



ACTOR

SILVER FOX A-LISTERS: BOOK 1

CLEO WHITE

Actor

Silver Fox A-Listers: Book 1

Cleo White

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Trigger Warning

This story contains mentions of mental illness/depression and suicidal thoughts. Please read at your own discretion.

If you or someone you know needs help, please call the suicide hotline.

1-800-273-TALK

Chapter One

Noa

“Wait, what?” I press my trembling hand over my mouth, trying to keep my breathing steady, even as my heart hammers against my ribcage like I’ve just finished running a mile.

Through the phone pressed to my ear, I hear my agent, Miles, laugh. This is a practical joke. Miles is an asshole. There’s *no way*-

“You got the part, Noa. They’re sending over contracts for me to look over later today. I have the production schedule in my hand. There’s a press release going out next week. This is happening.”

“But-“ I stare blankly at the bathroom wall. I can’t seem to process that this is real life, never mind string together a coherent sentence. “I thought Kennedy Phillips got the part! I thought it was over!”

I’d known it was the long shot of all long shots when Miles managed to get me an audition. The movie is a 1920’s period piece, based on the big, best-selling novel ‘Price of Valor’, which is one of those books that high school English classes write reports on. There’s already a ton of press about the upcoming adaptation.

It’s about a hero of World War One, James Castor, who returns home and has to solve the murder of his wife while dealing with PTSD, the loss of his son on the battlefield, and navigating a relationship with the daughter he ignored for most of her childhood. The characters are amazing, the script is beautiful, and while the part of James Castor’s daughter Sybil was perfect for me, I still never expected to actually *get it*.

Sure enough, when weeks passed and we didn’t hear anything, Miles had made some calls and found out that that Kennedy Phillips, a well-known model dipping her toe in acting, had been cast.

That was months ago. I’d been bummed but unsurprised and moved on to my usual schedule of tax preparation

commercials and filming my part of cheerleader #3 in a teen TV show.

Miles laughs again, and I swear I've never heard him sound so gleeful. "Rumor is that she was arrested for drunk driving a few days ago, and the producers don't want her attached to the movie in case the press gets ahold of the story. I'm guessing they think it would ruin their awards chances."

Awards. Holy shit. I've never even *been* to an awards show, never mind worked on a project which might be nominated.

"That's not all." Miles tells me, with all the barely suppressed glee of a man who's clearly been holding back a bombshell for the sake of dramatic effect. "*Cash Lowell* is playing James Castor."

I plop down on the toilet seat, full on hyperventilating now.

Cash Lowell isn't just an A-Lister, he's a legend. At only forty-something, he's won every award out there and now does all kinds of charity stuff to give underprivileged kids access to arts education. Whenever he takes on a project, it's big. Like... *big, big.*

He was also my adolescent crush, but we won't talk about that.

I won't just be in the background eating a croissant in the café scene, either. I'll be sitting across from him. Working with him. I bet he'll have to learn my name.

Miles chuckles. "You there, kid?"

"I'm here." I confirm numbly, staring at the floor. "I just... You're *sure* they said *me*?" Now that the impossible reality is beginning to sink in, so is the fear. How could I possibly hold my own as a supporting character to a man like Cash Lowell?

I'm not one of the beautiful, poised starlets who get opportunities like this, I'm a theater nerd from Virginia! The only reason I'm able to be here in LA is because my grandma

passed away last year and left me just enough money to quit my barista job and give this impossible dream a shot.

Until a year ago, the biggest thing I'd ever done was community theater.

Coming here was a wild leap of faith, but the ugly truth is, I never expected it to actually work. I wanted to be able to say I tried, to have a few good stories and be happy that I believed in myself.

I didn't want to regret not going for it.

This though? Acting in a major movie with someone like Cash Lowell? It's like I've been thrown into the middle of the ocean, and I only just conquered the kiddie pool.

Miles sighs. "You're talented, Noa. And you know I don't say that shit to stroke your ego. I told you that you'd do well the day we met."

A hysterical laugh bubbles from my lips. "I thought you meant *dog food ads* talented, not *working with Cash Lowell* talented!"

I can practically see Miles rolling his eyes. "You wanted this, yes? You want to be an actor? Well kid, congrats. You are. Now get your ass down here at four to sign."

"But." I protest weakly, searching for a loophole that would allow me to slide back into my unremarkable existence.

I want this, I always have, so why do I feel like I'm about to have a nervous breakdown now that I actually might just be able to have it?

"Listen to me, Noa. I'd be worried if you *weren't* nervous about this. It's a big deal, but you wouldn't have been cast if they didn't think you were up to it."

Right now, I don't feel up to getting off the toilet, never mind starring in a major motion picture. Still, a fierce little flame ignites in my chest at his words.

My parents had begged me to go to college instead of pursuing acting, my old coworkers laughed at me, even my friends warned me it wasn't a good idea, most days I felt like

this had all been a mistake but today... Today one of the biggest directors in Hollywood decided I'm right for this. Today somebody who's *someone* decided I could be too.

"Okay." I hear myself agree over the blood rushing to my ears. "I'll be there at four."

Normally, when you're cast in a role this big, you get months to prepare. At least, that's what I've heard. I'm pretty sure you *at least* get more than twenty-four hours before a table read with some of the biggest actors in the industry.

That's what I'll have though. Kennedy's ill-timed DUI occurred only a week before the first time the cast will all sit down together and read through the script. They went through all the old audition tapes looking for a suitable replacement, and that's how I ended up getting the call that would change my life.

I'm somehow both excited and terrified out of my mind when my bus pulls up outside the EWP Studios in downtown LA after a sleepless night. There's a guard at the gate and I half expect him to send me packing and tell me there's been a mistake when I hand over my ID.

He doesn't though, just directs me through the lot to an entrance where a few people are lingering outside, talking.

They all look round as I walk across the lot and my stomach flips when I recognize Meredith Hallston, the film's director, amongst them. She's about fifty with iron colored hair, bright eyes and is wearing a full-length wool coat despite it being September in southern California.

"My god, she's even lovelier in person." Meredith says aloud when she sees me approaching and my cheeks color when she looks to the man at her right, who is watching me appraisingly, a cigarette pressed between his fingers. "Ken, didn't I say she'd be a little dove?"

Ken nods obligingly. "You did say that, Meredith. Welcome, Noa." He holds out a large hand when I approach. "Ken Fallon, production design."

I shake hands all around before Meredith links her arm through mine and leads me inside. “You’re right on time. How utterly refreshing.” She pats my hand. “I think we’ll get along just fine, Noa. No need to be nervous about all this, we’re all just people.”

The room where the read through will be held is smaller than I expected. Little folded name cards with the actor’s name and their role, copies of the script and bottles of water in front are placed neatly around a long conference table. My eyes scan the cards, chest tightening as I see famous name after famous name.

Then, right in the middle of the A-List lineup, me.

Noa Peters

Sybil Castor

Meredith heads off to speak to a few besuited men standing in the corner, and leaves me to linger awkwardly by the table, trying to look like I know what I’m doing.

Can you be fired for being awkward?

Just for something to do, I wander over to the coffee machine in the corner and fix myself a cup, acutely aware of the hushed voices across the room and the sound of muffled laughter outside the window where the production staff had been when I arrived.

I’ve got this. It’s going to be fine.

I take a sip of the coffee, and gag, spiting it right back out into the cup. It’s terrible, and I’m just wondering who buys instant coffee for a production with a fifty-million-dollar budget, when a low chuckle sounds from beside me.

My whole body goes tense when I turn and meet the bright blue eyes of the man who’d appeared right next to me.

Cash Lowell.

He’s dressed in jeans and a form fitting t-shirt, his silver hair just a little too long and he’s smiling right at me, with dimples and everything. Oh god.

“I’m sorry.” I squeak, realizing he’s probably waiting for me to move so he can get a cup of terrible coffee. I jump out of the way of the table, and regret it immediately. “Oh, shit!”

At my abrupt movement, the black sludge masquerading as coffee sloshed out of the cup, soaking through the neat white blouse I’d splurged on for today, burning my skin and leaving an angry brown stain from my boobs to my bellybutton.

Shit. Shit. Shit.

“Damn it.” Cash sighs, grabbing a stack of napkins from the table beside us and handing them to me. “I’m sorry, that’s my fault, I snuck up on you.”

Even through my horror and embarrassment, I register that his voice is *great*. I’ve seen his movies, caught a few interviews, and somehow that never occurred to me until now. Maybe because I was distracted by his face.

I dab at the front of my shirt, feeling sick. I don’t have time to go home and change, I live all the way across town. This will have to do.

“Do you know where there’s a bathroom?” I ask him softly, dropping my voice so Meredith and the executives she’s talking to don’t hear me. The last thing I need is to be flagged unprofessional five minutes out the gate. “I’m sure it will be fine. I’m just going to use some water.”

Cash’s mouth twists and he shakes his head, glaring at the stain like it’s personally offensive to him. “I have a spare shirt in my car. Come on, I’ll lend it to you.” His eyes dart up from the stain to meet mine and my stomach flips. “I’m Cash. I don’t think we’ve met...”

“Noa.”

I’ve never met someone before that I felt this drawn to. It’s not just the fact that he is who he is, there’s something else... something more.

Like he feels it too, Cash smiles and holds out a hand to take mine. Heat seems to gather over my skin in the places it touched his, even after it falls back to my side.

“It’s nice to meet you, Noa.”

Chapter Two

Cash

I don't remember the last time I had to actively remind myself to play it cool.

Somewhere along the way, and the hell if I can remember when, life stopped making me feel... Anything.

I didn't get excited or nervous or even angry. I was just this numb, uninspired shadow walking around, smiling for the camera at the right times and doing just enough to keep up the facade of being a real human being.

I know what that's called, my head wasn't so far in the sand I couldn't diagnose the most common mental illness known to man.

The thing about being depressed though, at least how it's been for me, is you keep fucking expecting it to go away. If I just get this role, I'll be happy. If I buy this sports car, that should work. If I become one of the most god-damn famous men in the country, *then I'll fucking feel something*.

Until you wake up one day and wonder if there's any point to it at all. Pretending, faking it, will drain the energy right out of you. And then, if you don't have the soul *or* the drive, what the hell are you left with?

Nothing.

Some tiny flicker of self-preservation inside me managed to break above the surface, though. Long enough to force me to make a deal with myself: *Try to get help once, just once, and if it doesn't work, then you can give up*.

The next six months were spent in an in-patient mental health treatment facility. I paid for it all out of pocket, told no-one where I was going and finally addressed the gaping chasm of nothingness inside me that had been growing larger by the year.

It was the hardest, most painful thing I've ever done.

I've only been back to my normal life for a few months now. In some ways it's better, in others it's worse. Sometimes the pain is so fucking brutal it's tempting to slip back into that blessed numbness.

But then, I saw the tape.

It was by chance, on one of my shittier days. I had little interest in the movie we were about to get working on, but I did hear through the grapevine that one of the main actresses had her contract terminated at the very last minute and the search was on to replace her.

I'd gone by the studio to sign some paperwork and stopped in to say hello to Meredith on my way out. We'd worked together before and I would even consider her a friend, which was the only reason I hadn't pulled out of this damned movie to begin with.

I found her, sitting at a table with a few other executives, watching the audition tape of a young woman.

I'd never felt anything like it, never had such a visceral, whole-body reaction to simply seeing the face of another person. My head spun, my chest tightened, my cock twitched, and warmth spread to every inch of my skin.

It wasn't just that she was beautiful, though she was the most stunning creative I'd ever seen, but something deeper. Primal and possessive. Like something in my soul had blinked awake, stared at her and sighed in relief.

Was it possible to miss someone in retrospect? To be fucking bereft that it took so long for you to find them, that you grieve those lost years?

Every single thing about this woman wasn't just perfect. It was *right*.

Through the stunned haze, I heard Meredith speak. "She's lovely, isn't she? Who's her agent? Hm. She's very good, just what we were looking for in terms of looks too. I just don't think I can justify casting an unknown in a project this big. Keep the tape though, maybe for that cheerleader movie next summer--"

“No.” I heard myself bark, making everyone at the table jump and look around at me in shock.

“Cash!” Said Meredith in surprise, rising to kiss my cheek. “What on Earth are you doing here?”

I nodded toward the screen, not taking my eyes off the now paused face of the unknown woman. “She’s reading for Sybil?”

Someone cleared their throat out of my line of sight and Meredith laughed nervously. “Um, yes, but I don’t think she’s quite what we’re looking for.”

I finally looked away from the screen to glower at her. “You just *said* she was what you were looking for. So, what’s the problem?”

Meredith recovered her bravado and scowled at me. “This is a directorial decision, Cash. We’ll let you know who we decide on, and-“

I was being an asshole, Meredith was completely in the right to put me in my place, and I couldn’t give less of a shit. “I want her as Sybil, or I’m out.”

It was the most illogical, impulsive, ridiculous thing I’d ever done, and it was fucking thrilling that another person could have that effect on me.

Not just any person though, *her*.

She was different, special, and as I walked back out of the room, I looked to the screen one more time and saw her name in the bottom right corner.

Noa Peters (21)

Meredith had done as I said.

She’s an established, award-winning director but that wouldn’t stop her from losing her contract if the studio found out she hurt their relationship with me.

Still, it took another week for the pieces to come together and to get word that the part of Sybil would officially be played by Noa Peters.

I'm not sure what I've been expecting to happen. I'm not oblivious to my own good looks, but it doesn't diminish the fact that I'm forty-one now and have to take a handful of antidepressants just to get through the day.

She's too young for me.

Too healthy.

Too happy.

I can't force myself in and dull her shining, promising life. *She'll be playing my daughter for fucks sake.*

I had to meet her though. Had to know the person who made me react so instinctively, so *emotionally*. The woman who bewitched me, just from seeing her face on a screen.

Her feeling it too? It hadn't even occurred to me. Never even crossed my mind that this might not be a solitary fall.

But as Noa Peters jabbars away nervously, her cheeks burning pink and her top stained with coffee, I smile.

I *really* smile.

I'm convinced that a heart has never gone from zero to full so quickly.

"You really don't have to do this. I was jumpy. I'm super nervous, you know? Of course, you don't, you're Cash Lowell. God, this is right up there with the time I stepped in horse poop at that birthday party."

I can't help but laugh, my cheeks aching from smiling so hard, as Noa and I come to a stop beside my car. She buries her face in her hands and shakes her head, groaning.

"Hey." I nudge her chin with my finger, forcing her eyes up to meet mine. Just that tiny contact is enough to make warmth spread through my whole body.

I want to make her happy, want to put her at ease and erase the tense little crease between her eyebrows. So, I say the first thing that comes to mind, and immediately regret it. "There's no way this was as bad as the horse poop."

Noa stares at me, jaw slack, and then the pair of us burst into laughter.

We laugh so hard that a few tears escape the corner of Noa's eyes and my whole chest fills with triumph. A seagull sitting atop a nearby car takes off in alarm at the noise and a man walking to his car keeps glancing over his shoulder at us.

Neither of us care though.

When we're finally able to draw breath again, Noa wipes her eyes, beaming up at me. "Wow. We might both be lunatics. Thank you for that, I've been so stressed since I got the news." She nods back at the building with a little shrug, like being anxious about such a big opportunity is something to be embarrassed about.

"It's a big deal." I agree, remembering how I felt all those years ago when I got *the call*. "Meredith is great though, you'll learn a lot from working with her. We can exchange contact information if you like, before we leave, I'm happy to sit down with you and run lines before production begins. I'll even buy you dinner and you can pick my brain, so you know what to expect."

Hell, I'm so gone for this woman, I wouldn't mind if all she wanted from me was help with her career. The way she looks at me though, I instinctively know that's *not* all Noa wants.

She bites her lip and nods, gazing up at me from beneath a thick fringe of pale lashes. "I'd like that. Thank you, Cash."

A nearby car door slams and Noa jumps, pulling her phone from her pocket to check the time. "Shit." She curses quietly.

"Here." I open my trunk hurriedly and pull a clean black t-shirt from my bag. It's faded and soft, with a worn image of my college logo on the front, and the brand new, possessive alpha-male inside me wants to beat his chest when Noa slips it on right over her stained top.

"Not exactly the professional vibe I was going for, but it *is* comfy." Noa sighs, examining her reflection in the tinted back-

seat window. She straightens up when she realizes I'm still watching, and her smile is like stepping into the sun.

I've made a career out of playing the leading man. I've worked with some of the most beautiful women in the world, and not a single one of them has made me feel even the faintest shadow of what Noa has evoked in me after ten minutes in her presence.

I'm a pragmatic man, I've never believed in love at first sight or soulmates or any of that nonsense, but every single piece of me now is screaming that I was wrong.

She makes me feel like I was wrong.

We walk back to the building in silence, our arms brushing and when I hurry a few steps forward to open the door for her, I'm rewarded by her sweet smile of thanks.

The door to the conference room is open and a great deal more voices can be heard since we were last there. It's still informal, everyone is just getting the pleasantries out of the way before we get started.

I've seen the full cast and production crew list, I've worked with nearly everyone in that room before, but as Noa hesitates just outside the door, I stop too.

"Hey." I say quietly. For the second time today, I nudge her chin up to look at me, and my heart lurches in my chest. We're standing close together, much closer than two people who just met generally would, but as Noa's lips part and she gazes up at me with her expression filled with desire, nothing has ever felt more right. "There's nothing to worry about."

A nervous little laugh bubbles from her lips. "It's just so sudden, you know? I knew I didn't get this part, but here I am." She leans into my hand, which has curled around the side of her neck, my thumb rubbing soothing circles over her pulse point. "I know I earned this, and they chose me, I guess I just keep waiting for someone to jump out and tell me it's all been a joke."

I feel a little squirm of guilt at the thought of how Noa actually got the part but shove it away just as quickly. She *did*

deserve it, and if me pushing for her was enough to get her the part and jumpstart her career, then I don't regret it. I won't destroy her confidence now by telling her the truth.

"You *do* deserve this, Noa. I saw your tape, I know what you can do. Now go in there and show the rest of them."

Noa's lips part and for one mad moment, I imagine leaning forward to kiss her. This isn't the time though, or the place, and as much as I want her, I refuse to rush this.

She opens her mouth to speak, just a throat clears behind us and we both jump, turning to see Micah Kelly, an old colleague of mine and another member of the cast. He raises his eyebrows and smirks before moving around us and into the table read room.

When I look back to Noa, her cheeks are burning, but she hasn't moved away from me.

"I guess we should get in there." She smiles sheepishly and I finally step back, immediately mourning the absence of her warm skin against my hand.

"Did you drive here?"

Noa shakes her head. "Took the bus."

"Wait for me." I tell her firmly. "After the read. I'll drive you home."

Noa nods in agreement, her eyes sparkling. "Okay. I'll wait."

Chapter Three

Noa

‘Price of Valor’ is going to be filmed in a small town in Pennsylvania. My shooting schedule is demanding, the number of scenes I have is second only to Cash, so I’ll be on set from the day shooting starts to when we wrap, ten weeks later.

“I like filming in small towns like this.” Cash says quietly in my ear. We’re nestled together in the back of a production van, heading from the airport to the set with half a dozen other cast members around us. His arm is over the back of my seat and the cup of coffee he bought me at the airport is warming my hands.

I’ve seen a few knowing smirks and nods in our direction amongst the other cast and crew members. I know what they’re thinking, hell, I wish they were right, but we’re not a couple.

I hadn’t really had time to wonder what working with Cash would be like, what *he* would be like. Even if I did though, I’m not sure I ever would have imagined the sweet, considerate, down to earth man who texts me silly memes and makes me laugh every day.

He’s famous. Like... really famous.

When we’re together, it’s easy to forget that. He’s just Cash and I’m just Noa and, against all odds, we just... fit.

I like him so much.

Cash is kind and funny and endlessly patient with all my anxiety and craziness about the film. If someone had told me a month ago that I’d be cast as a leading role in a major motion picture and falling in love with Cash Lowell, I’d have laughed myself silly.

Now though, with my thigh pressing against his and the smell of his cologne invading my senses, I know that the “*falling*” part of this is probably behind me now.

He hasn’t made a move though.

Sometimes I think he wants to, when I see that flicker of desire in his eyes or our hugs last just a little too long to be strictly friendly, but I can't quite shake the worry that he's just passing time with me. Maybe he sees me as a friend and colleague or, worse, the industry newbie he feels the need to take under his wing.

He's Cash Lowell and I, despite my recent casting, am still definitely no one.

I watch the rolling farmland passing by outside the window. We're close to my hometown, it's only a few hours south, and my parents have no idea I'm here.

I haven't told them about the movie yet. Probably because I keep expecting it all to be pulled out from under me and can't face their knowing sighs, like this was exactly what they expected to happen. No, I'll tell them when filming has wrapped, or when the trailer comes out, or before the premier.

Whenever I manage to wrap my head around this really, truly, actually happening.

"Where are you from?" In an effort to distract myself, I turn to look at Cash. "I just realized I have no idea."

He smiles. "Los Angeles."

"*Really?*" My voice drops in disbelief. "I didn't know people were actually *from* LA, I thought you just kind of popped up there in your twenties."

Cash shakes his head and nudges me with his knee, still smiling. He's *always* smiling. "Born and raised. I went away for college but came back right after."

Outside the van, farmland is starting to give way to the outskirts of a small town. The houses are old Victorians, and a rock wall lines the edge of the lush forest beyond. It's a beautiful place, and I can see immediately why it was chosen for the movie. It feels like we've just stepped into a storybook.

"Look alive!" One of the other actors, Micah, calls from his seat beside the driver. "One of the PA's texted me to let me know there are some locals waiting in front of the inn for pictures."

Sure enough, when the van comes to a stop in front of a sprawling manner house with “Little Broom Bed & Breakfast” carefully painted on a sign above the door, about fifty people are watching beyond a partition splitting the sidewalk on either side of the inn.

They all cheer when Micah throws open the door, smiling and waving good naturedly before heading over to smile for selfies and sign a few t-shirts with the logo for his TV show on them.

Everyone else after him elicits pretty much the same response, until Cash ducks out and the whole crowd goes insane.

I watch, clutching my backpack by the van while he moves from person to person, smiling at them like he’s excited to see them and nodding at whatever they’re saying. He takes pictures, signs scraps of paper and even kisses a blushing, little old lady on the cheek.

“Come on.” Cash says when he manages to break away from the crowd, rejoining me immediately and guiding me up to the inn with his hand pressed against my lower back.

I’m hyperaware of several dozen sets of eyes on me as we walk up to the building. It’s beyond weird, watching people react that way to Cash, and it’s even weirder to think that once this movie comes out, there might be people who recognize me too.

As we all file inside, my heart soars.

The inn is adorable.

The flustered inn owner hands out keys and directs everyone up to their rooms, stammering and tripping over her words with ever new, famous face. The poor woman almost keels over when Cash compliments her inn.

“It’s so pretty here.” I sigh the moment I unlock my door, crossing the glossy floors to flop back onto my bed. Someone has already brought my bags up, and they’re stacked neatly beside the closet.

Cash, whose room is just across the hall from mine, lingers in the doorway. “It is.” He agrees, though he doesn’t look anywhere but at me.

Warmth settles in my lower belly as I prop myself up on my elbows and meet his gaze. “Not a bad place to spend ten weeks. Better than the motel you told me about.”

He shudders. “I was on a first name basis with the roaches before we finished filming.”

I saw that movie back in high school. He had a sex scene with Nora Witley that inspired more dirty dreams than I’ll ever admit. Something of my thoughts must show on my face because Cash raises his eyebrow at me, smirking. “Something you’d like to share with the class, Miss. Peters?”

I shake my head, trying to arrange my face into something resembling casual nonchalance. All I can think about is the brief glimpse of his bare butt you could see in that scene though and my cheeks ache there’s so much blood rushing to them.

“It’s nothing.”

Cash’s throaty chuckle makes my thighs clench reflexively. “*Nothing* has you blushing, Noa. Did you happen to *see* ‘Northern Heights’?”

I flop back flat on the bed and cover my face with both hands. God this is embarrassing, as if Cash needs any more reason to see me as a child, now I’m losing it over the same view of his butt millions of other people had.

Also, if I ever meet Nora Witley, I might stab her in the boob.

“Go.” I laughingly beg him, but Cash just huffs quietly, I hear the door shut and a pair of footsteps approach the bed.

“Noa.” The mattress creaks as another weight settles on it beside me, and a big, warm hand wraps around my wrist, pulling my hand away from my face so I’m forced to meet a familiar pair of blue eyes.

He's leaning down over me, and as I inhale shakily, my breasts brush his chest.

Oh god.

So slowly it's like he's expecting me to turn away, Cash leans down and kisses me.

My whole chest expands and I whimper into his mouth, winding my fingers through his silver hair as our lips move slowly against each other, like neither of us can quite believe this is happening.

He tastes so good.

Cash seems to be just as rocked by this as I am because as I press my hand gently against his chest, he groans, his free hand coming down to cradle my jaw and pull me more securely against him our tentative, slow kisses turn desperate.

His hips are covering mine now, and I can feel the rigid length of his cock pressing insistently against my lower belly. My center is slick and aching and, half out of my mind with wanting him, I hitch my leg over his hip, opening myself up for him.

"Noa." Cash groans, breaking our kiss to press his forehead against mine. "God, you have no idea how long I've wanted this."

"Not as long as me." I nip at his jaw, my heart so full it could burst. I feel almost drunk on the knowledge that *he wants me too*.

We're pressed so close that his laugh vibrates through me. "*Northern Heights* ' doesn't count, Noa."

I smile too, tugging him back down to steal another kiss, two, three...

"Oh no, you don't." Cash grins, catching my wrist when my hand starts to slip between us in the direction of the thick erection still pressing against me. I'm no expert, but he *feels* big, and I would like confirmation. "We're going to talk first."

"Talk?" My hormones are definitely in the driver's seat. Normally I *love* talking to Cash, but right now all I want to do

is push him over and grind myself all over him.

He chuckles again. “Yes, Noa. *Talk*. Then you can use me for my body.”

“Don’t be ridiculous.” I mutter back, trying my best not to pout. “Your face is excellent too.”

Cash shakes his head, clearly biting back another laugh. “I’m going to have my hands full with you, aren’t I?”

My smile is so big that my cheeks ache. “Maybe. Are you complaining?”

His eyes flash and I stuck in a gasp when his lips come down to graze my neck, raising goosebumps over every inch of my body. I’ve never felt like this before, needy and desperate and so wet that I wouldn’t be surprised if I left a wet spot on Cash’s crotch through my pants.

“Noa.” He rumbles warningly as my hips start to roll against him.

“You started it.” I pant out, and Cash snorts, pulling back to meet my eyes again.

“I guess I did.” His eyes search my face, like he’s looking for signs of regret. He won’t find any though. “I want to do this right, Noa. I don’t want you to think I’m not serious about you, or that this is about sex.”

There’s something in his voice, and my whole chest fills with something almost too big to contain as I realize it’s vulnerability. This beautiful, sweet, considerate man is afraid I won’t want what he wants.

“Cash.” I curl my hand through his hair again and echo his words. “I don’t want *you* to think I’m not serious about you, or that this is about sex. I’ve never felt like this before. I know I’m young and I’m supposed to do the Hollywood thing and sleep around, but that’s not me and-“ I force myself to say the most embarrassing part of all of this. “I’ve never done this before. *Any* of it.”

Cash’s gaze darkens and the hand on my wrist tightens just for a second. “You’re a virgin?”

I want to bury my face in his chest in mortification, but I force myself not to. “I’m not like, *waiting for marriage*, or anything.” I shrug feebly. “I’ve just never dated and then I was busy and-“

Cash kisses me, effectively stopping my rambling in its tracks.

“We’ll work it out.” He promises when we break apart again, panting. “I’m in this, Noa.”

It feels like my heart has been stripped bare and everything I’ve always wanted is right here, holding me, as I gaze up at him and nod. “I’m in this too, Cash.”

Chapter Four

Cash

“I’m in a good place.”

On the screen of my computer, Dr. Keller straightens his glasses, looking out at me appraisingly. “I’m glad to hear it, Cash. Are you still seeing-“ He goes to check his notes but I beat him to the punch.

“Noa.”

His lips twitch behind his moustache. “Yes, Noa. Are you two still involved?” The ridiculous grin that spreads over my face at the thought of just how *involved* Noa and I are, must be all the answer he needs.

My therapist chuckles and shakes his head, making a note on the paper next to him. “That good, huh?”

“She’s...” I try to think of a single word to describe what Noa is and fail. Incredible, devoted, kind, talented, sweet? All true, but also somehow insufficient. “Become very important to me.” I finally finish.

We’re only a few weeks into shooting, a few weeks of stolen kisses and sneaking into each other’s rooms at night to make out like horny teenagers. Noa makes me feel young again, inspired, and excited about my life for the first time in years.

“Does she know about your depression?”

Leave it to Dr. Keller to throw a wet blanket over my newfound joy.

I scratch the back of my neck guiltily. “It’s still new. I don’t want to put that on her.”

Dr. Keller raises his eyebrows. “Do you think Noa would feel it was a burden to support you?”

No. Of course not. She would be endlessly supportive and compassionate because that’s the kind of person she is. My

mouth opens, then shuts, then opens again. “She shouldn’t have to.”

I can tell, just by the curve of his mouth, that Dr. Keller is about to make me eat my words. “Let’s say the situation were reversed, and it was Noa having this conversation with me. How would it make you feel to know she didn’t want to burden you with her pain?”

I stare hard at the worn tabletop beneath my computer, my gut squirming with guilt. I know exactly how I’d feel but I don’t want to say it.

“Reading between the lines here, Noa seems to be someone you see yourself building a future with. Which means that you’re pouring the foundation right now.” Dr. Keller checks his watch and smiles wryly. “Saved by the bell, Cash.”

I rub my hands over my face, feeling wrung out and exhausted, just like I always am after my weekly therapy session. “Thank god.”

Dr. Keller laughs indulgently. “Not quite. Your homework for the week is to *think* about telling Noa.”

“That’s all, huh?” I grimace.

“It’s not mandatory.” He assures me. “I’ve seen a change in you since you started seeing her though, Cash. A *positive* change. If you want it to work out with Noa, but you need to open up to her.”

“Alright everyone! That’s a wrap!”

The set, which was eerily still only second ago, seems to release the breath it was holding.

“Coffee.” I grunt at one of the PA’s who appears to take the prop rifle from my hands. I’m not normally short with anyone on the crew, but the scene we’ve been working on has to be shot in the dead of night and I’ve been up since midnight after tossing and turning in the aftermath of my therapy session.

For the first time since I met her, I feel guilty for starting things with Noa. When I'm with her, I feel so much that it's easy to tell myself that the years of numb existence won't happen again.

It's a lie though. It *could* happen again, and if I ever got to that point again, it wouldn't be just my own life I'd drag down.

What if I marry Noa, what if we have kids, and then I fall apart all over again?

I don't want to be a fucking burden to her.

Rubbing the aching place at the center of my chest, I wander through the set in the direction of my trailer. As I approach though, there's a familiar figure leaning against it, holding a cup of coffee from the little cafe in town.

Noa's curls are vibrant in the morning light and she's wearing cut off jean shorts and a t-shirt which would look ordinary on anyone else but on her, they're enough to make my brain short-circuit as blood rushes to my cock.

"Hey, you." Noa smiles, holding the cup out for me as I approach.

I groan my thanks, taking a long sip just to avoid meeting her eye. I'm not fine right now, the bubble we've been living in had popped and all the horrible possibilities that come with my mental illness are flooding back in.

I have years of experience playing the part of *fine*, but something tells me it won't work on Noa.

Sure enough, when I look back down at the woman in front of me, a suspicious little frown is pulling at her lips. "Everything alright?" She asks gently, her eyes searching.

I nod, plastering a weary smile on my face. "Just tired. Long night. How was your day off?"

"Alright." She shrugs. "Did some shopping in town. Hey, did you know this gig pays better than tax preparation commercials?"

Despite myself, I can't help but laugh, and not caring that we're in the middle of set and people are bound to see, I pull her into my arms and bury my face in her hair.

Noa sighs happily, hugging me back.

"Let me shower this stuff off." I murmur into her hair. "I'll meet you back at the Inn?"

Noa pulls back and glances over her shoulder. There are a few guys screwing boards together twenty yards away, but they aren't paying attention to us. Turning back to me, her lips curl into a mischievous little smile and she runs a finger through the fake mud on my face. "Why don't you let me help you, instead?"

I swallow, trying to think straight as my cock begins to swell at the thought. It's tempting. Very tempting.

I still haven't shaken my dark mood from this morning though, and as much as I want her, I'm also aching to be alone and get my head straight. "Um--"

"It was just an idea." Noa looks horrified at my hesitation. "I just thought--"

"Sweetheart." I catch her wrist as she moves a step away from me. "It's not that I don't want to. I really am just exhausted."

It's a lie, and by the look on her face, I can tell she knows it.

Noa nods unevenly. "Of course. I'm sorry, Cash. That was so selfish of me." And before I can say another word to stop her, she's pulled her arm away, given me a quick kiss on the cheek and is hurrying off across the lot.

I stand there staring after her, long after she's disappeared from sight, a wave of despair rising inside me.

I don't expect to see Noa until the scene we're shooting tomorrow. I hurt her by my dismissal, I know I did, and I'm counting on a night's sleep to get my shit straight and figure out what the hell I'm doing.

Sleep is harder to come by than I expected, however.

Every time I close my eyes I see the embarrassment on Noa's face. I *know* how little experience she has with sex, and when she got the confidence to overtly come on to me, *I rejected her*.

I roll over, punching my pillow into form as I try to clear my head and get some sleep for the dozenth time tonight.

It's not going to happen.

Lying in bed just across the hall is the woman I've been falling in love with, and she knows that I lied, just not about what. She probably thinks that that *I don't want her*.

"*You're being a coward*" whispers a voice in my head that sounds an awful lot like Dr. Keller. My therapist would never say that, but maybe he should.

I *am* being a coward.

Noa has been nothing but open with me, while I- my gut squirms with guilt at the thought of the huge, life-altering things I've been hiding from her. The truth of how she got her part in the movie. My depression.

I bite back a groan in the darkness as I sit up and swing my legs out of bed. I can't fix everything in one night, but I can start.

Nothing's changed, not really, but I brought Noa into this. Like it or not, right or wrong, I owe her the truth. If she walks away, I won't blame her, but it might destroy me.

Not as much as ending it myself would, though.

The inn is silent and dark as I push my door open and slide out onto the landing, barefoot and wearing only my sleep pants.

I have the spare key to Noa's room, a necessity with the late-night filming I've been doing. She'd told me, blushing, that she likes to know I'm back safe, and my heart aches when I realize this is the first night since we've been here that I didn't at least check in.

The room is dark as I push the door open, but a rustling beneath the covers tells me she's awake.

"Hey." I say quietly as I shut the door behind myself. Noa doesn't reply, even when I sit down on the edge of her bed, staring at her through the darkness. "I'm sorry. About earlier."

The shadowy figure curled beneath the quilt sniffs.

God, I'm a fucking asshole.

Unable to bear it even one more second, I reach over to pull back the covers and curl myself around her back. Her shoulders are hunched and she makes no move to weave her fingers through mine or stroke my arm like she normally does.

Fuck, fuck, fuck.

I need to fix this. Now.

"Noa." I kiss her shoulder, my throat tightening. "Sweetheart, please. Give me something, here."

Her shoulder jerks up in a shrug and her voice is barely more than a whisper when she replies. "I don't have any right to be angry. You didn't do anything wrong."

"Yes. I did." I have to force myself to breathe evenly, desperately trying to figure out how to say the words I never wanted to tell her.

"I have to tell you something. Something I've been putting off because I'm sure you'll see me differently when I do."

Noa is silent for a moment before she turns in my arms, gazing at me through the darkness. The lights outside the inn are shining through the gauzy curtains just enough to let me see the shadow of her face.

Gently, her hand comes out to hold mine, and my eyes burn. I don't deserve this woman.

"I'm not sure when it started. About ten years ago I think." My voice is choked with emotion. I've never spoken to anyone about this who wasn't my physician, but Noa's fingers tightening on mine are enough to keep me grounded. "I think I

had this image in my mind of depression being very different, so it took me a long time to realize that was what was wrong with me.”

“There’s nothing *wrong* with you.” Noa whispers instantly, so firmly I can’t doubt that she believes that.

I want to kiss her, to lose myself in her, but I need to get through this. If I don’t say it now, I’m not sure I’ll ever be able to convince myself to do it again.

“There is something wrong though, Noa. It’ll always be there. I spent time in an in-patient facility, I take medication and go to therapy, but it could happen again. I don’t want to burden you with that.”

A little sob comes from Noa’s lips and her forehead presses against mine. Tears of my own are trailing down my face and onto the pillow, but as our hands grip each other harder and our shared breaths warm my face, I know I’ve never felt closer to another human being in my entire life.

This connection, this trust... She hasn’t said anything, but I know, *I know*, we’re going to be alright.

I won’t fall apart again, Noa won’t let me.

“Oh, Cash.” She sighs, pressing a kiss to the back of my hand. “It’s never going to be a burden to love you.”

Chapter Five

Noa

We've both been crying, my heart is still tender from our earlier interaction and from Cash's confession, but when he closes the tiny distance between us and I don't feel anything but love and relief.

We're going to be okay.

Nothing has ever meant more to me than Cash's trust in me. I'd had absolutely no idea he struggled like that, I never would have guessed, but as scary as it is to hear something like that about the person you love, a part of me is also relieved.

He told me. He trusts me. That means I can be there for him.

Cash pulls back to kiss my nose, my forehead, my chin, cheeks, neck.

"I love you." He swears to the dark room, and more tears run down the sides of my face. "I love you, Noa."

"*I love you.*" I pull his face back up to mine and kiss him again, this time deeper than before, enough to make wet warmth bloom between my legs and my belly to clench.

I will never get enough of this, of him, or the wild connection growing even stronger between us.

"No more sneaking around." Cash pulls away from me to sit back on his heels, and in the dim light through the curtains I get a delicious view of the lean musculature of his chest and stomach as he gazes down at me. His hands tighten on my thighs, which have fallen open on either side of him.

I'm only dressed in my little cotton nightgown and panties, which grow even wetter beneath the weight of his hungry gaze.

"Cash-" I start to say but my words fall away when one of his hands drops between my thighs, cupping my aching pussy

through my panties. Moaning, I try to roll my hips up to get more friction, but Cash's free hand holds me flat to the bed.

He's always in control when we're together like this, and it's intoxicating. I want to be everything he wants; I want to please him.

My head spins as pleasure curls up my spine and I try to move again, only to be rewarded by a sharp little spank right over my throbbing clit.

I squeak, and Cash glowers down at me. "Were you listening to me, sweetheart? Or were you too preoccupied with figuring out a way to get my fingers inside that tight little cunt?"

Oh God.

He's never spoken to me like this before, and a dark shiver races up my spine at the words.

I like it.

I *really* like it.

Another sharp spank and I squeal, instinctively trying to snap my thighs closed over the offending hand, but Cash's body is in the way.

"Answer me." He demands, his voice a low growl.

"I- I-" I blink, trying to clear my head of the lusty haze he has me in. "You said no more sneaking around.'

Cash rewards me by slipping his hand beneath my panties, and we both hiss as he draws a single finger through my wetness. "Fuck, you're tight. You've needed this, haven't you baby? Needed me to fill you up?"

A single finger pushes inside me, curling to massage a place inside me that makes my head drop back and a moan of pleasure to echo through the dark, quiet bedroom. We've never gotten this far before, and I'm dizzy with desperate excitement as he fucks me with his finger.

"Cash, please!" I reach for him. Through the darkness I see his smile as he comes down on top of me, hovering over

my body as he adds a second finger.

We both groan.

Is it possible to die from sexual frustration? I probably will if he doesn't fuck me tonight. Weeks of kissing and touching have been leading to this moment, and I don't want to hold back anymore. I want all of him.

"Do you know what it does to me? To hear you begging for my cock?" His hips drop down to meet mine and there's no mistaking the long, thick ridge pressing insistently against my mound. "My gorgeous little virgin, desperate to be filled for the first time."

I'm pretty sure under normal circumstances my face would be bright red at his words, but right now, with my legs spread wide and my entire body aching for more, they just send another flood of wetness over the fingers still moving steadily inside me.

Cash's nose skims over my throat and down to the hollow between my breasts. My nightgown is twisted around me, only barely covering my pebbled nipples and as Cash's mouth down to suck and nip at one breast through the cotton, I pull the straps down over my arms, exposing myself to him.

"Fuck." He grunts, latching onto one nipple to suckle and nip hungrily.

Without warning, Cash pulls away, sitting back up to yank off the dress bunched around my waist and my completely soaked panties.

I expect he's going to return to my body but he doesn't, stealing one last fierce kiss, Cash lays down beside me.

He can't actually be stopping, can he? After all that?

"Cash-" I begin to protest, almost in tears I'm so worked up and frustrated, but he cuts me off.

"Sit on my face."

"What!" I squeak, my heart hammering so loud he must be able to hear it.

Cash chuckles and reaches over to grip my waist, pulling me closer. “I mean it, Noa. Sit on my fucking face or I will spank your ass red.”

I sit up, staring down at him with wide eyes. He’s so handsome it hurts, silvery hair shining in the dim light and the trail of hair below his belly button leading down to the enormous tent in his sleep pants.

My core tightens. I’ve felt him before, but seeing how big he is, is faintly terrifying.

Seeing where I’m looking, Cash chuckles. “Do you want to play with it, baby?”

My belly flutters. Biting my lip, I nod.

I’d never really understood the appeal of blowjobs until right this moment. Putting a man’s penis in your mouth should be objectively gross, but as Cash tugs down the waistband of his pajamas and his cock springs free, I get it.

I really, really get it.

“I’ll make you a deal.” A hand comes up to pinch one of my nipples, making me gasp and rip my eyes from the intimidating cock in front of me back up to Cash. “Sit on my face and you can do whatever you like to my cock.”

Belly fluttering, I get to my knees and shuffle closer. I pause for a moment, while trying to decide if I should just swing my leg over him or if there’s a less weird way to do it, but Cash apparently gets sick of waiting.

Reaching over and yanking me over him, I only have time to gasp in surprise before his mouth is on me and every other thought is wiped blissfully from my mind.

Cash doesn’t just eat, he devours me.

I’m barely able to hold myself up, and tingles are already beginning to spread through my body when my nipples brush Cash’s belly and I remember to open my eyes and stare down at the massive cock in my face.

Moaning, I wrap my hand around it and crane my neck so his head brushes my lips and my tongue darks out, licking

tentatively over the white drop gathered at the very tip.

He must like that because a pair of large hands tighten painfully on my hips and the vibration of his groan makes me moan and squirm closer to the hungry tongue prodding at my opening.

Encouraged, I open wider, sucking and licking him just like he is me, all while the pleasure building in my core grows tighter and tighter.

I desperately want to make him feel good but whatever he's doing to me feels so good I keep losing my focus, and when my hand slips off him to clutch at the sheets, I feel the vibration of a laugh through my center.

Without warning, one of Cash's thumbs slips though my wetness and presses against my other opening, and I explode. Bucking and grinding down as my orgasm bursts white light behind my eyes and sends pleasure to every cell of my body.

I moan Cash's name around his cock.

I haven't even come down completely when I'm suddenly on my back again, staring at the ceiling a fraction of a second before Cash is looming over me, gripping his cock and guiding it to the throbbing slit between my legs.

"Hold your legs open nice and wide for me, baby." He nudges my knee up and I do as he says, watching as he circles my clit with the head of his cock, gathering wetness. "Ready?"

I barely have time to nod before I feel the pressure.

It *burns*.

I'm small and he's big, and my body definitely wasn't made for this, but the sight of Cash's mussed hair, his jaw strained from holding back and the way his chest heaves as he pushes deeper, I'm more turned on than I've ever been in my life.

"Cash-" My head falls back against the pillows and I reach for him. He allows me to pull him down on top of me, kissing me deeply as he pulls back out and thrusts back in a little deeper.

“You’re doing great. So good. You feel incredible, Noa.” His rough praise does something to me, warming me from the inside out and I start to push myself forward to meet his thrusts.

The sharpness of the pain is subsiding now, and I begin to feel the stirrings of pleasure as he moves inside me, finally bottoming out when the head of his cock bumps something deep inside me and we both groan.

I cling to his shoulders, breathing raggedly as I try to get used to the feeling of being filled. Cash holds still, kissing me and murmuring how good I feel, how beautiful I am, how much he loves me.

When I finally wiggle experimentally, he groans in relief and begins to move, slowly at first and then harder. Reaching back to pull my leg higher on his hip, I gasp as he somehow slides even deeper.

Oh wow. That again, please.

“You like that, huh?” Cash chuckles, nipping at my ear.

Without warning, he rolls us so I’m sitting astride him, and he’s fully seated inside me.

Deep. Really deep.

It takes a little bit of experimenting to get the rhythm right, but Cash murmurs praise and encouragement that makes a fresh wave of wetness flood over his cock.

“Fuck. That’s it. Use me, baby girl, make yourself cum.”

I’m going to. My hands dig into his chest, and I rub my clit desperately against him, my inner walls fluttering over the thick length of his cock.

I’ve never even been naked with a man before this, and here I am sitting on top of one of the most beautiful men in the world, without a single ounce of self-consciousness.

How could I doubt he wants me when Cash’s hands haven’t stopped roaming hungrily over my skin and his breathing is as ragged and uneven as mine?

“I’m so close, oh god, Cash-“

He growls and pushes a hand between us to rub rough circles over my clit. “Give it to me, Noa. Come on my cock.”

His words and fingers push me over the edge. I cum with a cry, my core clenching over his cock as Cash pumps up into me, the sound of our slapping flesh filling the room until he stills, gripping my hips as I’m flooded with his orgasm.

I don’t want this to be over, don’t want to separate from him, so I lean right over, curling myself around him with his softening length still inside me. Cash kisses my hair, banding his big arms around me to pull me closer.

“Stay right there.” He finally murmurs, reaching down to squeeze my ass. “I want to get hard again inside you.”

Chapter Six

Cash

Despite what the tabloids have suggested over the years, I've never been involved with a colleague.

Plenty of those I've worked with have, but I could never get past the awkwardness of it all. Nobody wants to run into your ex on a red carpet in front of hundreds of cameras or, God forbid, be cast opposite them and have to work together for months on end.

Those reservations had gone out the window the very first moment I laid eyes on Noa. Now that she's mine, *really mine*, I want the whole world to know it.

I just didn't expect the whole world to know before we'd even left the inn.

I'm standing under the spray of the water in the shower, grinning as I relive some of the finer moments of the night before. We'd talked for a long time and had sex again before falling asleep, then Noa woke me at dawn with her lips wrapped around my cock.

She'd been as happy as I am when she'd stepped out of the shower to start getting ready only a minute ago, so I'm momentarily confused when she pulls open the shower curtain again, eyes wide with panic.

Until she thrusts her phone into my hands.

Cash Lowell Caught with Co-Star Playing His Daughter!

Below, there are a series of images clearly taken with a long-view lens.

The first is from yesterday, I'm standing outside my trailer on set, arms wrapped around Noa and my lips pressed to her hair.

The second is from the day we arrived in Pennsylvania. I'm leading Noa up to the inn, my hand pressed to her lower

back as she gazes up at me, adoration in her eyes.

The third, and most damning of all, is from a few days ago. The pair of us are alone on the back patio of the inn. She'd gotten up to put her phone on the table and I pulled her back into my lap, we're both laughing.

I stare at the last of them for a long time, emotion building inside me as I see the obvious joy in my own face and Noa's.

We look like we're in love.

I look up at Noa who is standing beside the shower, worrying her bottom lip between her teeth like she thinks I'm going to be angry.

"I told you no more sneaking around. It looks like that ship has sailed whether we like it or not." I pass her phone back and she takes it with a huff of disbelief.

"I thought you'd, I don't know, put out a press release or something!"

I can't help but laugh. "Do people do that? Put out press releases when they have a new girlfriend? I thought that was something just assumed when you start co-signing birthday cards and kissing in public."

Noa swats at me, but I can tell she's holding back a smile. "I don't know! They do when they break up!"

I growl at the words break up on her lips and reach out to grab her wrist, dragging her back into the shower, towel, phone and all. "Cash!" She squeals, tossing her phone out onto the bathroom floor, play fighting to get away from me but giggling all the same as I drag her back against my chest. "Be serious!"

"I'm extremely serious about you. I don't want to hear the words *break up* coming out of your mouth ever again little girl." I bring my wet hand down on her ass hard enough to make her squeal.

"You aren't upset?" Noa asks fretfully, turning in my arms.

I snort. Reaching down I grip the back of her thighs and lift her smoothly into my arms, my hard cock right along her slick little slit. Noa's eyelids flutter as she wraps her legs around my waist, rubbing herself over me.

I press her against the wall and push forward into her in a single thrust that makes both of us cry out. Noa's eyes are wide as she clings to me, hot water still pouring over us both.

"I meant every word I said last night." I grind out as I pump into her. "Did you think I was going to keep you locked up in my house?"

It'd been *a fucking-while* since I'd been with anyone before Noa, and I'm positive it was nothing like this. I've never felt this hunger before, this desperation. I could fuck my cum into her morning, noon and night and it still wouldn't be enough.

I couldn't give less of a damn the paparazzi had caught those images.

Hell, I'm going to frame them.

The gorgeous young woman in my arms shudders, her pussy tightening around my cock as she cums with a cry that echoes off the tiled walls of the bathroom.

I don't last much longer.

As my cock twitches, spending inside her, Noa giggles, and presses a sweet kiss to my neck. "I think I'm a fan of sex."

I grin, trailing my nose down her neck to nip at her collar bone. "I'm going to fuck you like this every morning, so you walk around set with my cum soaking your panties."

Her inner muscles clench at my words. "No complaints here. I might need to ice my vagina before we do this again though."

I wince, feeling like a bastard and pull out of her immediately, dropping to my knees.

"Cash!" Noa tries to press her thighs together and turn away, but I've already lifted one of her legs onto my shoulder, opening her for me. Her opening is red and swollen, and as I

stare, a bit of my cum dribbles out, running down her leg into the stream of water.

“Fuck that’s hot.” I groan, reaching up to push what I can back inside her. “Let’s leave it where it belongs though.”

I hear Noa’s head thud back against the shower wall. “Oh good. New kink, unlocked.”

Chuckling, I stand and cradle her face. “I’m sorry.” I press my forehead against hers. “I was rough. We’ll take a few days off to let you recover.”

“I liked it.” She squirms self-consciously. “I’m going to feel you inside me all day.”

“Fuck, you’re perfect.” I kiss her one more time before reaching behind myself to shut off the water. “Were *you* worried about the article?”

Noa steps out of the shower ahead of me. “Not really.” She sighs. “It’s stupid, but I just really don’t want everyone thinking I got the part because we’re together and you pulled strings. I wanted my performance to stand by itself.”

My stomach sinks.

I should tell her, right this second. My meddling can’t stay a secret forever. I need to tell her the truth, but when I open my mouth, I just can’t do it. Not now, right after the happiest night of my life.

“Nobody who sees your performance will ever think that.” I say instead, my throat tightening when Noa turns to face me, her expression soft and sweet.

“You’re amazing. I love you.”

She presses a kiss to my lips, then another, before heading off into the bedroom, humming happily to herself.

I wipe my face over the steamed-up bathroom window, frowning at my reflection. I’ll tell her tonight. No more excuses. I’m not going to lose her over this.

I just have no damn idea how I’m going to explain it without sounding like the world’s largest creep.

“Sybil! Sybil get back here!” I pound through the muddy field, my boots squelching and my whole back drenched with sweat as the camera follows along on the rig, documenting my chase of my fictional daughter.

Just ahead, Noa is muttering under her breath furiously, fists clenched at her sides. I hit my mark and lunge forward, capturing her wrist and yanking her back to face me.

“You listen to me, girl-“

“Cut! Cut!” A shrill beep sounds and I look automatically toward Meredith who is sitting up on the platform, shaking her head. “Let’s reset. Cash, for god’s sake, if you could to not eye-fuck your supposed daughter in a scene where you’re supposed to be fighting about her childhood, that would be great!”

The whole set laughs nervously and I grin, glancing at Noa who is pressing her hand over her mouth to stop her smile showing. “I’m sorry!” I tell Meredith, holding out a hand to help Noa through the mud back to start. A group of set guys appear with rakes and hoses to erase our footsteps.

“You’re going to get me fired.” Noa groans, letting me guide her through the field. “You just saw me naked like four hours ago, isn’t that enough?”

“Nope.” I tug at the sleeve of her muddy farm girl costume, “What can I say, this really does it for me.”

Her answering laugh makes me feel about ten feet tall.

“I forgot to mention.” I say conversationally when we reach the edge of the field, standing back to watch while they freshen up the mud. “I think it’s pretty wasteful of us to ask production to pay for two rooms at the inn when we’re only using one.”

Noa’s lips press together and she raises her eyebrows. “Are you asking me to move in with you?”

“I’m perfectly willing to move in with *you*.” I curl my arm around her waist and pull her into me, fully aware there are

dozens of eyes on us.

“Cash!” She hisses. “It’s been like... three weeks!”

“It’s been three weeks since I kissed you.” I correct her. “I’ve been mad about you for much longer.”

Noa’s arms curl up around the back of my neck. “It’s too soon.”

“It’s not.” I kiss her gently and lean down to murmur in her ear. “In the last twelve hours I came inside you four times, Noa. I don’t think either of us is really concerned about moving too fast.”

She squeaks, eyes going wide with alarm. “Cash! God! It’s not a good time. You know, in my cycle. For that.”

I bite back my disappointment. “Do you want us to start using condoms?”

Leaning back to meet my eye, I see the telltale flush creeping over her cheeks. “Do *you*?”

“No.” I’d never thought much about becoming a father, being a family man, but Noa pregnant with my child is the single most intoxicating possibility that’s ever crossed my mind. Only yesterday I’d been terrified of becoming a burden to Noa and any future children, but after last night...

I have hope.

I can do this, I *will* do this, and if a time comes when I start to struggle again, I’ll remember those precious words she spoke to me last night. “*It’s never going to be a burden to love you.*”

“We’re insane.” Noa shakes her head, but she’s radiating such happiness my heart swells with pride that I was the one to make her feel that way. “I’m only just getting started in my career. I shouldn’t even be thinking about this. We’re not even married!”

I grin, remembering the little jewelry store I’d seen just a mile from set, they won’t have the kind of obscenely large ring I want on Noa’s finger, but I’m sure I can find a suitable placeholder until we get back to California. “We can remedy

that today. We're done shooting at three, I know there's a courthouse downtown--"

Noa claps her hand over my mouth to stop me just as Meredith orders us back into position. "We'll talk about it later." My girlfriend tells me over her shoulder.

I'll deserve a damn Oscar for not smiling through this whole scene.

Chapter Seven

Noa

It's a long day.

I'm not sure who started the narrative that movie stars just sit on folding chair and get fed peeled grapes in between takes, but it's bullshit.

I spend all day running through mud with Cash, who managed to pull it together and keep his lusty new-relationship vibes under wrap long enough to deliver a stunning performance.

He's going to get nominated for every award in the book for this, I'm sure of it.

What's crazy though, is that everyone keeps talking about *me*. I'm not sure if it's because I'm new or because they're surprised that I'm managing to hold my own opposite Cash, but when we finally wrap, I'm glowing from Meredith's praise.

For the first time since I got *the call*, I feel like I deserve to be here. Like this isn't some big, terrible joke. Somehow, against all odds, my life is becoming everything I ever dreamed it would be.

I'm an actor, a real actor, and I'm not doing tax preparation commercials or waving pompoms around in the background of a shot, I'm doing a *real* movie that *actually* matters.

I'm in love with the best man in the world, a man who wants everything from me. He isn't holding back or playing games, Cash wants me just as much as I want him and it's impossible to keep my heart from fluttering every time I think about the conversation we had in in the field earlier.

It's crazy to think about these big things, moving in together, getting pregnant, marriage, when we've barely known each other six weeks.

It doesn't *feel* like six weeks though.

No, as I watch the man I love talking with a few extras across the set from where I'm standing, I know that the usual rules don't apply here. It's intense and special and different, and I'm not going to hold back or waste time because I'm afraid of what people will think.

"We've got a breakout star on our hands!" A voice calls, breaking through my love-struck preoccupation.

One of the studio executives who flew in for the day is standing a little way away with Meredith, smiling at me, and I walk over to them.

He winks. "Your agent is going to have a pile of scripts waiting for you when you get back, Miss. Peters. EWP has quite the list of projects coming up, we should have lunch tomorrow and discuss--"

"Leave her alone, Jonah." Meredith rolls her eyes. "We've still got almost two months to go on this project." She looks pleased though.

"I should go shower all this off." I gesture down to my muddy costume. "I'd love to have lunch though, Jonah."

He beams. "Excellent. I'll have my assistant set it up. Have Cash join us, Noa. If rumors are to be believed, we have him to thank for all this."

Confusion washes over me and I look to Meredith. "Why do you have Cash to thank?"

She frowns at me, her eyebrows creasing beneath the visor of her baseball cap. "You don't know? I thought he would have told you he was pushing for you to get the part."

It feels like the ground is falling away beneath my feet. No. It doesn't make sense. "But I didn't even *know* Cash before the table read. Why would he push for me to get the part?"

Meredith looks equally confused and opens her mouth to speak, but whatever she's going to say is lost when a familiar voice calls out behind me.

“Noa!” I turn, staring at Cash who just called out to me, clearly wanting me to wait for him.

How is it possible that two minutes ago I was happier and more content than I’d ever been in my life and now it feels like my heart has crumbled to dust in my chest?

I don’t deserve to be here. I only got this part because Cash wanted me to.

Did he orchestrate this whole thing just so he could have me? Am I even doing well, or is all the positive feedback I’ve been getting down to him too? Are they all just trying to get on Cash Lowell’s good side by letting his girlfriend play act?

The slight smile slides from Cash’s face as he stares at me, and I know he must see the hurt and betrayal in my eyes. He knows what he did, and he knows that I know.

Wordlessly, I move away from Meredith and Jonah and walk right past Cash toward my trailer.

I’m a fraud.

I’m just one more girl who spread her legs for the right man to get ahead. Cash had already seemed so much further ahead in life than me, so much more accomplished and talented even when I thought I’d rightfully earned this part which would surely jumpstart my career.

Now?

I barely get the door to my trailer shut before the tears start. Fumbling with the zipper of my dress, I strip down right in the middle of the little sitting area and stumble over to the shower.

Muddy water splatters around my feet as I stand beneath the spray, my whole heart aching, trying to wrap my mind around what just happened.

I’d given Cash my whole heart, every single piece of myself without even thinking about what it would mean. I’d always be Cash Lowell’s now, the pretty thing that he anointed with his fame and every single thing I do will be his too.

Maybe he's done this before. Saw some pretty young thing and got her a part so he had something to play with all those lonely nights during filming-

No.

I stop the thought in its tracks. I won't do that to myself.

All of this is bad enough without doubting Cash's feelings for me too. He loves me, I see it in his face every time he looks at me, but I still don't understand why he would go out on a limb to push Meredith into giving me the role before he'd ever met me.

Did everyone know about this but me?

Were they all laughing about it when I wasn't around?
Rolling their eyes behind my back?

Every bit of the pride I'd felt for my work today has evaporated, leaving cold shame in its place. A strangled little sob escapes my lips and I fumble with the water, turning it off. I just want to go back to the inn, crawl into bed and cry my eyes out.

By the time I get dressed in my street clothes and leave the little bathroom area however, my trailer isn't empty anymore. Cash is sitting on the couch, his forearms braced over his knees, his head hanging.

"What are you doing here?" My voice is icy and cold, and even though I'm furious and hurt, my heart still aches when Cash's head jerks up and I can see his face. He looks destroyed.

"Noa." He gets to his feet hurriedly. "I wanted to explain-"

"Why did you do it? Because you wanted to sleep with me?"

His jaw goes slack for a moment, like he can't believe that's what I think. Recovering himself, Cash shakes his head emphatically. "No. *No, Noa.* Absolutely not."

Tears cloud my vision. "Explain it to me then!" I explode. "Because it doesn't make sense! Why would you push for me

to get this part when we'd never even met? Why wouldn't you tell me that first day at the reading so I wouldn't walk around this set for weeks *acting like I deserved to be here!*”

“You do deserve to be here!”

My eyes burn. “I thought it was too good to be true from the moment I got that call. I don't deserve this, I took someone else's job, someone else who is *actually* talented.”

Cash's chest heaves. He looks every bit at ruined as I feel right now, and I hate that *I can't hate him*. He doesn't argue though, he doesn't say a word, just stands there staring at me until I can't take it anymore.

“Just go.” I turn away from him to sink down on the couch, tears finally falling. “I just... I need some space, Cash. I need to think.”

Out the corner of my eye, I see his hand tighten on the edge of the table. I can't bear to look at him, I'm sure if I see the pain in his eyes I'll run right back into his arms.

I love him, but that doesn't make me immune from the hurt and anger and confusion currently swirling through me.

Loving him might even make this more painful.

Still, nothing feels worse than the moment he does what I asked. He doesn't fight. He doesn't tell me he loves me or that he's sorry. He just turns and leaves without a word.

I'm alone.

I half expect for Cash to crawl into bed with me again last night.

Every set of footsteps in the hall or creek in the old building made my heart leap and my eyes flick toward the door, waiting for him to walk through it.

He doesn't though. I can't be mad about that, I *asked* for space, but I ache for him to fix this. I want there to be an explanation that makes this better, that makes me not feel like a fraud.

I barely sleep and then sleep through my alarm, barely making it to set on time to meet the team who does my hair and makeup every day.

I can tell just by their faces and the amount of foundation painted over the bags beneath my eyes that I must look like shit. Nobody comments though, and I read through the scene we're going to be shooting today without trying to chat with them like I normally do.

“Could you give Noa and I the room, everyone?”

I look up in surprise to see Meredith standing in the doorway, smiling around apologetically.

She's their boss, mine too, and everyone hurries to comply while I squirm in my seat, stomach in knots. What does she want to talk to me about *alone*?

Am I fired?

Did she find out Cash and I fought and is seizing her opportunity to cut me loose?

Oh god. I bet there's a new actress on the EWP jet right now, being flown in to replace me.

The door closes behind the last of the hair stylists and Meredith crosses to the table covered in makeup. Leaning against it, she regards me silently for a long, horrible moment while my mind continues to churn up even more horrible possibilities for why she's here.

“I think I owe you an apology, Noa.”

My stomach flips in surprise. I'm so shocked that I burst out, “What! Why?”

Meredith sighs. “I should have been transparent about what went into your casting. I saw you and Cash together at the table read and assumed you'd met before and you were aware he pushed for you to get the part.”

Oh. Wow. I'd been so preoccupied with Cash's role in this whole thing, it had never even occurred to me to be upset with Meredith.

“It’s not your fault.” I assure her, even though my throat is tight. “*I’m* sorry. I was probably stupid not to realize. I’m sure there were much better people you’d have rather cast for this.”

Meredith raises an eyebrow. “Do you think Cash Lowell is the one responsible for you getting this part?”

I open my mouth to speak but no noise comes out, confusion washing over me. “But, Jonah said-“

Scoffing, Meredith takes the vacant seat next to me. “Like everyone else in this industry, Jonah loves a good story.” She rolls her eyes. “Would I ordinarily have cast someone without star power in a movie like this? No. Cash stumbled into a last-minute casting session as we were watching your tape and... to be honest I don’t know what went through his head now that I know you two hadn’t met. He pushed hard for you, yes, but this is *my* movie.”

Her eyes flash and a smug smile curls her lips. “Do you think I got to be in this position by letting men like Cash Lowell make the calls for me?”

A reluctant bubble of laughter escapes my lips. “I’d hope not.”

Meredith huffs. “They try, goodness knows. Every now and then, when it suits me, I let them think they won. *You* though-” she nods at me, “you Noa, were *my* decision. And you got the part because you’re excellent.”

“Really?” I ask shakily. Her words are a balm on my raw heart, soothing away the insecurity and pain I’ve felt since yesterday.

“Really.” Meredith confirms, reaching out to squeeze my arm. “Did Cash’s insistence make me take a second look at your tape? Yes. However, I care deeply about this movie, and I wouldn’t have put someone in the role of Sybil who wasn’t up to the task.”

My heart is so full it must be close to bursting.

I won’t forget what she’s done for me. Never.

Standing again, Meredith smiles down at me fondly. “You aren’t just up to the task, Noa. You’re excellent. And *I’m* quite proud to be the one who discovered you.”

Chapter Eight

Cash

Even in the darkest, loneliest days of my depression, I never had trouble with work.

Playing whatever character I happened to be cast as at the moment was easier than being in my own head, and for years I rarely took a break between projects.

Today though, I'm useless. I was late, I barely remembered where my trailer was, and I know when I'm standing in front of the woman I love who doesn't want to even see my face right now, I won't remember a single damn line.

I'm not depressed this time, I'm fucking heartbroken, and I have no one to blame for it but myself.

I *knew* that keeping that secret from Noa was a mistake, but I was so damn wrapped up in my feelings for her and my own shit that somehow this massive thing just got pushed off.

She doesn't deserve this. Any of it. If the world was a just place, she would have been cast on her own merit, but even in the wake of my fuck-up, I can't bring myself to regret what I did. Noa deserves roles like this, she's so damn talented, she works so hard.

Just thinking about how amazing she is makes my whole chest ache. It hasn't even been a full day and I miss the hell out of her.

Noa Phillips owns my whole heart and if she throws it away because of my own idiotic behavior, I'll never forgive myself.

At least I'll know that something good came from it though.

On the hip of the woman doing my hair, a walkie talky crackles to life and a male voice speaks through it. "*Hey June? Can you let Cash know Meredith pushed his scene with Noa to this afternoon? It's raining a bit, but it's supposed to clear up after lunch.*"

The hairstylist, June, sighs and tosses the comb she was previously working through my hair to the countertop. “I guess I’ll see you at noon to redo this.”

I’d normally be annoyed by the last-minute schedule change too, but I barely have it in me to give her an apologetic smile.

I’ll just have to go back to the inn, try to sleep and hope to get a glimpse of Noa.

As much as I ache to go find her, to try to fix this, I’m determined to respect her request for space. I’ve done enough, I won’t force my presence on her while she’s trying to process the damage I caused.

My stomach sinks as I remember, yet again, that there’s a very real possibility she won’t want to fix this. Maybe I’ll have to see her, work with her for weeks, all while knowing that our relationship is over. Maybe I’ll see her at the premier next year with a man that’s younger, healthier, *better* for her than I ever could be.

I slide off my stool and head for the door of the trailer without another word to anyone. It’s just starting to rain, and all around me crew members are hurrying to cover up equipment or set pieces. Noa’s trailer is only two down from mine, and I have to force myself not to turn that way.

She asked for space, I need to respect that.

Swallowing the lump in my throat, I shove my hands in my pockets and head toward the transportation van which takes us to and from the set. I barely make it three steps however, when a familiar voice calls my name.

Noa.

My heart leaps and I turn on the spot, finding her almost instantly as she hurries toward me through the rain.

“I-“ But she doesn’t give me the chance to say more than that because she’s thrown herself into my arms. I hear myself let out a choked noise of surprise, and then Noa’s fingers are in my hair and she’s tugging my head down so she can kiss me.

She's fucking kissing me.

I have no idea what prompted this, but I'm not complaining. I hold her against me, my body responding to hers instantly as joy and relief rush through me.

I couldn't care less that we're standing in the middle of the damn set and there's people watching, I lift her into my arms and Noa's legs go around my waist instantly.

She pulls away, panting, and looks down at me through pupils blown wide. "I'm still really mad at you. And I have questions!"

"Okay." I agree mindlessly, already moving in the direction of the van. I need her alone, need her naked and crying out my name. Maybe fucking my cum into her half a dozen times will begin to loosen the knot of fear in my chest.

"I mean it!" Her hands squeeze my shoulders.

She looks so beautiful, glaring at me through the rain.

"I know you do. I fucked up, you should be mad at me." I set her down when we get to the van, just as thunder rumbles in the distance. The rain is increasing already, and I know we probably won't be working today.

Good. I smooth my thumb over Noa's full bottom lip, unable to tear my eyes away from her long enough to even get in the van.

Her hands curl over around the back of my neck. "Take me home?"

Somebody came in to straighten up my room in the few hours I was gone. The windows are cracked and wind from the storm makes the gauzy curtains flutter.

We barely spoke on the way back to the inn, but Noa sat beside me, our fingers woven together in a constant reminder that she was really there.

She wants to make this work.

By some miracle, I haven't broken things beyond repair.

“I’m sorry.” I say the moment the door closes behind me. Noa sits on the edge of the bed, watching me silently as I stumble over my words in my haste to get them out. “I should have told you all of this the day we met.”

“Why didn’t you?”

My chest tightens as I remember all those feelings rushing through me at the sight of the beautiful girl in the casting video. “The first few months after I got out of the in-patient center, I was in a lot of pain. I wasn’t numb anymore, but I wasn’t happy either. When I saw your audition tape-“ I shake my head, trying to stay on track and not get lost in the memory of that day. “I’ll remember that day until I die, Noa. These feelings hit me all at once, and I had to know you. I didn’t plan any of it.”

Noa’s eyes are filled with tears, and a strangled little sob escapes her lips. “Oh, Cash-“

I smile weakly. “I’ve been a damn mess, baby girl. I didn’t expect you to look at me the way you did. I didn’t expect you to feel this too. You did though, and I swear I wanted to tell you a hundred times, but I saw your pride, your hard work.” My voice rises, growing stronger. “You *deserve this*, Noa. Every bit of it. You’re so talented. I’m sorry I didn’t tell you, but I’m not sorry I pushed for you to get this part.”

Brushing away a tear, Noa laughs quietly. “Meredith came to talk to me, today. Before I went to you. She said this was her decision, that she wouldn’t have put me in the role if I couldn’t handle it.”

“I believe that.” I shake my head, embarrassed at my own behavior. “I owe her an apology too.”

Noa pushes off the bed and steps across the room to wrap her arms around my waist. I go to kiss her, but she stops me, her expression serious.

“You have to promise you won’t do it again, Cash. I know you’re *Cash Lowell* and you’ve won all these big, fancy awards and people love you-“ I snort and she shoots me a

warning look, “but if I’m going to succeed, it want it to be because of *me*. Not you.”

“You’re going to succeed, and it will have nothing to do with me pulling strings.” I assure her. “But I’m always going to support you, baby girl. Always.”

Her lips twitch and she reaches up to comb her fingers though my hair. “You promise?”

I lean down and she doesn’t stop me. Our kiss is slow, heat building slowly as the heightened emotions of the last day drain away. I pull away after a long moment to cradle Noa’s face in my hands. “I promise.”

Epilogue

Cash

4 Years Later

“Are you sure you’re ready for this?”

Noa leans against the bathroom sink, watching me shave, her bottom lip between her teeth. It’s barely seven in the morning, she hasn’t showered or done her makeup, there’s a smear of yogurt on the sleeve of her shirt from the kids’ breakfast, and she still takes my breath away.

I meet her eyes in the mirror and smile. “You’re cute when you’re nervous.”

My wife huffs and pushes off the counter to slide her arms around my middle, resting her cheek against my shoulder. “And you’re not?”

“Nervous?” I consider for a moment, probing at my own emotions. “A little, I suppose. I’m ready though.” I squeeze her hand and finish the last drag of the razer over my chin.

I’ve been in therapy for nearly four years now and I’m only now getting to a place where I feel like I can talk openly about my depression with someone other than Noa or my therapist.

I feel clear now, though. I’m not on medication anymore, and while there are days that are hard, nothing is as hard as my whole life was all those years ago.

I’m happy. I’m fulfilled. I’m loved.

I splash water over my face to clear off the remaining shaving cream and turn in Noa’s arms so I can see her face.

“I’m sorry. I know I’m hovering.” She smooths her hands over my bare chest, and I can’t help but smirk at the sparkle of hunger I see in her eyes.

There are a few perks to having a young, beautiful wife, and her insatiable need for me is one of them.

I kiss her. "Hover away, baby girl."

One of her hands slips down to tug at the towel around my waist so it falls to the floor. Eyes sparkling mischievously, Noa drops to her knees.

I hiss, leaning against the counter and watch as Noa's mouth moves over my flaccid cock. There's something especially erotic about watching myself grow hard under her touch and my eager girl seems to love it too.

"Good girl. Just like that." I weave my fingers through her hair, guiding her movements as Noa gazes up at me through bright eyes. "I want to get you pregnant again."

Her answering whimper vibrates around my cock and I grunt, adjusting my stance so I can fuck her mouth. One of her hands moves beneath the waist band of her shorts, and I know she's playing with herself, too needy to wait for me to do it for her.

I fucking love that.

"You want that too, don't you?" I grunt as heat tightens through my groin. I'm going to cum soon if I'm not careful.

Noa whines when I pull her head back off me, but her moment of displeasure is quickly silenced as I tug her to her feet and bend her over the bathroom sink.

In seconds, I have her sleep shorts on the ground and our groans echo off the bathroom walls as I slide my cock into her waiting pussy.

She's fucking soaked.

There are days when I could happily spend hours between Noa's legs, bringing her to orgasm after orgasm until she begs me to stop.

Then there are times like now, when it's all I can do to keep myself from coming the moment my cock pushes into her wet heat. This isn't lovemaking, it's claiming, and my horny little wife can't get enough of it.

My thrusts are brutal, and I have to bite the inside of my cheek to stop myself from filling her. I haven't cum inside her

for months, she's not on birth control, and if our previous track record is any indication, she could be pregnant by the time we walk out of this bathroom.

At the thought, I reach between her legs, rubbing harsh circles over her slick little nub. In the mirror over the sink, I watch as Noa's eyes flutter shut at the same time inner walls clench over my cock. She cums with a wail, and I follow a second later, pushing as deep as I can.

We stand there for a moment, catching our breath. It's Noa who breaks the silence when she laughs tiredly, dropping her head to the counter. Her eyes follow me in the mirror as I pull out of her. "I missed that."

"I didn't mean to spring it on you..." I trail off, dropping to my knees to push the bit of cum that escaped when I pulled out back into her. There was a time when my doing shit like this would make her cheeks burn, but my little wife is used to it now.

She sighs happily. "I knew you wanted another one. You wouldn't let me donate the highchair."

I chuckle, standing back up and pressing a kiss to her spine. "We made great kids. It would be selfish to only have two."

"So selfish." Noa agrees, straightening up and giving me a quick kiss before heading in the direction of the closet, calling over her shoulder, "Let's work on that some more later!"

"Tell me why you decided to write a book, Cash."

I walk slowly through the garden behind my home, a camera moving steadily ahead, carefully keeping pace. The man at my side, Elliot, is a reporter. Normally, my interaction with the press is sending security to scare off paparazzi outside the drive to my family's home, or in carefully scripted press interviews about whatever project I'd been working on.

This is different though. This is about me, my story, *my book*.

It's still bizarre to think, despite spending nearly a year on the damned thing, that I wrote an actual full-length book.

I take a deep breath, steadying myself before replying. "I suppose I should start out by saying that I suffered from depression. It isn't something I've ever shared before, mostly due to my own shame. However, about a year ago, it came to me that I'm in a position to help others who are suffering the way I once did. So, to answer your question, that's why I wrote the book."

Elliot nods, crossing his wrists behind his back. "You haven't been in a major project for a few years now. Is your depression the reason why?"

I shake my head emphatically "No. Actually the past few years have been the happiest of my life. It's not a secret that Hollywood marriages don't typically have the longest shelf life. When we met, my wife was just getting started in her career, I made the decision to take a step back and support her, to make our relationship a priority."

"So no plans to return to acting?"

I look up toward the house, though I can't see her, I can sense Noa watching. "While it might not seem like it, acting is a job, and some of my most well-known roles were played when I was in some of the darkest days. I won't say never, but right now? I'm doing what makes me happy."

Thank you so much for reading! I hope you enjoyed Actor, for more from Cleo, check out [The Storm!](#)

Teaser: The Storm

Cassian

“I don’t think we’re going to have a busy day and this storm is looking like it’s going to be intense. Should we send everyone home?”

I turn, staring out at the snow coming down on the street outside the shop, forcing away even our most intrepid clients. I don’t blame them. Behind me, my business partner Jace rattles around in his desk which is crammed next to mine in the tiny back office, oblivious to my preoccupation.

We should send everyone home. It’s the responsible thing to do, let everyone get home before the roads get too bad and a weather warning goes into effect, save ourselves the overhead of half a dozen bored tattoo artists with access to unlimited ink and needles. Pretty soon, somebody is going to suggest tattooing somebody else, someone will break out a bottle of whisky, and the day will go downhill from there. No, we’re better off cutting our losses and closing up for the day. But that would mean I won’t get to see *her*.

It’s a fucked-up obsession, even I know that. I’ve been in Luna’s life, well, always. Jace was my best friend growing up, I was around for all the shit he got into, including getting his high school girlfriend pregnant. I was there when Luna was born, when she went to kindergarten, when she graduated High School. I was the one who convinced Jace to let her take a year off to go traveling before starting college.

She went everywhere, sending me pictures of the incredible places she found and all the amazing people she met from every corner of the world. One year turned to two, then three. She worked along the way, taking a few months off at a time to wait tables in Amsterdam or clean hotel rooms in Paris. A romantic, bohemian existence, and no less than I would expect of my free-spirited pseudo-niece. I was fucking proud of her.

Then, about six months ago, she called Jace to tell him she'd decided it was time to come home, start college and get back to the "real world". *Finally*. Overjoyed, he'd booked her a plane ticket and not even two days later, I was standing with Jace, his wife Natalie, and their youngest daughter Sunny at luggage claim at JFK, waiting for Luna to arrive.

I wasn't paying a lot of attention to what was going on around me, too distracted by who was coming down the escalators ahead of us. I was never the type to chase younger women. At nearly thirty-seven, I valued experience and confidence in my sexual partners and appreciated that most women my own age didn't ask for more than I had to give.

This woman though. God damn. She couldn't have been older than her early twenties but one look at her made me want to throw out every single rule I had. My cock had become uncomfortably hard in my jeans, pressing viciously against my fly as my eyes roamed hungrily over golden tan legs in cutoff shorts and a tiny waist, begging for me put my hands on it.

It wasn't until Sunny squealed and ran forward that I realized, a moment too late, the stunning creature on the escalators was Luna.

I barely recognized her. Three years abroad had effectively shed her of the last traces of childhood. Her face had slimmed, her belly had flattened, she'd changed her hair and pierced her nose. Suddenly, I was struggling to breathe, trying frantically to get myself under control as Luna greeted her family.

Then she'd turned her gaze to me, smiled, and the whole world shifted beneath my feet.

Call it love at second-first sight, obsession or what-the-fuck-ever, I'd walked into that airport a free man and walked out owned completely by a woman I'd never have.

It's enough to fuck up anyone's head and make them do irrational things. Like keep their entire staff at work in a snowstorm just so they won't have to spend the next two days without their drug of choice.

I pinch the bridge of my nose, feeling a headache coming on as Jace continues to rattle around behind me, looking for God knows what.

“Hey guys.” My eyes snap open as my head turns automatically toward the door of the office, so quickly I twinge a muscle in my neck. Cursing, I rub it, gazing blearily at the angel leaning against the doorframe in black leggings and a plain t-shirt.

Luna’s eyes widen in alarm. “Are you alright, Cass?”

I wave her off, backing away to the farthest point in the office from the door and sinking own on the radiator. “Just strained a muscle. I’m fine.”

“I could rub it if you-“

“Nope.” I drop my hand from my neck, even though it’s still throbbing. “Already fine.”

“What’s up, Luna-Tuna?” Asks Jace, smiling obligingly at his daughter. She’d been looking for a job when our receptionist decided to follow her boyfriend to Nevada and Jace was thrilled to give her the job. He hadn’t even told me, assuming I wouldn’t care, so I’d just walked in one day and there she was.

Now my torment isn’t reserved for family dinners and the occasional party. No, now I burn every fucking day.

Luna tilts her toward the side of the shop where the artists have their own rooms. “I thought you’d like to know that Nancy is currently placing a stencil of a pizza slice on Tommy’s ass. In case you want to get out in front of that.”

Jace chuckles, shaking his head. “Christ. Yes. Tell them to go home. Call up whoever is left on the schedule for today and bump them, would you Luna?” She nods, giving me one last look before vanishing as Jace picks up his phone, speaking to me over his shoulder as his thumbs fly over the screen. “I’ve got to get Sunny from school, I don’t want her walking in this. Do you mind giving Luna a ride back to her place?”

It’s a perfectly reasonable request. Luna’s apartment is only a few blocks away from mine, and I go right by it. Still,

the thought of five minutes alone in the car with her is enough to make me screw up my face and wince.

“Um.” Jace and I both look around to see that Luna’s returned, her lips are pulled into a pained smile and my heart sinks, realizing she saw my dismay at being asked to give her a ride. Shit. “I forgot to ask if you wanted me to post anything to the shop’s social media pages about the closure.”

“Sure.” Jace tells her, oblivious to the underlying tension in the room. “Cass is going to give you a ride home since he’s heading that way anyway. I don’t want Sunny out in this.”

“That’s okay.” Luna says a little too quickly, looking anywhere but at me. “I’ll get a rideshare, seriously don’t worry about it.” And she’s gone again, leaving Jace and I in stilted silence.

“What was that about?” My best friend asks, turning to me with a frown.

“No idea.” I heave myself off the radiator, heading over to my own desk chair where I can pretend to look busy.

Jace isn’t put off though. “You guys have been cold as fuck for months now. She used to be your little bud, what the hell happened? Did you have a fight?”

My “little bud” grew up into the most gorgeous woman I’ve ever seen and the only way I can resist bending her over the nearest flat surface and fucking her senseless is by keeping as much distance as possible between us. The Atlantic Ocean would be ideal but being an asshole will have to do.

“We didn’t fight, Jace.” I sigh, fighting to keep my expression impassive. Hiding something like this from the person who knows you best in this world is a fucking uphill battle. “She’s an adult now. She doesn’t idolize me anymore. I don’t know what to tell you.”

Thankfully, Jace seems to accept this and turns back to his computer. “Just take her home, alright?” He insists over his shoulder. “I don’t want her getting in the back of a rideshare in a snowstorm.”

How the hell am I supposed to argue with that?

Check out [The Storm!](#)

About The Author

Cleo White

Cleo White is a 29 year old caffeine addict who lives with her family in Vermont. After accepting the unfortunate reality that she has the attention-span of a fruit fly and finishing a whole-ass novel was never going to happen, she found a love of writing short, spicy, insta-love stories that always have a happy ending. When she isn't writing, Cleo can be found avoiding social obligations, gardening and painting.