night, when I was at your house and Whitney was there... I felt like

something was off. Something I couldn't put my finger on and then it hit me out of fucking nowhere. I couldn't even believe my mind went there." His hands ball into fists so hard that I hear his knuckles crack as he draws in a breath of air through gritted teeth. "You knew I could see it. I saw the way you looked at me. Like you were apologizing. When we were in your office, I could sense it but I couldn't believe it. There was no way that Jacob Price, my best friend and the most trustworthy, honorable man I knew would ever touch my daughter. My baby... my pride and joy." His nostrils flare. "I thought I knew you. But this just proves that you've been fooling us both for thirty fucking years!?! You lied to us about who you were for this long!?"

"Kevin, I am still that person. I would do anything for you and Miche and..."

"NO! You don't get to say that after this," he yells. "You gave up our friendship the second you touched my CHILD."

"I am not a child! I was never a child when we did this," I scream, wishing I could drive home that point so they stop looking at Jacob like he's a predator or that he groomed me for this.

"Semantics and you fucking know it, Whitney. And maybe if this was something you were exploring *now* for the first time, I may be handling this differently. Trust me, I'd still be pissed but all the lying and sneaking around three years ago!?" He shakes his head. "I will never forgive you for this, Jacob."

"Dad—" I go to touch him when he moves back quickly out of my reach as if he doesn't want me to touch him. I place a hand over my heart as if I'm trying to shield it from the pain he's causing at this moment. He used to tell me that my hugs were his favorite thing in the world. *The Whitney Bug Hugs* he'd call them and now he can't even bear me touching him.

"And you, Whitney. I can't imagine you're going to leave him now so I don't know what kind of relationship this allows you and I to have." My heart thumps painfully as a flash of a life without my father appears in front of me. "You're my daughter and I will always love you, and I'll always be there if you need me but I don't support this and I won't be around... *this*." He says pointing at us.

"I'm in love with him, Dad. I know it's hard to wrap your brain around but he's the love of my life. I can give you time to..."

"Time to what? Get on board with this?" He scoffs. "Grow up, Whitney. You both just destroyed this family." He shakes his head. "I hope this was all

fucking worth it.” He storms out of the room and up the stairs and I can hear the door open and close with the same force of my mother’s slam.

I turn to Jacob and I’m in his arms instantly, sobbing into his chest. “Shh, I’ve got you. Baby, I’m sorry. I am so so sorry,” he whispers in my ear before he presses his lips to my temple and I cry even harder that he’s the one comforting me when he got the brunt of their anger.

“Don’t apologize. I’m sorry. Do you hate me?” I hiccup as I look up at him. I can barely see him through my tears that I can tell he’s trying to brush away.

“Never,” he whispers against my forehead. “Do you hear me? This is not your fault.”

I frown and look up at him. “It’s not yours either,” I whisper and I realize that Chloe and Mason are probably still in the room but when I turn toward them, I only see Chloe who’s got tears in her eyes. “Where’s Mason?”

“He followed Uncle Kevin.” She wipes under her eyes. “I think I’m going to head out. I... would advise you guys to do the same for now?”

I nod in agreement knowing I do not want to be here whenever my parents emerge from their bedroom. “Thank you for coming and... I’m sorry about what my dad said.” I wince.

“He was angry and... we have talked each other into doing a lot of crazy shit over the years. He doesn’t know all the trouble I’ve gotten you into too.” She smiles but I know what he said stings because Chloe has proven time and time again that she’d follow me over a cliff every time.

“You drive here?” Jacob asks and I can sense his worry that maybe she shouldn’t be driving.

“Your brother is outside. He didn’t want to be too far away in case things went south.” Her lips form a straight line. *Like they did.*

I pull out of Jacob’s arms despite the grip he has on me and wrap my arms around her, crying into her neck and I feel her hands at my back. “I love you, Chlo.”

“I love you more, Whit. Just give them some time to let it sink in. It’s a bomb. You have to let the dust settle now.” She pulls away and gives me a small smile through her watery eyes. “Kevin and Michelle Monroe aren’t capable of grudges or hatred... let alone for two of their favorite people in the world. Let them sit with their anger for a minute, alright?”

I nod, knowing she’s right but unsure how I can live in a world where the two people that brought me into it potentially aren’t talking to me for even

the shortest amount of time.

“Chloe, thank you for... everything.” Jacob says from behind me and she nods at him.

“Take care of her,” she says and then she’s gone.

I shoot a text to Mason as we head toward the door that we are about to leave when I hear the faint sounds of a door closing and then he’s moving down the stairs.

“How bad is it?” I ask as he meets us at the door. Mason, who was the only person who hadn’t shed any tears initially now has red eyes and I wonder if he cried while he was upstairs.

“Bad. Mom won’t stop crying and Dad is pacing the room talking about what charge he’d get for murdering you.” He rubs his eyes and clears the emotion from his throat. “I told him probably second degree because you know crimes of passion? But the longer he thinks on it, the more it’s looking like first-degree murder.”

“Mase...” I chastise him for his joke.

“Too soon? Well look, Dad hates me as much as he hates you right now,” he says, pointing at me. “Definitely not as much as he hates you,” he says, gesturing to Jacob. “But yeah, the whole me not telling him what was going on? Pissed. Apparently, he’s subscribing to the bros before hoes thing.”

“Okay, Dad is not your bro and I am not a ho,” I say, giving him my middle finger.

“You know what the fuck I’m saying, Whitney. He’s pissed I didn’t tell him what was going on. That I knew and kept it to myself. That I didn’t kick your ass myself,” he says, pointing at Jacob. “Dad is really angry, Whitney and you know Dad rarely gets angry. I’ve never seen him like that. This isn’t just anger. This is pain and hurt and betrayal and that’s why it’s so intense. Who Mom and Dad are has become so heavily intertwined with Jacob over the years. Their friendship is one of the foundations of this family. So yeah, he’s right in that regard, that this changes our entire family. You changed Mom and Dad... forever.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Jacob

The ride back to my house is quiet, save for the sounds of Whitney's sniffles and the windshield wipers. Part of me wants to take a detour and pay a little visit to her ex-fiancé and beat the shit out of that motherfucker. *How could anyone be so cruel?* Maybe he hated Whitney or me or probably us both but to destroy her parents like that so callously and with no regard to their feelings or how this would affect them. *What the hell did she ever see in him?* "Are you hungry?" I finally break the silence and Whitney pulls her gaze from the window toward me.

"No," she responds quietly, her voice barely above a whisper and I grab her hand pulling it to my lips.

"You're going to need to eat something."

"Can we just order something when we get back to the house? I'm fucking exhausted and I have a headache and I think I need a drink. Several of them."

"I can make that happen." She takes a deep breath through her nose and lets it out through her mouth slowly and I can feel the tension flowing off of her in waves. I don't know what's going on in her head and it's driving me crazy. "Can you tell me what you're thinking about?"

"I can't believe that's how it happened." Her eyes flutter closed, and she continues to speak with them shut. "We waited years to tell them only for it to blow up in our faces like *that*." Her eyebrows pull together and she bites her bottom lip and not in that sexy way I love although I still can't help but feel the need to pull that lip between my teeth. "I feel like they'll never forgive you. That I'm their daughter, so they'll forgive me at some point. But

they won't forgive you." Her eyes finally open and sweep to find my gaze which I catch. A tear slides down her face and I'm glad that we are back at my house so that I can comfort her properly. "And I worry you'll grow to resent me for losing them. That they may not even want to come to our wedding..." She lets out a shaky breath. "If there's even a potential for you and me anymore."

I frown because after everything we'd been through today, I assumed that us being together in the long run was the one thing she could be sure about.

"You have doubts about me, now?" My voice sounds hurt and I know she can hear it because when her eyes meet mine, I can see the regret in her choice of words.

"I wasn't sure. That was intense. I mean my dad and my mom," she winces. "Have they even been angry at you?"

"No," I answer honestly. "If anything, I mediated their arguments when we were in college. I was put in the middle of so many of their arguments fueled by tequila or jealousy or just stupidity. Not that it ever came anywhere near something like that."

"And now you may have lost your best friends because of me."

"Kevin and Michelle will come around eventually. I know them."

"You know the versions of them whose daughter you weren't sleeping with. What if they never get over this?"

"Then, I won't have a relationship with my wife's parents." I shrug and her eyes widen at my words. "It'll be hard, losing them. But, to your point, I chose them once and I spent three years being miserable." I turn in my seat and rub my hand down her cheek, rubbing a thumb under her eye to collect the stray tears that had lingered on her skin. "I'm not losing you twice in a lifetime."

"JP." Her bottom lip trembles and she sweeps her gaze away from me and toward the house. "Can we go inside? I want to forget for a little while. Forget that this happened and that everything's a mess. I know it's probably not the best idea. Avoidance but I need *you*." I already know where her mind is going and my dick hardens thinking about the fact that being inside of her might be the only thing to calm us after what we've been through today. I follow her into the house and when I close the door behind her, she turns to face me. Her brown eyes sparkling with mischief and I half expect her to drop to her knees and pull my pants down. "Do you still have... our stuff?"

Ah, that would have been my second guess. I raise an eyebrow knowing

what she means by that and I make my way into the kitchen toward my bar cart. I was already planning to make us both a drink but if she's asking for that then I know we definitely need whiskey. She follows behind me and presses up against me as I grab the highball glasses from my cabinet. "What did you have in mind?" I knew what she wanted but I wanted to hear her say it.

"I do recall being told that you'd let me inside you again when I moved in." She hops up on the counter and begins to swing her legs like she'd just asked for the most innocent thing in the world and not to fuck me with a strap-on. "I'm here to collect."

"Have you?" I ask her. "Moved in?"

She looks up at the ceiling before turning as a cheeky grin spreads across her face. "Well, I'm pretty sure I don't have any other options at the moment." I shoot her a glare as I peel the orange for the old-fashioned drinks, I plan to make us. She presses her finger to my cheek which I notice she does when she wants my dimple to show and I can't help but oblige her. "Can I move in, JP?" She flutters her eyes at me. "I would very much like to live with you... here, if that's okay?"

The idea of Whitney being here twenty-four-seven, makes my dick hard. Holding her every night before bed, late night showers and talking well into the night, morning sex without wondering who might call her wondering where she slept the night before, having quiet nights in where I can cook her dinner and rub her feet after a long day of classes. Having all of her things all over my bedroom and bathroom turning it into our bedroom and our bathroom. I wanted those things and I wanted them *yesterday*.

"I would love that," I answer as I add the sugar and bitters to the glass before mixing in the bourbon. I pin her with a glare. "Is this what you want though? Don't think you have to live here because you don't want to go home and to avoid homelessness." I chuckle. "I can help you look for a place and pay for it for that matter, if you need time." The last thing I wanted was her to live here out of convenience.

"JP." She shakes her head. "I was kidding about not having other options. I could go live with Chloe in a heartbeat. My liver would hate me." She blanches. "But I want to be here. I want to be with you wherever you are." She frowns. "Any chance you could get a job at a big fancy hospital across the country? I'll transfer schools and then we can only see my parents on Christmas and Easter, maybe?"

“You would hate that.”

Christmas is huge in the Monroe household. I’m talking the absolute works. They had two huge Christmas parties and had Christmas-themed dinners every Saturday in December inviting anyone who was having a rough time that holiday season. Recently divorced, dumped, widowed or estranged from family, they opened up their house to anyone that didn’t have anywhere to go.

“I hate awkward or angry tension more.”

I strain the contents of the glass over two glasses with an ice cube inside. “I was actually thinking about going back to my old hospital. Whitney, baby, running away from this isn’t going to help. I don’t want you transferring schools unnecessarily and we need to at least try with your parents. If after you graduate law school, we haven’t made any progress then we can talk about it because I’m not about to allow their grandchildren to feel an ounce of that bullshit.” I see the stars in her eyes instantly over my words and I give her a smirk. “After you graduate,” I tell her instantly in case she’s having any thoughts on starting to try for them now.

“That’s two years away, JP.” She drops her head back as she picks up the glass, that I’ve just dropped the orange peel inside. “I’m fine with waiting that long to start trying for a baby but we have to potentially endure two years of my parents behaving like *that*,” she says, hitching a thumb over her shoulder to indicate what happened an hour ago. “Before you’re open to moving?”

“I don’t think it’ll take that long. I know them. They’re pissed. They have a right to be and I would be too.”

“But...” She puts her glass down after taking a healthy sip. Her hands find my neck and I haven’t looked but I assume she’s touching any marks that Kevin left after his hand was wrapped around my throat. It didn’t hurt as much as the fact that he actually did it. The physical pain was there but the mental anguish and emotional pain was worse. She runs her fingertips over my pulse point. “It’s bruised here. It looks like...” Tears flood her eyes. “I’m so sorry.”

“Hey, none of that.” I brush my nose against hers and then peck her lips. “He was angry and I would rather he take it out on me than you. I couldn’t even handle him yelling at you. I was ready to snap.”

“You did.” She laughs. “You actually yelled at my dad for yelling at me.”

“I didn’t yell.” I take a sip of my drink and decide it’s good before

helping her off the counter and moving toward the living room. “I didn’t like his tone with you.”

“His tone!?” She giggles. “The way he talked to me was the mildest of his temper today.”

“I don’t care.”

It’s still raining or else I’d suggest going to my patio but we settle on the couch and she sits in my lap before dropping her head into the crook of my shoulder. I feel her pressing feather-light kisses to my neck and I wrap my arms around her, holding her close and not wanting her to move for anything.

“So, about my ass...” I start, wanting to divert the conversation away from something so heavy. In the car, she said she wanted to forget and this was doing the complete opposite.

Her head perks up, and she eyes me. “Do you still have it?”

“I do.” I nod, referring to the strap-on she’s used to fuck me.

“Are you still into the idea of us doing that?”

“I’m into doing anything with you. Anything you want. Everything.”

I’d never explored that with anyone until I met her. And honestly, how we came to that was because she’d never done anal sex before and when the idea of us trying it came up, she looked me dead in my eye and said, “*you can have mine if I can have yours.*” It took me a few weeks to get on board with the idea, but one night after a few too many whiskeys and a drunk naked Whitney, I let her pink cheeks and even pinker pussy convince me to try it.

What I had not expected was to like it. Perhaps it was because it was Whitney and it was the connection we had. Maybe because she was as nervous as me and she’d been a virgin prior to me and she trusted me with so many of her firsts that I felt comfortable enough to give her this one. Or maybe it was because I came like a fucking freight train all over her tits because she was on top. Either way, it was something we’d done a handful of times while we were together.

“Can we tonight?”

“Can I have yours tonight?” *Even if she said no, I’d still agree. I would do anything to put a smile on her face after the day we’ve had.*

“Of course.” She purrs as she begins to move around in my lap. “Missed putting your dick in my ass, Price?”

“Missed putting a fake one in mine?” I quip, and she nods.

I clear my throat, not wanting to bring this up but knowing it’ll haunt me if I don’t. “Did you... I mean, did you try this with anyone else?”

She shakes her head. “No. This isn’t something I could do with just anyone.” Her eyes avoid mine. “Let’s just do this now, I suppose.” She puts her hands in her lap and fidgets with them. She’s still straddling me, so she grazes my chest in the process. “Parker wasn’t very adventurous and coming off of a relationship with you made things disappointing at times. You and I had done so many things and it was always exciting... even when it was missionary in your bed, it was so intense I couldn’t even breathe at times. But you showed me how fun and exciting sex could be and then I met someone who didn’t want to try anything. He never even... I mean...” she scrunches her face. “I hate that I’m saying this, it feels shitty but... he never made me come during sex.”

“EVER?!” The word leaves me in a roar and she winces before putting a finger to her ear.

“Okay, JP, I’m right here.” She chuckles and I pinch her side because between the two of us she’s always been the louder one. “No. I mean, he did make me come, but just not from penetration. I’m saying it like that so you’re not thinking too much about it.” I’m grateful for her oversight because I know if she’d said anything about his dick, I’d lose it.

“So, when you two... never?” She shakes her head. “How... I mean... you knew it was possible, how did you not miss it?”

“I did! But I don’t know if I was just in my head or if it was him. I don’t know; it’s not a comfortable conversation to have and I didn’t know how to broach the subject.”

“So, you just faked it?”

“Sometimes. Or he’d just finish and get me off a different way.” I grip her thighs, the thought of anyone making her come but me making me almost irate.

“JP, don’t get yourself worked up.” She pecks my nose and I feel slightly less angry. “I just wanted you to know that... there are a lot of things I’ve still only done with you. Things I fucking miss.”

“Like what?”

“Like sex in cars.”

I raise my eyebrows in shock. “You mean there was never a time you couldn’t wait to get home? Never a time that you were so wet or he was so hard and he couldn’t take it another second without him being inside of you in some way?” I run my nose down the side of her face. “Never a time he had to pull over because the scent of your cunt was so heady that it actually made

it so he couldn't focus on getting you home safely without having a taste of what was between your legs?"

She whimpers in my lap and spins her hips in a circle and I groan. "No."

"Fuck. What else?"

"He didn't want to tie me to the bed so you better believe he didn't want me to do that to him either."

"That's something that requires a lot of trust, baby."

"We'd been together three weeks when you let me do that."

"I'd known you a long time." I chuckle. "And you were such a curious little kitten." I press my lips to hers. "We were exploring all of these very new and sexy things and I don't know, I just trusted you from the jump."

"I resigned myself to the fact that my sex life changed considerably and I learned to accept it. Like I said, no one was going to measure up to you and us. Our chemistry was—"

"One of a kind." I grab her face to make her look at me. "I'm so glad I have you back," I tell her. "I know it potentially cost us a lot of things but I'll make you so happy, baby and we'll get through it. We'll make them understand eventually."



Whitney is in the bathroom getting ready, and by getting ready, I mean *playing with the new appendage between her legs*. I chuckle at the thought of her jumping up and down and swinging her hips in a circle like she always does when she puts it on. We'd already showered in preparation for tonight and now I was naked, lying on my bed as I waited for Whitney to come out of the bathroom.

I was already hard, the thought of going down this road with Whitney again making precum leak from the tip already and I grab my cock and drag my hand over it from root to tip. It took a minute to wrap my brain around the fact that I enjoyed this so much. That I enjoyed the feeling of something in my ass. *Her* in my ass. And not just enjoyed but would come hard as fuck. I eventually realized it was the fact that it was Whitney. The feeling of doing something with her that I'd never done with anyone else. Her small body

rutting into me, chasing the orgasm while simultaneously giving me one as well as she stimulated my prostate. The first time we did it, she did it from behind with me on all fours, and after thirty years of having sex, I got to feel the other side of my favorite position.

They say that pegging was in ways a reversal of power and gender roles and I agreed completely. The sounds that came out of me when she was inside of me begging her to fuck me harder. The moans and groans as she penetrated me, trying to breathe deeply as I grew accustomed to something so new and foreign. She emerges from the bathroom with the familiar toy hanging between her legs, and I reach for the shot sitting on the nightstand and down it in one gulp, wanting my body even looser for her. I let out a breath as I watch her stroke the fake dick while her eyes don't leave mine.

"I forgot how fucking hot you look like that. Come the fuck over here," I tell her and she moves toward me slowly, making my breath hitch with each slow step toward the bed. My heart begins to race and I feel like it might pound out of my chest when I hear her speak.

"Are you ready to get fucked, baby?"

Fuck.

That was another thing about this. Whitney always talked dirty. She had a mouth on her that I loved, but hearing her say the things that I usually said to her in bed made the dirty talk ten times hotter. It's like she channeled me when she was like this and every word that fell from her lips turned me hard as stone.

"Yes." My voice is hoarse.

"Have you missed my dick in your ass?"

She crawls on the bed and I resist the urge to touch her, knowing she likes to be the first person to make contact when we do this. Her hands find my ankles and she drags her hands up my legs.

"God, you're fucking sexy."

I'd gotten lube while she was in New York knowing that we'd be doing this shortly after she brought it up and I'm glad I did. I grab the lube off the nightstand and toss it to her and she tuts at me.

"So eager." She kneels between her legs, placing her hands on her thighs as she looks down at my dick. "I want to play with this first." Her voice is breathy and sexy as she runs her hands through her hair and looks down at me. Her hands find my dick and pulls at it delicately. Not like she wants to get me off but like she wants to tease me.

I shudder at her gentle touch as her finger drags up the bottom of my dick and she traces my tip, circling it around the head and collecting the bead of cum already leaking from the tip. She sticks her tongue out and drags her tip across it. “Mmmm. Fucking delicious.” My body trembles when she runs her hands up my legs, settling on my thighs and massaging the skin. “Your body is so insane, JP. I love it. I’ve always loved it. Been borderline obsessed with it since I was too young to even know what to do with it.” She leans down and kisses the tip of my dick before sucking it into her mouth.

“FUCK. Oh God, fuck me baby, you know just what the fuck I like.” I groan as she hollows out her cheeks and sucks harder, swirling her tongue around the tip before pushing me as far as she can go in her mouth. Whitney was no stranger to deep-throating, but it’s not that easy for her to do at this angle. It’s easier if I’m standing and I can feed her my cock gently but she pushes herself, probably in thanks to the whiskey and she gets almost all the way to the base of my cock.

“Jesus, Whitney,” I grit out as she digs her nails into my thighs. “Don’t want to come in your mouth,” I manage to sputter out as she picks up the bottle of lube that I’d tossed toward her. She squirts a sizable amount into her hand before squeezing it on the dick hanging between her legs.

“How do you want me?” I ask.

“Dealer’s choice,” I respond, letting her decide how she wants me.

“Turn around, it’s been a while for both of us. I want to take it slow.” I nod, excited to be in this position with the love of my life for the first time after three years. I do as she says, turning around and getting on all fours already feeling exposed and yet fucking invigorated. I lower myself farther given our disparities in height so that my ass is in line with her pelvis and I feel her fingers first tracing the puckered hole and I know it’s only about three seconds before I feel... *yep, there it is.*

Whitney’s tongue circles the hole and I moan at the kinky, unbelievably dirty feeling of Whitney’s tongue in my ass.

Jesus fuck, I am going to hell. I think the same thoughts I had the first time she did it.

“You still love that.” Her voice is hoarse, and I feel her breath against the wetness at my entrance.

“Yes.” I say quickly.

“Mmm, I love how down you are for anything. How down you are for *me.* Anything I ever want to do, you trust me enough to do it.”

I feel her teeth against one of my ass cheeks, grazing down before she spreads my cheeks again and drags her tongue between them, rimming me.

“I love you,” she tells me and then I feel the cool gel of the lube at the same space. She rubs it in as she pushes a finger in and then another, priming me.

“I love you more,” I tell her as I drop my head to the mattress and let my eyes shut as the anticipation takes over.

She pushes her fingers in and out and I let out a groan when she hits my prostate. “You like that?”

“You know I do,” I say through gritted teeth and then her fingers leave me and I hear the sounds of her applying more lubricant to the appendage before she lines it up to my ass. I clench on instinct, the foreign feeling of something going in which is something I haven’t felt in years.

“I’ll go slow,” she whispers and then she presses herself against my asshole and pushes in slowly.

“Fuuuuuuck.”

“Touch your dick,” she commands me and I do as she says, rubbing my hard cock that’s only getting harder as she pushes inside me. “You okay?”

“Yes, baby. I’m good.” I start to slide back on her and she digs her nails into my ass.

“Uh uh.”

I smile at her dominance. “Sorry, beautiful.”

“I’m in control here. You get to be in charge ninety-nine percent of the time, give me this.” She grips my hips and begins to push a little harder. She still hasn’t bottomed out but she’s going deeper with each thrust. I grab a nearby pillow, curling my hands around it as she pushes deeper and I let out a moan I can only describe as feral as she hits my prostate again.

“Fuck. Whitney...” I reach between my legs and find my dick and begin moving in time with her thrusts although I don’t need to. I could come with the stimulation in my ass alone but I’m greedy for more.

“Oh God.” I hear her whimper and I remember this particular harness had something that rubbed against her clit while she thrust.

“Feel good?” I ask, wanting nothing more than for her to climax while she’s in my ass.

“Yes,” she whimpers.

“You want to go faster?” I ask her, wanting her to, *needing* her to.

“Ahhhh yes.” She moans.

“Then move fucking faster,” I grit out. “Make sure it hits your clit, Angel,” I command her as she begins to move faster. “Fuck,” I whisper. “Oh my God, yes.”

She’s all the way inside me now, fucking me harder, her hips banging against my ass with every thrust as she bottoms out inside of me. I’ve dropped my hand from my cock to put both of my hands on the mattress needing to grip the sheets with both hands as I meet her thrusts but my cock still tingles with the need to come. My balls are heavy, the need to release overtaking me.

“Fuck, I forgot what this feels like. What *you* feel like.” I squeeze my eyes shut as the orgasm starts in my fucking toes. “You’re going to make me come, baby.”

The only sounds to be heard other than my moans is our skin slapping together and it makes my cock even harder hearing that sound.

“Fuck yes, I am,” she moans against me. “Only I can do this. This is for me. ME,” she whines as she rotates her hips and I know it’s because she’s trying to hit her clit at the right angle.

“Yes yes yes.” I groan as lightning flashes behind my eyes and the tingle in my balls shoots throughout my entire body. “Oh fuck, Whitney fucking yes. I’m going to come. Fuck *me*.” I slam my fist against the mattress and let out a guttural moan as I climax. I reach for my cock and pull on it, and seconds later, I’m ejaculating all over the bed.

“Yes!” I hear from behind me, and I’m not sure if it’s because she comes or if she knows I’m coming or sees me coming but that sound makes my heart swell that I’ve made her so happy. She pulls out of me and since I’m not sure if she’s come yet, I turn around and push her to her back and yank the harness from around her hips with so much force, there’s a good chance I break it in the haste to put my mouth between her legs.

“Fucking come for me, Whitney.”

“I did...” she moans.

“Give me another, then,” I growl against her as my hand finds my cock and I begin fisting it to get it ready to go inside her again. I look up at her just as her hand finds the back of my head pushing me harder against her cunt. I eat her hungrily as I feel her building again under my tongue, her clit pulsing and quivering as I eat her like I’m trying to climb inside of her.

“JP, oh my *God*.”

She whimpers as her grip on my hair tightens, and she raises her hips,

trying to get me deeper *and my God, Angel, if I could, I would.*

“I’m going to come again.”

I open my eyes, just as I close my lips around her clit and her hands leave my head and find my arms and then my hands and then they’re interlaced with mine and I squeeze and she squeezes back and then she’s coming *hard.*

“OH MY GOD.”

She lifts her pelvis high enough for my hands to slide under her to grip her ass and I do, hard. I dig my nails into the flesh of her ass just as her needy clit pulses and she squirts all over the bottom half of my face. I tongue her through her orgasm, drawing every drop of the juices that flow from her. I lower her body to the bed and pull my hands from under her and begin to rub her pussy tenderly, pressing gentle kisses to the slick skin every few moments.

Her eyes flutter open and there are tears in them. “JP.”

She sits up and then she’s in my arms, sobbing and a part of me wants to join her. Today has been probably one of the worst of my life and our orgasms brought on by the intense love we have for each other were the cathartic releases that we needed more than we needed air. “Never let me go, *please,*” she begs and I can’t help but beg her to make a similar promise.

“As long as you never let *me* go.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Whitney

It's been a month since that catastrophic day at my parents' house and I've barely spoken to either of them. I tried to give them time and space, doing my best to check in intermittently to tell them I loved them and was thinking about them but it was a vast difference from our constant texting and phone calls every few days. *I missed them.* The texts to my father pretty much went unanswered and while my mother responded and even called me once or twice, she said she was still struggling with it and needed more time to really grasp this change. On top of everything else, Mason and my father now weren't speaking after Mason went to his house and laid into my father for not speaking to me. I feel like I've created such a divide and now Thanksgiving is this week and I have no idea if I'm even going to see my family.

Like Christmas in my house, Thanksgiving is huge and it'll feel weird not being there but I can't imagine they want JP there and I want to be wherever he is.

"Baby, you should go." He leans against the doorjamb of the bathroom as I get ready for my last class of the week. His arms fold over his chest as he stares at me at my state of undress. I was only wearing a bra and my underwear under a tiny robe but he's staring at me like I'm completely naked.

"You're a machine, you know that? And we do not have time," I tell him, knowing that if he keeps looking at me like that, it'll end up with his mouth on my cunt and me late for class. "And no, what about you?"

"I'll go to my mom's with Trey."

I turn around as I let my hair fall from around the curling wand. "Trey's

not going to my house with Chloe?”

“No, I think he’s avoiding your parents for my sake.”

“Why? They’re not mad at him.”

“He’s mad at *them*. He doesn’t want to say anything out of line.”

I sigh. *Another strained relationship*. “It’s our first Thanksgiving together as a couple, we should be together.” JP told his mother shortly after everything happened in the very off chance my mother told her during one of their lunches. But unfortunately, my mom has been avoiding JP’s mom as well. But I think that’s more out of “*what can I say to the mother of the man I’m so angry at?*” My mother was raised to be very respectful of her elders and disrespecting Ella Price would have my grandparents turning over in their graves.

Ella was—well, I’m not sure how she took it. JP told her without me and he’d only told me that she took it better than my parents *which is really not saying much*.

“Maybe I could go with you to your mom’s?” I ask.

“I would love that but I know you don’t really want to.”

“I want to be with you.” I purse my lips, and he smiles before planting a kiss on my lips.

“I’m going to swing by the hospital today. Let them know I’m ready to come back after the holiday.”

“Which holiday?”

He raises an eyebrow curiously. “Thanksgiving...?”

I pout. “Because I was kind of hoping you meant like Christmas? I mean New Year!” I know all too well what Jacob’s job entails and while he typically gets home at decent hours not working into the wee hours, I do know that giving surgeons off on holidays isn’t always a luxury the hospital can afford.

“You want me to wait another seven weeks?” He chuckles. “I’ve already been off for a month.”

“And what a great month it’s been, right? Lots of sexy time with me.” I shimmy and his eyes find my chest instantly as they shake in my La Perla bra. “And just think, in December I’ll be out of class and that means even *more* sexy time.”

He takes a step forward and pulls the wand out of my hand and sets it down before pulling me into his arms and running his nose down my neck. “I would love that. I’ll see what I can do.” He places a hot kiss on my neck and

drags his tongue upward until it finds my mouth giving me a kiss that makes my knees weak. When he pulls away, my eyes immediately drop to his groin and then back to his eyes. “Hmm, I thought you didn’t have time?” He winks before he backs out of the room with a cocky grin on his face.



I let out a deep breath as I stand in front of the door to my parents’ house. It’s the first time I’ve set foot inside but we needed to talk and I couldn’t run the risk of them not answering my phone calls. It’s after six, so I know they’re home, not to mention, I see their cars in the driveway. When I open the door, it’s quiet and I frown because in the twenty-two years I’ve been alive, this house has never been quiet. I push through the front door and make my way into the living room where I see my mom lying on the couch taking a nap. Underneath a cashmere blanket, she looks so peaceful and I wish I didn’t have to wake her. I take a few steps when her eyes flutter open and she gasps in surprise.

“Whitney,” she says, putting a hand over her chest. “You scared me.”

“Sorry.” I wince. “Where’s Dad?”

“Ummm, upstairs, maybe? He was on a call, and I wanted to take a nap.”

My mother never napped in the middle of the day and certainly not three days before Thanksgiving. It doesn’t even smell like she’s cooking anything.

“I’m surprised you’re not already cooking.” My eyes dart to the kitchen.

She sits up. “Oh. Yeah, we decided not to do anything this year.”

“What!?” I gasp in shock. “Why? You love Thanksgiving and holidays and tradition.”

“Well... we’re just taking a break this year.”

I let out a sigh. “This is about me and JP, right?”

“It’s about a lot of things. No one is speaking and—”

I interrupt, not wanting to entertain the narrative that I didn’t want to speak to them. “You’re not speaking to *me*, Mom, and Mason feels terrible about the fight with Dad.” I shake my head. “But this all stems from me.”

“It’s a lot to take in, Whit.”

“Mom, I fell in love.”

“With someone old enough to be your father. Someone that was actually *like* your father. I know you think that this is all about you and him but it’s bigger and you know that which is why you kept it from us for so long. This is... almost thirty years of friendship. Family. Jacob was the most important relationship your father and I had other than with each other and the two of you kind of wrecked that.”

“That’s not fair.”

“Oh?”

“No, Mom, it’s not fair to put that on us. You could still have that relationship with Jacob.”

“How? Knowing... what... you know maybe I could get by that. *Maybe*. But your father? I’m going to be blunt with you, honey, your father knows quite a bit about Jacob’s personal life and now he has that image of you with him.”

“Okay well... don’t picture it!”

“You’re being immature, Whitney. Maybe we didn’t handle it the best at the time but you can’t sit there and tell me you don’t understand why this is uncomfortable for us.”

“I do! I just don’t think you should cut us out of your life because of it.”

“I haven’t.”

“You don’t get me without him, Mom. Don’t you see? We wouldn’t have done this if it wasn’t real. We came to you because we are ready to take the next step together and our families need to know. If it was just fun or sex or whatever...”

“Can you not?” She slides her glasses into her hair to rub her eyes. “I cannot believe you and my best friend from college. He slept with half the girls in our freshman year dorm, Whitney!”

I blanch and scrunch my nose. “I didn’t need to know that, though I could have guessed. But I am well aware of what happened before me. But I also know that nothing has happened with anyone else since he met me, if that’s your concern. He went to Mexico and couldn’t move on. He tried, Mom. He broke up with me and it destroyed us both.”

“I just don’t... how did this happen, Whitney, and be honest.” She gives me a pointed glare.

“Does it matter? Will it help anything?”

“Maybe?”

“I had a crush on him for forever which you knew. It was harmless,

nothing happened before I was eighteen, I hope you can believe that.”

“If I didn’t believe that, Jacob would not still be alive.” She narrows her eyes though I can hear the joke lying beneath her words, *I think*.

I sigh. “I never thought he’d see me like that. He never gave me any indication, never flirted with me or... anything. And then one night I was drunk and,” I shrug as if it wasn’t the most meaningful night of my life. “I came onto him.” I wince. “I think seeing me for the first time in a year, he realized that I wasn’t that same little girl anymore. The last time he saw me, I was seventeen with blonde hair and braces and no boobs. So fast forward a year and I look different and act different and I’m coming onto him... I think it was a moment of weakness? That first night? Because he told me we couldn’t. He told me that was it, it shouldn’t have happened.”

“And yet it did.”

“Mom, I know this is weird and uncomfortable but if you thought about it, isn’t Jacob the exact kind of man you’d want to see me with? Trustworthy and kind and caring and good to me?”

“Sure. But there are other men out there that fit those characteristics that are not part of this family.”

“Well, we are here now and JP and I are planning to get married.”

She gasps and I frown at her shock.

“Seriously? That’s shocking?”

She doesn’t reply, so I continue. “You and Dad have to figure out if you can live with this. If you can be in our lives and accept this. I want that. I want my family. My whole family.” Tears have sprung to my eyes and begin to run down my face. “Mom, I’m so sorry that I did this to us. That I had a hand in destroying a relationship that you held so dear. But I do love him, and I want to be with him and I can’t apologize for that. I can’t spend the rest of my life apologizing for falling in love with your best friend.”



“I think this is a *terrible* idea. Truly. Awful.” Chloe says as she leans against the island in JP’s kitchen. *Well, I guess it’s my kitchen now too.*

“I’m with Chlo. This just seems like a recipe for disaster,” Trey says as

he pulls his beer to his lips. “Holidays and family drama and alcohol and a carving knife?” he continues.

I spin away from the sweet potatoes I’m mashing and give them both a look. “Look, you two are here to *help*. I don’t want to hear any of this negativity.”

“You invited your parents and JP’s mom and *my parents* for Thanksgiving dinner and you think Trey and I can *help*?”

“It’s a shame that no one was having Thanksgiving dinner! My parents were going to be at my house alone, and who knows what Mason would have ended up doing because we were going to your mom’s,” I say, pointing at Trey. “And Aunt Melanie can’t cook for shit,” I say, referring to Chloe’s mom. “I am saving your parents.”

“Oh, make no mistake, my parents are thrilled but mostly for the front seat to the shitshow.” She snorts into her mimosa.

“They were also invited for damage control.” I point my spoon at her. “Make sure they know their roles. Tell your dad not to antagonize my dad.” I wipe the sweat from my brow with the back of my hand. “Maybe this all blows up in our faces but I think we should all sit down and... try. It’s Thanksgiving after all. If we don’t do this now, if we don’t try while the wounds are still fresh, we won’t heal right. You know? Things will be awkward and polite and stiff hugs and forced phone calls and I don’t want that. So, I will take the arguing and the anger and fighting because at least that means we are fighting for something. What I will never take from anyone in this family is indifference.”

“Should I be writing this down? I feel like that was a nice little speech.” Chloe says with a chuckle and I give her my middle finger.

“I agree.” I hear his voice from the door and then he’s moving through it, already dressed for dinner. With gray slacks and a black cashmere sweater, he looks gorgeous and a picture of style and sophistication and I bite my lip. Unlike me, who still hadn’t showered and was covered in food.

“Baby, I said let me help.” He moves toward me before pressing a kiss to my temple.

“You did! You peeled all the potatoes.” I point. “And I am going to need you to flip the turkey in a little.

“Anything you need.” He looks down at me. “Anything at all today, alright?”

I nod, hearing the implication in his voice.

An hour later, just as I'm finishing getting dressed, the doorbell rings and I hear it open. *Fuck. I wanted to be down there.*

My hair is still in a wet bun from my shower and I curse myself for washing it because now I still have another twenty minutes before I'm ready. My phone beeps with a text message and I see it's a group thread with Chloe and Mason.

Chloe: Our parents came together. Hurry up.

Mason: Why did you think this was a good idea?

One from Jacob shows up while I'm in the process of responding.

Jacob: Your parents are here. Take your time though. It's going to be fine, angel. I love you.

Me: I love you more. Be down in a second.

I opt to let my hair air dry, knowing that nothing matters at this moment but being with Jacob. When I make my way downstairs, it feels like the temperature has gone down several degrees. My parents and Chloe's parents are in the living room and the sounds of JP and his brother and his mother are coming from the kitchen.

"Hi, honey," my mom says as she comes toward me and wraps her arms around me before pressing a kiss to my forehead. I hold on to her for an extra second, missing the warm feeling of her arms around me. She gives me a small smile and then a wink and I'm choosing to believe that means everything is going to be alright.

"Hi Dad," I whisper and he looks at me for a second before I see the moment of defeat in his brown eyes. The last time I saw them they were cold and full of anger but now I see a small glimpse of my dad.

"Come here," he says as he holds his arms out for me and I practically run into them.

"Dad," I whisper just as I press my nose into his chest letting the nostalgia take over after not seeing him in over a month. The tears are falling down my face rapidly and when I sniffle and stifle a sob, he pulls my face away.

"Hey, none of that."

"You hate me."

"No. Never." He shakes his head and I don't miss the tears in his eyes either. "You understand me? Never that."

My heart squeezes in my chest thinking about my next words. “You hate *him*.”

“Never that either.”

My lips tremble as more tears trickle down my face hearing those three words fall from his lips.

A throat clearing breaks us apart and when I turn, I see JP with a smile on his face. “Whitney, I just wanted to let you know the food’s ready, but take your time.” I turn back to look at my dad that’s looking at JP with a look of... hurt? Maybe? Although he’d only shown his anger, I knew my father was hurt. *For reasons aside from the fact that I was his daughter*. My dad used to always say there were no secrets between him and JP. Both of them knew where all the bodies were buried and that was that. So, I wonder if a part of his anger came from the fact that he didn’t know. There was something about Jacob Price that he didn’t know. Sure, maybe that’s childish but after twenty-five years of the kind of friendship that they had, I get it. I get that my father was hurt that Jacob fell in love and couldn’t tell him. That he didn’t get to be happy for his best friend for meeting the love of his life.

That maybe he’ll never get to be happy for his best friend for meeting the love of his life. Because now Jacob has to assume the role of son-in-law when he’d only ever been his best friend and his daughter’s godfather. It was a mindfuck that I hadn’t realized until this moment when I see my father looking at Jacob as if he’s not sure if he needs to scream or punch something or apologize.

I hold my breath waiting for him to speak, but he doesn’t. He just walks out of the living room and toward the dining room where we are planning to have dinner.

Dinner is quiet. The only sounds to be heard are the clinking of metal utensils against plates and the quiet questions of passing food around the table. Chloe tries to keep the conversation going, but it’s hard for one person who seems to be the really only neutral party, even though anyone with a brain knows she’s on my side only. Dinner ends almost as quickly as it begins and if we were at my parents’ house, a three-hour long dinner turns into dessert and games and more drinking and karaoke and reminiscing about the good old days and dancing and then it’s two thirty in the morning and no one can drive home so it becomes a familial sleepover. My eyes turn to the clock which reads half past nine and everyone is ready to leave.

No one was in the mood for partying.

I'm putting some of the dishes in the sink when my eyes catch something on the back patio. Seated in front of the outdoor fireplace is my dad and JP.
Shit.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Jacob

The sounds of the crackling fireplace and the forest behind my house move around us as I wait for Kevin to start. He'd asked to talk, and I was more than willing. I knew that if he didn't ask, I was going to.

"Whitney, man." He finally speaks and when he looks over at me he's holding a glass of whiskey tightly in his hands. "Of all the people..."

"I know. *I know.*"

"You don't though. You couldn't possibly know what this is like and you won't until you have a child of your own. A daughter. A sweet, precious little person that you vow to protect with every ounce of you. Then you'll know this feeling. This feeling of being lied to and betrayed and by someone that you trusted more than anyone. The family we made for ourselves. That's what Michelle called you. When her parents died, and my mom died and your dad died, we were there. We've always been *there.*" He snuffles. "How could you do this to me? Did our friendship really not mean anything to you?"

"Fuck. That's not what this is about, Kev. Your friendship means the world to me, it always has."

"Then how could you touch my daughter!" he screams.

I have nothing but the truth. "I fell in love with her."

"That first time? Bullshit. That was you getting hard for someone you had no business touching. The forbidden fruit or whatever the fuck."

"That first time, Kev. I don't know. It all happened so fast and... I didn't... I don't know."

"Not good enough," he grits out.

"But it's all I have. I don't know why she looked different to me that

night. Why I felt attracted to her then when I never had before.” He’s staring down at his whiskey, his hands shaking and I don’t know if it’s out of anger or sadness or both. “I would never do anything to hurt you and Michelle,” I whisper.

“You did.”

“I know and I’m sorry.”

“That’s all you have to say?” He jumps to his feet and part of me wonders if he might attack me again as he begins to pace in front of me like a wild animal ready to charge.

“What the fuck can I say, Kev?” I shout. “Tell me. Tell me what I can say, what you want to hear that will make this better?” He doesn’t say anything. I stand up to face him before I continue. “There isn’t anything I could say. The only thing that would make this marginally better and easier for you would be if I said I would leave her. That I was sorry and I made a mistake but I value our friendship more than my relationship with Whitney. But I can’t say that. I won’t say that. I am not giving her up.” I stop as I prepare to unleash the words that will change everything once again. “I want her to be my *wife*, man.”

Kevin downs the rest of his drink and slams it forcefully down on the table so hard that I wonder if he may have cracked the glass.

“So, what is this? Are you asking for my permission? Because you don’t have that,” he snaps.

“I figured as much. But this is me coming to the father of the woman I love and telling him that nothing you say or do is going to make me leave Whitney. You will actually have to kill me first.”

“Do not tempt me,” he grits out and I can’t stop the hint of the smile finding my face.

“I am in love with her,” I tell him. “You’ve known me a long time. Forever. When have I ever been like this with anyone? Even when I was engaged to Emily.”

“You barely liked Emily,” Kevin groans and I resist the urge to chuckle over the fact that Kevin and Michelle were *never* Team Emily.

“I just mean... I could barely even stand the sight of another woman in Mexico. I kissed one or two. That’s it. I was in Mexico for three years and I didn’t sleep with anyone.”

“Do you want a medal or something?”

“No, I want you to see that I have very real feelings for Whitney that I

sacrificed for you and it hurt. It really fucking hurt. I don't want to lose you and Michelle over this but I *can't* lose her again. And maybe you want to say to hell with my feelings or that you don't give a fuck about them. But what about her? You yourself said how miserable she was when we broke up only you didn't know the cause. But she loves me too, Kev."

He lets out a breath and doesn't say anything for a while before he finally speaks. "You know what I'll do to you if you hurt her?"

Relief floods me because while that doesn't sound like any type of blessing, it does sound like acceptance which is a big fucking step. "Kevin... I won't, ever."

"I'm going to hold you to that."

"I know you will."

He clears his throat. "You have a ring?"

"Not yet."

"She know it's coming?"

I nod. "Yes."

He lets out a breath. "You take care of my girl, Jacob, so help me, God."

I smile, and he narrows his eyes.

"Do not look at me like that. I still do not approve but... I want to walk my only daughter down the aisle."

"She would love that."

"And I promised you a long time ago to be your best man whenever you got married."

I had asked both him and my brother to be my best men when I was going to get married before. "And I still want you to be. I still want you and Michelle to be my people."



A few weeks have gone by since Thanksgiving and while things aren't perfect, we're moving in the right direction. It's the Saturday before Christmas and we are all going to Kevin and Michelle's like usual for dinner.

I'm cradling my phone between my ear and my shoulder as I'm moving the cartons around trying to find what I'm looking for. "Baby, does it really

matter which eggnog ice cream brand I get?”

“Yes, of course it does! It has to be Turkey Hill; you know my dad is so picky about it! You are barely back in his good graces!” I sigh, knowing that Kevin was in fact very picky about how he made his strong as fuck egg nog. I’m standing in the freezer section of the grocery store staring at every other brand *but* Turkey Hill knowing this means I have to go to another store.

I sigh. “Alright, I have to go to another store.”

“Okay, hurry pleaseeee, I miss your face. I need some time with it before we go to my parents’ house and I have to behave.” She giggles. Much to Whitney’s annoyance, I did actually go back to work a week ago and have been super busy at the hospital while I get re-acclimated which has meant that Whitney and I have really only had late nights and very early mornings together. I move toward the end of the aisle when I spot someone I recognize coming toward me. He’s dressed like he might be going to a Christmas party in black slacks and a black button-down under an overcoat with a bottle of wine tucked under his arm.

“I’ll call you right back, beautiful,” I say into the phone before I press the end button.

He must recognize me as well because his face turns to anger. “I always wondered what I would say if I ever saw you again,” he starts.

I’ve always known what exactly I would say, so I do. “You tried to destroy her family, Parker. *My fucking family*. You cheated on her and then you refused to trust her...”

“Because she was fucking you!” He points at me, and I am definitely not about to allow him to fucking yell in my face.

I glower at him. “Not the whole time, Parker.”

“I knew about you the whole time.” He lowers his voice.

I do not think Whitney knew that. “What?”

“I didn’t know who you were exactly but, in the beginning, when I met Whitney, she talked in her sleep sometimes.” I frown, never knowing Whitney to talk in her sleep, and I’ve stayed awake at night watching her for hours. “She would talk about you. ‘JP.’”

“What did she say?”

“‘Don’t go,’ usually.” *Well shit.* Unease washes over me thinking about how heartbroken Whitney must have been to be talking about me subconsciously. “When I was in New York and you showed up at her house she said your name and... I just started thinking that the J in JP could be for

Jacob. The timeline matched. You'd been gone. When she broke up with me, she told me it was because of you. At the time, I didn't know you were the same person..." He narrows his eyes judgmentally. "You were really sleeping with your goddaughter?"

"That's none of your goddamn business," I snap. I was already being judged on some level by over half of the people in my life, I didn't need it from this asshole who didn't even matter.

"Except it was, because she was my fucking fiancée."

I let out a sigh. "It was a shitty thing that we both did and I'm sorry that we hurt you but what you did in retaliation was unforgivable. Dropping that bomb to her parents? That was ugly and vengeful."

"So is cheating, so as far as I'm concerned, we're even."

I take a step closer to him. "I ought to put my fist through your face for causing Whitney the amount of pain you did. For sticking your—what I assume to be a tiny—dick in another woman, for trying to control her and then for trying to destroy her family. I ought to kick your ass." I growl at him. "But it's the holidays, and I'm feeling generous, so consider this a Christmas present." I take a step back. "But if you ever so much as breathe the same air as her again, you will regret it." I don't wait for his response before I turn around again. "And if you ever find yourself in the need of medical attention? Do not come to my hospital."

EPILOGUE

Whitney

Two Years Later

“Are you sure you’re ready?” my father says as we watch Chloe, my maid of honor, begin her procession down that infamous aisle toward the love of my life.

Jacob Price.

I am marrying JP today.

Oh my God.

Goose bumps erupt on my flesh at the thought and I can’t even stop the squeal from leaving my lips. “Yes!” I turn to my dad, who’s equally teary-eyed. “Absolutely.” I grin. “Is he ready?”

He chuckles, blinking the tears away. “What did I tell you both about making me switch roles between your dad and his best friend?”

It had been a long road of crying and even more arguments but my parents had finally accepted me and Jacob together. Jacob’s relationship with my parents wasn’t ever the same as it was before, but if possible, it had transformed into something even better.

I giggle and give him my best eyes, imploring him with a look just as the song indicating it’s time for me to take that walk begins to play. “Yeah, Whit. He’s ready.” He links his arm through mine as the doors open to the outside and I’m greeted with the eyes of one hundred people staring at me. “I’ve known him over half his life and I’ve never seen him in love before.” He nods to the end of the aisle where Jacob stands with Trey and my brother behind him staring at me with tears in his eyes.

I have a veil over my eyes and I have to be at least forty feet away but our

eyes are locked as I make my way down the aisle stepping on the white rose petals beneath my feet.

I meet my mom's teary eyes as she rests her hand over her heart. *I love you*, she mouths.

I love you too. I mouth back just as we make it to the top of the aisle.

Jacob's eyes finally leave mine as he runs his gaze down the length of my gown and then back up to my face.

"Wow," he whispers.

My father slides my veil up from over my face and kisses my cheek. He places my hand in Jacob's and moves to stand directly behind him. "You are so beautiful," he murmurs quietly. "How are you mine?" he says, his eyes wide and unblinking like he can't believe I'm standing in front of him.

The rest of the ceremony flies by and then he's leaning down, only an inch or so above me and his hands cradle my face like I'm the most precious thing in the world. "Mrs. Price."

And then his lips are mine, kissing me so deeply that I hear my father clear his throat behind him and Chloe chuckles from behind me.

When I pull away, I catch the fleeting look in his eye that said, *the second I have you alone*.



Six Months Later

"You are the most beautiful woman in this restaurant," JP whispers in my ear as he presses kisses down my neck. "I can't wait to get you back to the hotel." Jacob and I had flown to Aspen for the weekend because it was December and also the first time he'd been off work for three consecutive days and he wanted to, and I quote, "have uninterrupted time with my wife's pussy." Now we are sitting in a rounded booth, his entire body wrapped around mine because he hasn't been able to take his hands off of me since we got here yesterday. "As a matter of fact, why did we even come down here? We should have just ordered up to the room."

I smile at him, knowing that he's really going to want to get out of here

the second I give him the news I've been sitting on since yesterday. I'm actually surprised he didn't figure out when I had forgone champagne on the flight over but I think he was so exhausted from three consecutive eighty-hour workweeks and also so desperate to get inside of me that he didn't realize that I hadn't had a sip of alcohol since we got here.

"Dr. and Mrs. Price, good evening. I'm Victor, the sommelier. Can I interest you in some wine pairings? Dr. Price called ahead so I know your tastes, ma'am. Care to try one?"

"Oh!" I smile, not wanting Victor, no matter how lovely he is to be a part of this moment when I tell Jacob he's going to be a father. "Can you just give us a second?"

"Of course, ma'am. I'll be back shortly."

"Do you not want wine? We can get something else," he says, turning over the menu. I grab his hand and lace it with mine.

"JP." I bite my bottom lip.

"Yes, beautiful." He pulls my hand to his lips and kisses it gently.

"I... can't drink."

His eyes widen and a large grin spreads across his perfect mouth. "No."

I nod. "Yeah."

"You're... pregnant?"

I nod again, the tears falling down my cheeks as he looks at my stomach and then back up at me. "We're having a baby, JP."

"Oh my God." He pulls me into his arms and drops his forehead to mine. "Whitney," he whispers before he kisses me gently. "I want to do so much more than that, but I don't think the restaurant would appreciate me fucking you on this table."

I giggle in response.

"We're going to have a baby."

"Are you happy?" I ask through my tears.

"Baby, I'm so happy." He kisses me again. "We're going to order in." He gets out of the booth and holds his hand out for me.

"Wait, really!"

"Yes, really." He gives me a look that sets my whole body on fire and I sink my teeth into my bottom lip as I think about what he's got in store for me tonight.

"Okay, daddy. I'm ready."

Eleven Months Later

“And that little one is how I became your daddy.” I watch as my husband walks our little girl, Sophia, around the room, having given her a very detailed synopsis of mine and her father’s relationship.

“Now that you’ve thoroughly scarred our child for life, can I feed her now?” I’m rocking back and forth on a chair, my eyes struggling to stay open after JP kept me up half the night talking my ear off about the pros of having Irish twins. *Meaning I’d be getting pregnant next month.*

His eyes dart to mine. “Listen, I am just setting all the boundaries now because you know...” He sighs before dropping a gentle kiss on our daughter’s forehead before putting her in my arms. “I hate to say this, and if you tell your father, I’ll deny it, but I will murder any of my friends that even THINK about it.”

I shake my head at my husband hearing him reject the very thing that we begged my parents to accept. “Mmm mm mmm. Well that’s a shame.”

“I’m a hypocrite and I own it. I don’t care. No. No. Hell no.” He rubs a hand over his eyes. “How didn’t your dad kill me?” I roll my eyes as I begin to nurse her and he kneels next to me. “I love you.” He turns my head to kiss my lips gently. “I love our daughter and our life and... I’m really glad your dad didn’t kill me,” he jokes before he gets up. “I’ll be right back,” he tells me as he kisses my forehead.

“Sorry, sweetie.” I kiss her forehead as her sweet brown eyes that look exactly like mine flutter shut. “Unfortunately, I think Daddy is serious. But don’t worry, Grandma and Grandpa will probably take your side out of spite.”

The End

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Check out *Love Unexpected*,
a stepfather/stepdaughter romance!

PROLOGUE

Stassia

The first time I saw him, it was love at first sight. At least my ten-year-old brain, that had watched too many romance movies with my incurable romantic mother wanted to believe. He was standing across the playground talking to the Social Studies teacher whose name I could never remember. He was new from just a few towns over, I later learned, after his wife died in a fatal car accident leaving him widowed and devastated.

It was a warm Spring day, one of the first of the season and I found myself getting hot under my sweater that my mother made me promise not to take off. I pulled at it, wishing I had the courage to disobey just this once, and sighed.

Mark Erickson, this stupid bully that my mother told me only picked on me because he was sweet on me, ran past me, knocking me over and breaking my line of sight with my new love. I hit the mulch, but I didn't get up. I just stared up at this beautiful man willing him to look at me. He looked like Prince Eric from *The Little Mermaid*, with jet black hair and tanned skin. I couldn't see his eyes, but I bet they were blue just like his. I cocked my head to the side briefly wondering what it would be like to be part of his world.

The second time was later that week. He entered my math class just as we began a test. I set down my pencil, watching him move towards the front to quietly talk to my teacher. I tried to angle my ear towards them just to hear his voice. *What did he sound like?* I got up and moved towards the sharpener as it was in the front of the room. My heart pounded with every step, knowing that I'd get to hear his voice any second now. *And I did.*

Soft. Smooth. Rich.

I imagined it was what my father would sound like, *if I had one*.

The third, and perhaps the most pertinent time, he spoke to me. He told me he liked my pink overalls that I begged my mother not to make me wear. He gave me a grin, baring all his teeth and I almost melted. My heart slammed against my little ribcage and I couldn't help but feel like I was floating.

The beautiful man noticed me.

Maybe he'd love me one day.

Maybe he'd kiss me like they do at the end of the movies.

But I was wrong.

So, fucking wrong.

Because although I saw him first and told myself at the young age of ten that I was madly in love with this beautiful man, said beautiful man fell in love with someone else.

My mother.

I was ten years old when I fell in love.

Two years later, I fell in *hate*.

[Get Love Unexpected here](#)

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soon, k?

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bestselling author and lover of forbidden romances, tacos, coffee, and wine. Q.B. Tyler gives readers sometimes angsty, sometimes emotional but always deliciously steamy romances featuring sassy heroines and the heroes that worship them. She's known for writing forbidden (and sometimes taboo) romances, so if that's your thing, you've come to the right place. When she's not writing, you can usually find her on Instagram (definitely procrastinating), shopping or at brunch.

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