



THE
Fling

PLAYBOY PACT SERIES

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WALL STREET JOURNAL & USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

M. ROBINSON

THE FLING
PLAYBOY PACT BOOK 2

WALL STREET JOURNAL & USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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AUTHOR NOTE

I'm so excited that you are here and about to embark on this journey that is Ashton and Sage. You will be fanning yourself one minute with Ashton's dirty, dirty mouth and laughing your ass off the next. This is probably the most swoon-worthy, perfect book boyfriend I have ever written.

This is my single mom rom com that will have you wiping away the tears from all the laughter that will be stirred in your belly!

Enjoy my perfect hero, Ashton Hayes! I know you will love him as much as I do.

Thank you for reading Ashton and Sage!

Love you all, M!

P.S. Don't forget to leave a review!

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MEET M. ROBINSON

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DEDICATION

To all my single moms out there.

I see you.

I respect you.

I admire you.

Your selflessness.

Your courage.

Your strength.

Your sacrifice.

Your endless determination.

It takes a willful person to take on the job of both parents. You are a superhero in your child's eyes and in mine.

Thank you for being my inspiration for Sage in this story.

PROLOGUE

—Ashton—

There I was...

Sitting at a fucking bar, drinking away my broken heart.

Damn. I really did turn into a pussy.

I was the playmaker. The one with the best moves, the best lines. I was the best at everything...

And I mean, everything.

There was no woman immune to my charm. To my looks. To my bed-hopping ways.

Until I saw her again.

Sage McCoy.

We had a past.

History.

An instant connection right from the start. The first time I met her, she took my breath away. For a few minutes, I second guessed the pact I'd made a few hours prior with my best friends.

Through the years, I'd thought about her a lot.

What she was doing.

Who she was with.

I never thought I'd see her again.

Until I did...

It was supposed to be easy. A quick, fun, mind-blowing night where she screamed out my name in ecstasy. I didn't want her to fall in love with me.

We were only supposed to be a fling.

I didn't think I'd fall head over heels in love with her.

I fell for her smile.

Her laugh.

Her awkwardness.

She was funny, smart, witty, and sexy as fuck.

I made her come with my hands, my mouth, my tongue, my cock. Sage made me a better man. Now I couldn't imagine my life without her in it.

And not just her...

It was a long story.

An uphill battle.

Complete and utter bullshit.

Swallowing down another swig of Jack, I wallowed in my fucking pity party of one.

How did I go from an eternal bachelor to having the girl of my dreams in my arms?

Jesus, could I get any more pathetic? I laughed at the thought, leaning back against the barstool.

In order to understand, I'd have to go back to the very beginning.

You see, it all started...

With the Playboy Pact.

CHAPTER 1

—Ashton—

Eight years ago

“How are you feeling, man?” I asked one of my best friends, Cain. His parents just told him they were getting a divorce. Talk about a swift fucking kick to the balls.

He nodded. “I don’t want to talk about it.

I threw my arm around his neck as we approached my Chevy truck. “Dude, let’s get you fucking laid tonight. Your poor balls, bro. I bet they feel heavy after that news. Don’t you worry, man, I’m here for you. You need to get your dick wet. I’ll make sure you have extra condoms. You want to get shitty off Jack, I’ll be your designated driver.” I grinned at him with a cheeky smile. “You want to slip balls deep inside some chick, and you need me to keep her girlfriend busy”—I winked—“I’ll sacrifice my cock for you and take one for the team.”

Before I could get another word out, our other best friend, Sawyer, interrupted, “Jesus, Ashton, can you not think with your dick for five minutes?”

“I’m a guy. We think about sex every seven seconds.”

“Says who?”

“Fucking Siri.”

Sawyer chuckled, rolling his eyes. “It’s a myth.”

“If you don’t think about sex every seven seconds, Sawyer, then that sounds more like a personal problem.”

“I didn’t say I didn’t, shit-face. I’m fully on board if Cain needs his wounds licked by a blonde’s pouty mouth.”

“A blonde, a brunette, a redhead,” Cain chimed in. “Shit, I’ll do all three at once. I don’t have a preference.”

“Now that’s the spirit!” I exclaimed, jumping into the driver’s seat of my souped-up truck while Cain got in the front and Sawyer in the back.

We were headed to our other boy’s house, Leo, who was also like another brother to us. We all grew up together in Monteagle, Tennessee where the

Southern charm ran smooth and the whiskey did not, burning like a son of a bitch all the way down.

“I can’t believe Leo’s old man actually came through with the cabin.”

I shrugged at Sawyer’s statement. “I’m not. He treats Leo like shit. This is the least he could do for him.”

“Not everyone has parents like yours, Ashton.”

Cain’s clipped voice brought my attention to him. He was right—my parents were living the dream. They loved each other very much and didn’t hide that fact. My two older brothers and one older sister could attest to their ability to keep their hands off one another. I was the sixteen-year-old baby boy, and I had no problem with that either.

“You’re the golden boy. You could do no wrong when it comes to your mother,” Sawyer acknowledged.

“Jealous?”

“That you didn’t get off her tit until you were three, maybe... Your mom has a great rac—”

I slammed on the brakes, and they both flew forward.

“Ashton, what the fu—”

I snapped around, cutting Sawyer off. “Don’t you ever, ever, talk about my mom’s titties. Do you understand me?” I knew he was only messing with me, we all fucked around with each other like this, busting one another’s balls. “I don’t want you to even think about my mom’s titties. As a matter of fact, my mom’s titties are off the table.” My stare shifted to Cain. “And that goes for you too.”

Cain raised his hands in a surrendering gesture. “Dude, let the record show that I have never looked at your mother’s titties, okay?”

“Good. Keep it that way.”

I hit the gas, and we were off again, but seconds later Sawyer muttered under his breath, “Bullshit. I’ve seen you look at her tit—”

I shot him a warning glare through the rearview mirror, and he shut right up, laughing instead. It didn’t take long to get to Leo’s new bachelor pad. It was on his parents’ property, not that you could tell. They owned twenty acres of pure heaven. Leo’s parents were loaded. His old man owned Mountainside Building, and he was the best general contractor in our small town. Their estate was huge, and a full staff was needed just to keep up with the landscaping.

One day the company would be handed down to Leo, and we'd all known that since we were kids. His future was set and planned for him, and I wasn't sure how he felt about that. If I were in his shoes, I'd be grateful as fuck. However, Leo was definitely the most serious of us all. It was hard to gauge what he thought about anything.

Other than Mila.

She was his neighbor, and they'd known each other since birth. She was his closest friend outside of us. They were like two chicks at a slumber party, and he had yet to bang her. And let me tell you, Mila was extremely bang-able. We would all love to slip our dicks inside her, just the tip, just for a second, just to see what it felt like, but we would never do that to our boy.

Bros before hoes.

Not that Mila was a ho. All we knew was that she was off-limits to any of us. We didn't cross that line. At least not with her. Now, with any girl she brought around, those chicks were fair game. We'd ruined one too many friendships for her, and it was probably the reason she was always around. She didn't have any other friends aside from Leo. We were used to having her with us anywhere we went; we didn't question it. None of us really knew much about her, though. She was Leo's, and no one understood their friendship.

Not even us.

I parked my truck in front of his cabin, and we all made our way inside. Leo's cabin was more like a treehouse, given it was surrounded by tons of trees. It was bigger than a treehouse but still built like one. It was one big ass open room, the kitchen was to the left of the front door, and the living room was in front of that. It was in the middle of the open floor plan. To the right of the front door was a bathroom and a bedroom next to it that I'd probably be the first one to fuck in.

This place would definitely be crawling with girls. We all had a reputation for loving the ladies, and none of us were ashamed to admit it. We were good-looking and young—what else did anyone expect?

The apple didn't fall far from the tree in the Hawkins genes. Leo had an eye for building like his old man and the men before him. Our boy came from a long line of carpenters or some shit. He even made sure to have glass doors that led to the porch which had a hot tub and lower deck. He built a fire pit with lounge chairs to host bonfires and make s'mores; he

knew how much chicks were all about that. It would be easy to get laid here, and I knew a part of him wanted this place for that reason alone.

However, he still built a swing for Mila beside the pit. It was their thing. Our boy was so pussy whipped, and he wasn't even getting pussy from her.

Fucking idiot.

"I honestly don't know who's worse out of the four of you," I overheard Mila say as we walked toward the door.

Of course, she was the first one there.

I'll tell you one thing, if I was spending that much time with a girl, then I better be getting my dick sucked. I had no time for a girlfriend, and I didn't want one. I'd seen my older brothers have enough of them to know that I wanted no part of that.

The stage-five clingers.

The expectations.

The daily bullshit of what they wanted and needed.

Yeah, no thanks.

I was sixteen years old, I was in my prime, and these were the years I needed to look back on and remember I'd lived my best life. Balls deep inside as many girls as I could.

Why would I want to settle down and ruin that?

"Well..." Leo hesitated. "It depends on who you ask. If you ask any female in this region of Tennessee? It's definitely me. Now, if you ask guys from our opposing high school, then it's Cain because everyone knows he fucks anything that walks."

"Bro," Cain announced, walking into the cabin with Sawyer and me right behind him. "I resent that. I don't fuck freshman girls. They get too clingy for my liking." He grabbed a soda from the fridge.

Sawyer asked what we were all thinking. "What about that freshman, Laura, that you screwed last month?"

Cain was notorious for forgetting girl's names, and I'd seen him get slapped in the face because of it.

He looked up at the ceiling, narrowing his eyes like he was thinking about something. "Laura... Hmmm... Laura..." he accentuated, shaking his head. "Nope. Name doesn't ring a bell. I don't know a Laura."

"And you just proved my point," Leo remarked, making Mila chuckle.

"Oh!" I exclaimed, acting all giddy. "Do me next, Mr. Know It All." Grabbing the other controller off the coffee table, I hit the button to request

in the video game Leo was battling.

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

Mila choked on her drink, making me glance over at her. “Mila, why don’t we go into the other room, and you can tell Leo how easy it was to find my cock because it’s *so fucking huge*.”

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

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

She laughed; she couldn’t help it. I was hilarious with my constant smartass banter. Out of all of us, I was definitely the funniest, and I had the reputation to prove it. It was how I got laid. Nothing worked better than making a girl laugh. They ate that shit up, and I served it to them on a platter with my cock.

Mila knew I was messing around with her, though. This was how we always treated her, like one of the guys.

“Now I feel left out,” Sawyer stated. “What am I?”

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

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

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

He summed Sawyer up pretty accurately. I’d never seen someone be able to drink like a fish and still get up to take his SATs. Not only take them, but fucking knock them out of the park. He was smart as shit, wanting to be a doctor. I told him he should be a gynecologist because getting paid to feel tits and pussies all day seemed like a job you didn’t need to get paid for.

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

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

“Hey! You said go for it!”

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

I shook my head, chuckling. “You lost because I started playing and kicked your ass.” Leaning to the left, I tried to take out his next opponent.

“The fact that you guys play video games like we’re still in middle school should be the bigger issue here.”

“Playing a video game?” Cain questioned. “We’re saving the world one game at a time.”

“What?” she remarked. “That doesn’t even make sense.”

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

“Oh my God. Zombies are not invading. You know what? The only one of you ho bags I can stand is Sawyer.”

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

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

“More like railed her,” I added.

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

Cain somewhat apologized, “Sorry, not sorry.”

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

His demeanor immediately changed, and I nodded at her. “Way to kill the mood, Mila.”

“I’m sorry, Cain. I didn’t mean to—”

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

I could tell by the look in his eyes that he hated seeing Cain in pain; we all did. It was obvious he was hurting and trying to play it off like he wasn’t.

“Why do I feel like whatever you’re about to say is going to be life-changing?” Mila expressed with wide eyes.

“Because, my lovely Lala, you know I’m wise beyond my years.”

He’d been calling her Lala since we were kids. It was his nickname for her. I don’t know why he decided to name her after what sounded like a Poodle, but whatever.

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

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

I nodded. “It’s too soon.”

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

Our eyes went wide.

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

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

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

We nodded while bringing our attention back to him. He looked at us and without any hesitation, he said six words that would change the future of our lives. “*We’re going to make a pact.*”

We peered at him like he was crazy, and I asked first, “What kind of pact?”

“A lifelong one,” he remarked, speaking with conviction. “The Playboy Pact.”

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

The more I thought about it, the more it made sense. None of us had plans of settling down, and I didn’t see that changing anytime soon. If Leo thought this would keep us all close and in one another’s lives, then I’d be the first one to sign up for that. I couldn’t imagine my life without these assholes in it.

“Bros before hoes.” Leo nodded, reading my mind.

“Guys before lies,” Sawyer uttered, on the same page I was thinking.

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

Our stares shifted to Cain.

“Dicks before tits,” he asserted.

“And we’re gonna make sure of it.” Leo didn’t waver, adding, “We’re going to make a pact to stay single and never fall in love.”

I signed that pact in blood.

CHAPTER 2

—Sage—

“Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday dear Sage, happy birthday to you!”

I smiled at my parents, my best friend Aspyn, and my older brother by two years, Brady.

“How does it feel to be sixteen?” my mama asked, handing me a few plates so I could cut my cake.

I shrugged. “It feels the same as being fifteen.”

I refused to have a sweet sixteen party like most of my friends were having. I wasn’t much for being the center of attention, and all I wanted was to celebrate with my family and closest girlfriend. For the next hour we did exactly that until my brother left to go hang out with his friends.

“You need to get showered and dressed, Sage.”

I rolled my eyes, staring at her through the mirror in my bedroom. “I already told you I’m not going.”

“And I already told you, you are.”

“Aspyn—”

“I don’t want to hear it, Sage! It’s your sweet sixteen, and it happens to fall on the biggest party of the year! We have to go.”

“No, we don’t.”

“Yes, we do.”

“Aspyn—”

“Are you where fun goes to die?”

I rolled my eyes again. She was always so dramatic, but she was still my best friend. Had been since we were in Kindergarten. Her favorite color was pink, my favorite color was pink, and BAM, instant best friends.

“I have fun.” I pointed to myself. “I’m actually a very fun girl.”

“Sage, we both know that you’re a very fun girl. Except, I haven’t seen that very fun girl since Memphis broke up with you.”

I glared at her, and she raised her hands in a surrendering gesture. “Yes, yes, I broke our cardinal rule. I mentioned the dreaded ex, but he’s going to be there, and it’s your birthday! I think the sweetest revenge is for you to show up looking smoking hot and to have the time of your life.”

“How do you know he’s going to be there?”

“Because he’s Memphis, and he’s single now.”

I thought about it for a second.

“I know you still love him, Sage.”

I sighed deeply; she was right. I couldn’t help it. We’d dated this entire year, and out of nowhere he just broke up with me.

“Sage, you know I care about you, but I’m graduating soon. I’m going out of state for college. It wouldn’t be right if I kept this going.”

His words from a few weeks ago ran rampant through my mind. I thought he loved me too. He said he did.

Love was so confusing.

“You know what? I think you’re right.”

“Of course, I’m right. Now…” She jumped off the bed and walked toward my closet. “The most important question of the night—what do you wear? His jaw needs to hit the floor and break into a million pieces and then maybe, only then, you can say hi to him.”

I laughed. *I love her.*

While I was in the shower, she picked out my outfit. A cream crop top with a pair of jean shorts that might have been a little small on me now. Grabbing my tan two-inch heeled boots, she finished off my outfit with a tan Boho straw hat.

I took one look at myself in the floor-length mirror. “Aspyn, my dad isn’t going to let me leave the house wearing this.”

She mischievously smiled at me. “That’s why you’re going to leave the house wearing this.” She handed me a simple yellow summer dress.

“I see what you did there…” I nodded. “Smart.”

“I know, right? I’m pretty proud of myself for that one.”

I pulled my shorts down a little. “I do feel kinda naked.”

“That’s the whole point. We’re going for heart on the floor effects here, Sage. Memphis needs to envision you naked when he sees you.”

I turned around, gazing at my butt cheeks that were slightly peeking out of the bottom of the shorts. “He won’t have to try hard.”

She chuckled, shaking her head at me through the mirror. “Trust me. I know what I’m doing.”

Aspyn was a varsity cheerleader, and she was one of the most popular girls at our school in Tullahoma, Tennessee. Not to mention, my best friend was freaking stunning. She never let it get to her head, always staying kind

and humble. Guys just gravitated toward her. It didn't matter what school they attended, she had boys from the next town over driving here to take her on a date.

Sometimes these parties had a mix of a couple of different schools crashing each other's shindigs. These towns were small, so we had to find something to do. If it wasn't the woods, then it was someone's house.

We decided to leave my natural dirty blonde hair down, adding soft curls at the ends to give it more volume and texture. I'm pretty sure she sprayed half the bottle of my cotton candy body mist all over me, covering me from head to toe in Memphis' favorite scent.

Next was my makeup. Aspyn packed on my cherry lip gloss and smoked out my green eyes a bit too. I wasn't much for makeup; however, given the reason why we were going, I thought I might as well go all out. I hadn't talked to Memphis since he'd broken up with me two weeks ago. I'd been avoiding him at school, and since he was a senior and I was a sophomore, our paths didn't cross much.

She finished my eyes, adding black mascara to my light lashes. I swear when I looked in the mirror I didn't recognize myself.

Inspecting her handy work, Aspyn stated, "Dude, if I batted for our team, I'd totally be into you."

I laughed, and she winked at me through the mirror.

"Now, I need to find my outfit."

"You could wear a garbage bag, and guys would still think you're the hottest girl at the party."

"That's a severe exaggeration, but I'll take it."

"Aspyn, seriously. You know it's the truth."

"How many times do I have to tell you that it's not what I look like, but it's the confidence I carry? You just have to own it. That's why guys like me, Sage."

I nodded; it was true. "I need you to teach me your ways."

"But the shy thing you have got going works really well for you. Why fix it if it's not broken?"

"Because tonight, I want to be you. I don't want to be shy Sage. I want to be confident Aspyn. I want Memphis to regret breaking up with me, and I want him to say it to my face."

"That's asking for a lot, Sage. Memphis is a player. He won't say that to you."

“He *was* a player before *me*.”

She shrugged. “Once a player, always a player. I want you to get back at him tonight. Not try to get back together with him. Is that what you’re trying to accomplish?”

“I don’t know. I can’t help the way I feel. I love him.”

She shook her head. “This is why I stay single, and I never want to get in a relationship. I don’t care how cute the guy is.”

Aspyn’s dad cheated on her mom when she was twelve. She was actually the one who caught them, and she was also the one who told her mother. She never recovered from it.

She spent the next twenty minutes giving me a play-by-play on how to act sexy and confident.

“Okay!” she exclaimed. “We’re going to need a filler.”

“What’s a filler?”

“A fill in.”

I stared at her, still not understanding.

“We need to find you a dude. Just someone you can flirt with to make Memphis jealous.”

“Ohhhhh ... smart.”

“I know, I’m a genius. Plus, you can practice the moves I just taught you on him. It will be good to give you a run-through.”

“Right.” I nodded, trying to act all confident when I was internally freaking out.

Me? Be sexy? Sure...

I pouted my lips and narrowed my eyes at her, trying to look at her the way she'd just taught me.

“Jesus, are you having a seizure?”

“No, I’m mimicking the expression you showed me.”

“Sage, you look like you’re holding in a fart.”

I laughed, finding immature humor funny. Probably because I had an older brother who was as immature as they come. While Aspyn got dressed and ready, I practiced my sexy, confident face in the mirror and the poses she'd taught me. It wasn’t long before we were in her car, driving toward the party. I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t nervous. I was sweating buckets, and I was grateful I’d put on extra deodorant. After I changed my clothes back into the skimpier outfit, I realized time was moving at a rapid pace, and we were almost to the party.

“Do I say something to him when I see him?”

“Absolutely not. You need to completely ignore him.”

“Ummm ... I don’t know if I can do that.”

“Don’t you worry your pretty little head I will find you the hottest guy to flirt with, and you won’t even be thinking about Memphis.”

“Aspyn—”

She slammed on the brakes, causing my body to jolt forward. Seconds later, I heard a male voice holler, “This is why chicks shouldn’t drive!”

—Ashton—

The last word barely left my mouth before a five-foot-nothing tiny girl shot out of the driver’s seat of her car.

“Excuse me?!” she bit, reminding me of a chihuahua. All bark and no bite.

“Oh shit,” I overheard her friend mutter from the passenger seat, rushing out behind her friend.

The first thing I noticed was how pretty she was, hurrying out of the car to help her friend.

“I can drive perfectly fine!” the girl in front of me snapped, bringing my attention back to her. “It’s when guys with douchebag haircuts walk in front of me that it gets a little difficult.”

“Maybe if you’d learn to watch where you’re driving instead of checking yourself out in the rearview mirror, you wouldn’t almost hit me.”

“You sexist asshole!”

“Oh, we’re not sexist,” Sawyer chimed in. “We love girls. Just not when they try to kill us.”

Her eyes shifted to Sawyer. “I’m sorry, I don’t remember asking you for your input.”

“You didn’t.” Sawyer grinned, winking at her. “I gave it to you anyway.”

She jerked back, not appreciating his response.

“And if we are being technical, you have to yield to pedestrians, as you can see.” He gestured to the crosswalk.

See ... fucking smart.

“And what are you? The crossing monitor of your group?”

“I prefer traffic coordinator.”

I scoffed out a chuckle, hearing Sawyer’s reply to the chick who had her panties in a bunch. “Is no one going to make sure I’m alive? I’m the one

who was almost taken out Fast and Furious style.”

“Sexist and dramatic. How attractive,” the pretty girl with the stupid-looking hat said.

“Cain!” I smiled, never taking my eyes off of her. “Someone call an ambulance because I think I’m seeing the light.”

“Does that cheesy line really work?”

“You tell me?”

She gazed down at the ground, blushing while Sawyer and her hothead friend continued to argue, going back and forth.

“How about you get me a drink since your friend tried to run me over?”

“Uh...” She peered back and forth between her and Sawyer, who were still arguing like cats and dogs. “I think I could do that.”

Cain slapped me on the chest, whispering in my ear, “Only you would pick up a chick during a near-death experience.”

I threw him a look and grabbed the pretty girl’s hand, catching her by surprise.

“You’re holding my hand because...”

“How else am I supposed to cross the street? I mean, with drivers like your friend and all.”

“I heard that!” her friend shouted.

“Don’t listen to him. You need to listen to me,” Sawyer ordered.

“Who the hell do you think you are? I don’t need to listen to you!”

“On that note...” I didn’t wait for her friend’s reply to Sawyer’s demands, walking toward the backyard. “Let’s go.”

Despite not living in this town or attending their school, we’d been to parties at this house before. Our school’s football team played theirs every year, and this guy was notorious for his parties. Once we got to the keg, I let go of her hand and poured our drinks into red Solo cups.

Handing it to her, she sarcastically asked in a tone I recognized all too clearly, “So these are your moves?”

She wanted me.

I grinned, taking a sip of my beer. “My moves?”

“Yeah, your moves. I know you have at least one.”

I grinned again, scoffing out a chuckle this time. “I think I’m offended.”

“Does that mean I left a lasting impression?”

“Do you want to leave a lasting impression?”

“It depends.”

“On?”

“Whether or not you impress me with your”—she arched an eyebrow—“big move.”

Is she talking about my dick?

I smiled. My favorite kind of girls were the ones who could have a witty conversation with me. I got bored easily. “What’s your name?”

“Sage.”

“Oh...” I cunningly nodded. “So you’re going to be a stripper?”

She gasped. “I am not. What makes you think I’m going to be a stripper?”

“Besides your legs for days? Your name sounds like a stage name.”

I was pulling her tail; chicks liked that about me. It went back to grade school and that old saying of, “*He’s only mean to you because he likes you.*”

I learned the art of teasing at a young age and how much girls truly enjoyed it. It didn’t change as they got older—they liked the chase.

“Why so offended?” I played coy. “What’s wrong with strippers?”

“Nothing is wrong with strippers. I like strippers.”

Now that got my attention...

Right to my cock. She was referring to my dick before. Proving one thing for the night.

I was going to have her sit on my face.

CHAPTER 3

—Sage—

“So what’s your name?”

He extended his hand. “I’m Ashton.”

I smiled, shaking it. “I don’t think I’ve ever met an Ashton.”

“What can I say? I’m one of a kind.”

I arched an eyebrow. “You’re trouble. That’s what you are.”

I was usually rather shy around new guys, but tonight I wasn’t shy Sage.

I was confident Sage.

Sexy Sage.

Basically, I was Aspyn.

Feeling determined, I leaned against the railing, emphasizing my chest while he watched my every move. His stare quickly turned predatory and I could tell he appreciated the view, but it was over before it even began. My hand slipped, and I almost fell backward into the pool.

Quickly, he grabbed me from around my waist, tugging me into his strong, muscular chest.

Did he work out?

I slightly gasped, and the smell of my cherry lip gloss filled the small space between us.

My eyes followed the movement of his tongue as he licked his lips, making me feel warm and fuzzy all over. I’d never met anyone who had an instant effect on me quite like this guy.

What was that?

My mouth parted, suddenly feeling shy again. “I... I... I...” I didn’t finish my sentence. Out of the corner of my eyes, I recognized the person from across the pool. Ashton followed the movement of my stare, and his eyes landed right on the person I didn’t expect to see so soon.

Memphis.

He was glaring daggers at us, and I couldn’t help but feel this sense of confidence over it.

“Is that your boyfriend?”

“Not anymore.”

Memphis and I locked eyes.

“Are you using me to make him jealous?”

Now, that question snatched my attention back to Ashton; I was still in his arms. “I wasn’t the one who said I owed him a drink.”

“You didn’t answer my question. Are you trying to make him jealous?”

“Maybe.”

He smiled, he actually smiled. The expression on his face went right to the core of my belly, making it flutter.

“Lean into me.”

“What?”

“If you want to give him a show, then lean into me.”

“Ohhh...” I did as I was told. “Like this?”

“Yeah, but try not to look like I’m kidnapping you.”

I giggled, relaxing into his strong arms. In less than a second, he gripped onto my butt and sat me up on the railing, placing his body in between my legs.

“How about that for my big move?”

“That better be your cell phone that’s digging into me, Ashton.”

He leaned in close to my mouth, and I resisted the urge to gasp.

“You can call it whatever you want,” he rasped in a husky tone, making me swallow the lump in my throat.

There was no holding back what I was thinking. I blurted, “Are you doing this to help me make him jealous or because you like me?”

“Why do girls always have to put a label on everything? Why can’t you just live in the moment?”

“And what moment would this be?”

His mouth hadn’t moved away from mine. “The first time I kiss you.”

I didn’t have a chance to reply as his lips softly pecked mine, and it was the sweetest kiss I’d ever had. He slowly opened his mouth, and I followed his lead. Ashton’s tongue barely touched mine as I heard a voice from behind us say, “Happy birthday, Sage.”

Ashton didn’t move, nor did he stop. He simply gripped onto the nook of my neck and kissed me deeper, harder, like he didn’t hear Memphis, causing a heady moan to escape my throat.

This guy was unreal...

“Sage,” Memphis exclaimed. “What the hell is this?”

Ashton slipped his tongue into my mouth one more time before he softly pecked my lips. The expression on his face was the cockiest look I’d ever

seen on anyone. He didn't let me go, he simply spun his head around as if Memphis didn't matter, and he wasn't in the least bit intimidated by him which was rare.

Memphis had a presence about him. No one fucked with him.

Ever.

"Excuse me, asshole, you're making out with my girlfriend."

I jerked back. The audacity of this guy. "*Ex-girlfriend.*"

"We aren't over, and you know it."

I was going to give him a piece of my mind, but Ashton cut me off. "The taste of her tongue in my mouth says something different."

My gaze caught Ashton's.

Why was he putting himself out there for me? What did he gain from this? Did they have history? This couldn't be all about me, right?

I was more confused than I had been before this party.

Guys are so weird.

My jumbled stare went back to Memphis. "You broke up with me, remember?"

"So what? You're my girl, and everyone in this town knows it, so you must not be from around these parts, dickwad, because Sage is taken."

"Fucking Ashton," his friend who had been arguing with Aspyn earlier made his way over to us. "Do you have to start trouble everywhere we go?"

"Oh, so this is your big move?" I muttered low enough for only Ashton to hear me.

"I guess I'm a sucker for a damsel in distress."

I arched an eyebrow. *What do I even say to that?* "And you're willing to fight off the fire-breathing dragon you've just awoken?"

"For you? Definitely."

I opened my mouth to reply, but a fist hitting Ashton in the face knocked me right out of his arms and onto the ground. I hit it with a hard thud.

"Sage!" Aspyn came running toward me, falling to her knees in front of me.

"The fuck, man?! Who sucker punches someone when there's a girl in his arms?" Ashton reached for my hand. "You alright?"

I nodded, grabbing his hand. Memphis didn't allow it, and he shoved Ashton's hand away.

"What's your problem?"

Ashton didn't back down, getting in Memphis's face. "You. You're my problem."

His friend intervened, pushing him back. "Bro, it's not worth it. Let's go."

Ashton's gaze locked with mine. "You coming?"

"I'm sorry, Sage. I didn't think he'd drop you."

"You didn't think I'd drop her? Are you a fucking idiot? She was in my arms and you, like the pussy you are, side-swiped me. What the hell did you think I was gonna do, fly?!"

I never expected what happened next.

Nope.

Never.

—Ashton—

Sawyer held me back, firm and steady like the good friend he was. This douche needed to get put in his place. I fucking hated that guy. He had crashed so many parties in our town this last year. I didn't know he had a girlfriend with the way he slept around. His dick was a landmark for chicks to just hop on to.

Not that the boys and I were any different, but we didn't have any strings attached to anyone. I might have been a lot of things; however, I wasn't a cheater. Especially if I had a pretty girl like Sage to thrust balls deep into.

"Dude, let's go. Now!"

"Yeah, listen to your bitch ass friend, and walk away with your dicks tucked in between your legs."

Sawyer snapped around. "Who are you calling a bitch? I'm trying to save your ass." He pointed at Memphis. "Not his. Ashton can fight, dickwad. He'd sweep the floor with your balls, so either you walk away or he's going to show you what he can do with his fists."

"I'M GOING TO FUCKING KILL YOU!"

All eyes shot to the balcony upstairs. It was only then I realized we'd drawn a crowd. Cain came running out with his jeans around his ankles, his cock flopping free while he pulled up his boxers.

"Cain?" Sawyer called out, and his panicked stare found us below him.

"We gotta go! We gotta go! Abort! Abort! Code fucking blue!"

"What?" I exasperated, shaking my head.

“I said code fucking blue! You know what code blue means, Ashton! Her husband showed up!”

We all watched in disbelief as Cain pulled up his jeans and hauled ass off the balcony, climbing down the side of the house on the shutters.

“Husband?” Sawyer peered back at me.

Not even a second later, we saw this big motherfucker run out behind him, ready to kill.

“Oh shit...” I uttered—he was huge.

“Why the fuck are you guys still standing there?! We gotta go! I fucked up! I fucked up! Go get the truck! We got a runner!”

“Oh. My. God,” Sage spewed, only looking at me. “Is this what you guys do? Just cause trouble wherever you go?”

“How are you already having sex with someone?” Sawyer reprimanded. “We just got here.”

“I’ll tell you in the fucking truck! Now go get it!”

The husband ran back inside, and I figured we had less than a minute to get the hell out of there.

“How am I the only one who hasn’t stuck his dick or tongue in someone who is taken.” Sawyer looked around. “Anyone else want to make out with me before we leave? Actually...” He glanced at Sage’s friend. “Why don’t you put your tongue in my mouth, so I don’t feel left out?”

Cain fell on his ass, but quickly recovered and made his way over to us. “Abort! Go! Go! Go!”

He grabbed our arms, but I didn’t move as my stare lingered on Sage to come with us.

“Dude!” Cain grabbed my face. “I know you’re trying to be romantic and pull a romantic comedy out of this shit, but I’m literally about to get my ass kicked. Can we please go?”

The solemn expression on Sage’s face told me she wasn’t going to come with us, and for some reason it bothered me that she was going to stay with this shit-face who cheated on her all the time.

I was going to tell her. “He fuc—”

“You son of a bitch!” the huge husband hollered, interrupting me, sprinting out of the house full boar style.

“Dad!” the guy who threw the party called him, walking up to the scene of the crime Cain had committed.

Fucking Cain.

So much for ever coming back to this house again.

All that was left for me to do was tell Sage, “Happy birthday.” And we were out of there like we were Scooby fucking Doo.

Sawyer must have taken off at some point because his truck came into view, and he didn’t even slow down. We jumped into the bed of his Chevy, and he hit the gas. I couldn’t help myself. I turned around and locked eyes with Sage as she watched us hightail it out of there.

Our eyes never wavered from each other, and for the first and not last time in my life, I felt regret for what could have been. I wouldn’t see her again until years later, and by that time.

Everything had changed.

Everything.

Except...

My feelings for her.

CHAPTER 4

—Sage—

I watched them leave, and it made me feel sad.

Should I have gone with him? Why did it feel like I'd made a mistake?

I didn't even get his number. I'd never see him again.

"Babe, I'm sorry," Memphis expressed, bringing my troubled gaze back to him. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm fine."

He caressed the side of my face. "You sure are."

This was Memphis, always the charmer. It was what made me fall for him in the first place. His flirty demeanor and banter worked like magic every single time he used his Casanova antics on me.

Although, this time, they weren't carrying the same effect as they once did.

Was it because of Ashton? How could he impact me like this when I'd only just met him?

"Did you dress up for me?"

I nodded. It was the truth, I did.

"Sage." Aspyn glared at Memphis. "Maybe we should go?"

"How about you leave, so I can be alone with Sage on her sweet sixteen?"

"Or..." she accentuated, cocking her head at him with her middle finger on her chin in a sarcastic gesture. "How about you eat shit and die?"

"Aspyn..."

"Oh, come on, Sage. You're not falling for his shit again? He only wants you because someone else was interested."

"Aspyn, why don't you let Sage make her own decisions? Newsflash, you aren't her mother."

"Newsflash, you aren't her boyfriend. You broke up with her."

"And I've regretted it every day since."

She scoffed out a snide chuckle, "Where were you this evening then? When everyone who loves her was singing her Happy Birthday, huh?"

"I was buying her gift." He pulled out a small wrapped box from the inside of his jacket, and she eyed him skeptically. "Now, will you leave us

alone?”

Still not convinced, she gazed over at me. “I’ll do whatever you want, Sage.”

I peered back and forth between them for a few moments until I responded with, “I’m okay. We will meet up later, alright?”

She reluctantly sighed, not happy with my answer. “I have my phone. Text me when you’re ready to leave.”

With that, she left, leaving me alone with the guy I’d referred to as the enemy only hours earlier.

“Come on, let’s get you a drink, birthday girl.” He grabbed my hand and led the way inside.

I thought about Ashton the entire time.

What was he going to say to me?

I could barely keep up with Memphis’s stride; he was walking really fast for some reason or another. Finally, after what felt like forever from having to push through the crowds of people at this party, we made it to the punch bowl. I was blown away by the fact that one of Ashton’s friends had sex with the mother of this house, and we weren’t kicked out.

What kind of family was this?

I shook away the thought, grabbing the drink that Memphis handed me. I didn’t have to be told twice, I drank the entire cup down. Wanting to forget about the stupid boy who just liked to play the part of the hero for the night.

“I guess I’m a sucker for a damsel in distress.”

“Sage, I really am sorry. Are you alright?”

“Maybe you should’ve thought about me before you hit him?”

“He should’ve known better than to put his hands on what’s mine.”

“I’m not yours, Memphis. You broke up with me, remember?”

“You know I didn’t mean it, Sage. You know I’m crazy about you, but what am I supposed to do? I’m going out of state for college, for the next four years. You know my dad wants me to go to law school. I have to carry on the family name.”

Memphis came from one of the richest families in our town. They came from a long line of wealthy, successful attorneys. I once overheard his father state on a phone call that he charged a thousand dollars per hour. His family was always nice to me for the most part. His mom seemed lonely, though.

“Yeah, whatever.”

I served myself another drink and then another one after that. I didn't drink often, and I was definitely what you would call a lightweight. Things started to get a little fuzzy after that last drink, and I was beginning to feel better about the whole night in general.

"Did your slutty friend dress you?"

"Don't talk about Aspyn that way. She's the furthest thing from that."

It was true. She was picky and had high standards. She never had a boyfriend and had no interest in one either. She was as independent as they come, and I admired that about her.

"Why doesn't she like me? I've never done anything to her for her to treat me the way she does."

"She's just being protective over me. It has nothing to do with you."

"She knows I love you, Sage."

"Do you, Memphis?"

He brushed the hair away from my face. "Of course, I do. You're my girl." Leaning in, he kissed me.

Normally, I'd be weak in the knees for Memphis's lips on mine. He was the best kisser.

Well, not anymore. Ashton.

He didn't taste like him.

He didn't smell like him.

He didn't feel like him.

Stop thinking about him, Sage. He's gone. You're never going to see him again.

"I missed you, baby," Memphis whispered in between kissing me. "Come on, I want to show you your present."

I served myself another drink and finished it off by the time we were outside walking through the woods.

"Where are we going?"

"It's a surprise, birthday girl. Now." He grabbed the cup out of my hands and placed it on the grass. Blocking my eyes from behind me, he ordered, "Close your eyes."

I didn't consider the severity of what he was suggesting until we were already alone and in front of his surprise. He moved his hands away, and I opened my gaze.

"Wow..." was all I managed to express.

Gradually, I looked around at the bed of his truck which was parked near a river. The full moon was beaming above our heads, accentuating the makeshift bed he'd made for us. I stumbled back a little, and it was only then I realized how drunk I truly was. The booze running through my veins made it easy to follow his lead.

"You're so beautiful, Sage."

He helped me onto the bed of his Ford. It all happened so fast... One minute we were making out, and the next I was practically naked beneath him. I laid there in only panties, feeling completely exposed to him as he took in each and every curve of my body.

"How did I get so lucky?" he admired and grabbed my chin to make me look into his eyes.

He kissed me, and this time, it was more urgent and demanding. I went with it, and slowly, his hand found the edge of my panties.

"Memphis—"

"Don't you want this?"

"This?"

"Me, Sage. I want you. I've waited long enough, don't you think?"

We'd messed around before, mostly it was me getting Memphis off with my mouth, but we'd never had sex. We came close to it a few times, and I always made him stop.

"Don't you want me?"

Did I? I guess...

"Look at everything I did for you. Let me finish giving you your present."

I mean, I was already here. I loved him. At least I thought I did. "Do you have a condom?"

"Of course. Don't worry, I'll take care of you, baby."

I let desire take over, listening to him mumble about the condom as he placed it on.

"Do you want me to help?"

"No, I got it."

When he was done, he kissed his way up my body and found my mouth again. Positioning himself on top of me, he rested on his elbows with my legs spread open. His dick nudged at my entrance, and he slowly and carefully eased his way inside me. The pain and discomfort I felt was

almost unbearable. It didn't feel like anything I'd seen in movies or read about in books.

"Jesus, baby, you are so fucking tight."

He angled my leg a little higher and pushed all the way in. I wanted to scream, but I didn't.

He must have noticed. "Oh shit. I thought it would be easier if I just pushed all the way in. Are you okay?"

"Mmm hmm," I replied, wanting to hide the pain that I was sure was evident on my face.

He started to move, slowly at first, and I could feel the wetness as he slipped in and out.

There were no fireworks. The discomfort didn't subside. To try to take my mind off the pain, I started counting the stars.

One.

Fifteen.

Thirty-five.

Was I supposed to feel this hot?

Sixty.

Eighty-five.

I didn't want to make any noise or movement. I wanted it to be over and to soak in a bath to relieve the soreness I knew I was going to feel. His movements became quicker and more forceful, and I felt like he was tearing me open.

Was it supposed to burn this much?

His dick wasn't that big.

I knew within a few minutes that something wasn't right. I just thought it was the pain from losing your V card. What began as an uncomfortable tingling sensation, escalated to a sharp burning pain, like he had dipped his cock in a fucking jalapeño before thrusting inside of me.

"Oh my god," I moaned like I was on fire.

"I know. It's so good, isn't it?"

"What?" I frantically shook my head, unable to control my body. "No! I'm burning up!"

"I know, me too... oh fuck..." He abruptly stopped and shook on top of me, his chest convulsing for a few moments. "That was amazing," he huskily stated, kissing all over my face.

I swatted him away; the last thing I wanted was for him to touch me right now. I was literally scorching from the inside out. “No! Get off, get off! I’m actually burning!”

“What?”

I paid him no mind. The only thing that mattered was to try to relieve this sensation that was worsening to the point of no return.

What the fuck?

I shoved him away and didn’t think twice about it. I shot up and started running around the bed of his truck as if I was a fireman and I needed to stop, drop, and roll. I desperately tried to fan myself.

“Did you give me an STD?!”

“What! No! My dick’s clean.”

Never slowing down my roll, I ran faster, trying to be one with the breeze. “Why am I finding that extremely hard to believe right now, Memphis? My vagina feels like it’s been touched by the flames of Hades!”

“You’re overreacting, Sage. It’s just from me breaking your hymen. I’m big, so it was gonna hurt, babe.”

Abruptly, I stopped. “Oh please! Don’t flatter yourself. Big isn’t what I would say.” I gazed down at my blazing pussy. “Memphis! You gave me a rash!”

“Oh, shit...”

“Oh my God! What do you mean, ‘Oh shit!’ Why do I have a rash?!”

“Babe... I don’t know. I—”

I grabbed my cell phone off the bed of the truck and called the first person who came to mind.

“Sage—”

“ASPYN! My vagina is on fire!”

“I’m sorry, what?”

“Where are you? I think I have to go to the ER! I think there was Icy Hot on the condom!”

“Condom? What? You had sex?”

“Can we talk about that later, please?! Did you not hear what I just said! I think Satan is in my labia!”

“Oh... I’ve heard of this happening before. It happened to one of the girls on the squad.”

“What? Jesus, Aspyn, what?! Am I going to have to sit in ice?”

“Oh, ummm ... I think you’re allergic to latex.”

My face went lax. “What? That’s a thing?”

“I guess, according to your vagina. Where are you? I’ll come to you.”

“I don’t know. I’m in the woods. I’m going to jump in the river!”

“Drop me a pin of your location. I’m on my way.”

I hung up and did exactly that before I took off like a bat out of hell and hauled ass into the river. I swear I saw steam come off from the water the moment I sank in.

“Ummm…”

I stared up at Memphis who had his hand behind his head, looking at me as if I’d suddenly grown ten heads.

“Is there anything I can do?”

“No, I think you’ve done enough!”

He didn’t say anything after that. The water helped a bit, but not enough. *God, why did this have to happen to me?*

I didn’t have time to contemplate that any further because Aspyn’s car approached us, and within seconds she was grabbing my clothes, and I was darting into her car butt ass naked.

“Are we really going to the emergency room?” Aspyn asked, slamming on the gas and getting us out of there. “Your parents are going to find out if we do.”

“What other choice do I have? I literally have fire crotch.”

She sped through every red light until we finally pulled up to the ER doors.

“I’ll be right back!” Aspyn jumped out of her car and hurried inside. I heard her scream, “I need a wheelchair! A nurse! A doctor! Wait! Maybe I need a gynecologist! I don’t know! Possibly the burn unit too! My best friend’s pussy needs a fire extinguisher!”

I wanted to die.

Actually, this was what death felt like. Except, I wasn’t in Heaven.

I was in Hell.

Losing my virginity dragged me there.

CHAPTER 5

—Sage—

“How are things with you and Memphis?” Aspyn questioned on our way home from cheerleading practice.

On Fridays, I waited for her on the bleachers, doing my homework while she did her thing. Both my parents worked late on Friday nights. My mom owned an interior design business, and my dad was a pharmacist; he owned his pharmacy too. We were well off, had a nice, big house, but my family wasn’t conceited by any means. We appreciated what we had, and my brother and I never took advantage of what our parents could buy us.

Brady also had soccer practice on Fridays, and he usually went out with the team after. I didn’t care much for being home alone, so I always waited on Aspyn, so we could get our weekend started with movies or binge-watching our next series. Neither one of us were much for going out to parties, and I wasn’t ready to go back out there. Not with what had happened last time.

“Eh. He’s leaving in a month.”

After what happened that night, I don’t know... I kind of lost respect for him. He didn’t reach out to see how I was; he wasn’t even concerned. He played it off like it didn’t happen, and that didn’t sit well with me. I gave him my virginity, and he could consider it a parting gift.

“What do you want to do tonight?” she asked, coming to a stop at the red light.

“Let’s see if Redbox has any new movies?”

“That works. I need to pick up some Tampons anyway.”

I glanced at her. “You’re on your period?”

She nodded, looking at me. “Yeah, aren’t you?”

Our cycles had been in sync with each other for as long as I could remember.

“No...” I stated above a whisper.

Her eyes went wide. We both knew what happened last month...

“Did you just start?”

She shook her head, reading my mind. “No.

Oh, God ... please no.

Neither one of us said anything the entire drive to the store, both of us lost in the same thoughts. I stayed in her car while she went inside. I couldn't move. I was glued to the seat. My mind was numb, but I felt everything at the same time.

When she got back into the car, I saw the bag in her hands. There, shining like a fucking beacon of truth and consequences was a pregnancy test.

She took one look at me. "Better safe than sorry, Sage."

"We used a condom. I took the morning-after pill. The hospital suggested it since I was allergic to latex. They said the condom might not have worked. Aspyn..." I paused, feeling an intense sense of panic. "I did all the right things. I did everything I was supposed to. I can't be pregnant."

"You're probably not." She grabbed my hand. "It's just for precaution. You've been stressed because of finals. You know how you get."

I was almost a straight-A student. I made the honor roll every semester. All my classes in school were advanced, and I already had college credits.

This can't be happening to me!

My parents had shown up at the ER that night. They knew what happened between Memphis and me. I wasn't punished or grounded, but they weren't happy with the situation and what I decided was the right time for me to lose my virginity, but I'd suffered enough to last me a lifetime with what had occurred.

And now I could be pregnant? What the fuck kind of cruel joke was that?

My whole life flashed before my eyes on the way back to Aspyn's house. I blinked, and I was sitting on the toilet in her bathroom.

Aspyn sat on the sink, wanting to be there for moral support. She was eating a bag of Skittles.

"I can't pee with you just sitting there!"

"How old are we? Seven? Just pee. Do you need me to turn on the faucet?"

"Just close your eyes or something."

"Oh my God, Sage! I saw your entire coochie at the hospital. Hell, half the town saw your punanie!"

"This is different! Stop talking."

She made a zipper motion over her lips and proceeded to close her eyes. I shut one of mine and concentrated really hard.

"I think my pee has stage fright. It doesn't want to know the results either."

She didn't reply as she simply turned on the faucet, and it worked like a charm. For the next three minutes, we sat on the floor of her bathroom with a stick I'd peed on in between us. Both of us looking at it like it was a ticking time bomb about to explode.

"What are you thinking about?"

I shrugged. "Everything."

"You know if you're pregnant, we'll all be here for you. Your parents aren't going to be happy, but they wouldn't abandon you, Sage. Neither would Brady or *me*."

I nodded. "What do you think Memphis will say?"

"I'm the wrong person to ask this question. I think he's a fucking idiot, so he will more than likely say the wrong thing. He's moving soon, right?"

"Yeah. Ugh! What am I going to do? My parents are going to be so disappointed in me."

"You did everything to make sure you were responsible. It isn't your fault Memphis has super sperm. Who would have thought?"

I leaned my head against the wall. "I should have left with Ashton."

"Ashton?" She smirked. "You're still thinking about him?"

"Maybe."

"Does that mean I left a lasting impression?"

"Do you want to leave a lasting impression?"

I wondered if I left one on him like he obviously had on me too.

"If you are pregnant, your brother is going to murder Memphis. He didn't even like that you were dating a senior. He's going to shit a brick."

The timer on Aspyn's phone went off, alerting us that the three minutes were up. Call it intuition, a sixth sense, or maybe I just knew because I could already feel it.

I grabbed my belly as she flipped over the test. I didn't have to ask her for the results.

It was evident.

Written clear as day across her face.

I was knocked up.

CHAPTER 6

—Sage—

Eight years later

“MOMMMM!”

I threw my toothbrush into the sink and sprinted toward Haven’s bedroom. “Oh my God! What—”

“Haiden flushed my Barbie down the toilet!” She sternly pointed at the floating doll that was headfirst down the toilet. “Look! She’s stuck, and she’s probably drowned now! I’m going to have to have a funeral for her!”

I breathed out a huge sigh of relief. “Must you scream like that, Haven? I thought something bad had happened.”

She stared at me with wide eyes. “Did you not hear what I just said? A funeral, Mom! I don’t have time to plan a funeral! I have ballet today!”

Out of both of them, Haven was definitely the dramatic one while her twin brother was the troublemaker.

Yes, you just heard that correctly.

Twins.

I didn’t get pregnant with only one baby when I turned sixteen—I got knocked up with two. I had no idea my grandmother was a twin until the OBGYN said there were two heartbeats. At first, I thought I’d heard him incorrectly. After I’d passed out from the news, I was awoken with the reality that I’d be giving birth and responsible for two lives, not just one.

My mom didn’t have the best relationship with her mother, so no one thought it would be important to tell us that we had the twin gene in our bloodline.

I nodded. “I heard what you said. Let me see what I can do. Where is your brother?”

“MOMMMM!” she dragged out.

“Stay put,” I ordered before hurrying my way down the stairs. “Haiden! Where are you?”

“I’m out here, Mama!”

I went toward the backyard, and he came into view. “Haiden! How many times do I have to tell you that you can’t climb that tree when no one is

watching you?”

“But, Mama! I’m the man of the house. I don’t need anyone watching me.”

Damn you, Brady!

My brother had been telling him he was the man of the house since before he could understand what it meant. Now, it was his answer for everything.

“Sage!” Aspyn shouted from the front door.

“I’m out back!”

I watched Haiden’s eyes light up as soon as he saw my best friend walk through the screen door. He had the biggest crush on her.

“Hey, little man.”

He jumped off the tree like the daredevil he was. My boy had no fear, and he had the scars to prove it. He was only seven and had already had stitches twice and almost broke his arm last summer. It didn’t matter how many times I told him he couldn’t fly off the swings, he was determined to prove me wrong.

Haiden strode over to Aspyn with the strut of a man.

Where did he get this shit from?

“Mom, my girlfriend is here now. You don’t have to watch me anymore. She can.”

“Haiden, she’s not your—”

She laughed, shaking her head. “I swear he has better swagger than most men I date.”

With a serious expression on his face, he simply stated, “I am a man.”

Before Aspyn could reply, Haven ran into her arms. “Aunt Aspyn! You’re just in time. We’re going to have a funeral today.”

Aspyn picked her up, hugging her close to her chest. Haven was small for her age. My family had a reoccurring joke that Haiden took all her nutrients. He was big for his age. Most people didn’t realize he was only seven until I told them. They were both wicked smart, though. I spent a lot of time with them, so did my family. They were advanced for their age.

After we found out I was pregnant with twins, my mom closed her business and helped me raise them. I was able to finish high school and graduate with my friends. Yet, I was still the cautionary tale of all of Tullahoma, and let me tell you...

Trying to date when I had twins waiting at home was nonexistent. I lived vicariously through Aspyn. With the help of my loving, supportive family and best friend, my life stayed somewhat normal. As normal as it could be with having twins at only sixteen. I even graduated from college with my teaching degree a year ago; I finished that early too.

“Who died?” Aspyn questioned, looking at me concerned.

“Barbie,” Haven told her. “Haiden murdered her.” She stuck her tongue out at him. “You should go to jail.”

“Your brother is not going to jail, Haven.” I gazed over at my boy. “Haiden, apologize to your sister about her Barbie.”

“But, Mama,” he grumbled, looking at me with those puppy eyes he'd perfected since he was two. “I was just trying to see if she could swim.”

“You flushed her down the toilet!” Haven exclaimed. “You didn't even give her a chance!”

Fair.

“Haiden, I won't tell you again. Apologize to your sister, and you're going to buy her a new Barbie with your own chore money.”

“But, Mama... I was saving up to take my girl out on a date.”

“Oh my God.” I shook my head. “It's too early for this. I'm going to make some coffee; want some?” I asked Aspyn.

She nodded, setting Haven down on the ground. “You guys behave and play nice together. I have to talk to your mom.”

“Go get ready for school.”

“Mom,” Haven responded. “It's Saturday. There's no school today.”

“How is it Saturday already?”

The kids took off toward the jungle gym my brother and dad had built for them for their birthdays a few weeks ago. My twins could bicker and yell at one another and then make up like nothing had occurred between them seconds later.

It was amazing to witness. They reminded me a lot of Brady and me. After I had the twins, he became the best uncle a sister could ask for. Picking them up from school, taking them out on activities and their sports to give me a break. Haiden was the best soccer player on his little league team. My brother was his coach; he was adamant from the moment Haiden could crawl that he was born to be a midfielder.

Brady and our dad were the best substitutes for my twins not having a father of their own.

Aspyn pulled me away from my thoughts.

“You’re a mom and on mom time.”

“Is that a thing?”

“After seeing your memory, I’m convinced it is.”

I chuckled, walking back inside. We could still see the twins from the kitchen, and I made sure to keep an eye on them. Sometimes Haiden would make Haven do things she wasn’t ready for, and to prove to her brother that she was brave, she would do them.

Two ER visits in the last six months was never a good thing.

“What do you need to talk to me about?”

She grinned, taking a seat at the kitchen island. With the help of my parents, I moved out of their house and bought this one two years ago. It was right on a lake and had a big backyard for the twins to play. They had their own rooms, but I’d still find Haven in her brother’s bed most mornings. Despite the fact that they fought sometimes, they had this crazy-ass twin bond. They finished one another’s sentences and knew what the other was thinking without having to be told.

“Aspyn, why are you looking at me like that?”

“Because tonight is the night.”

“The night for what?”

“For you to have an orgasm.”

“I have—”

“With an actual man, Sage, not your battery-operated one.”

“Hey! Be nice to Ashton. He’s good to me and gets the job done every time.”

“Sage, don’t get me started on the fact that you named your vibrator after a guy you met for maybe all of ten minutes.”

I shrugged. “It was the first name that came to mind when you bought him for me.”

“Whatever.” She shook her head. “We’re going out tonight. I already got your mom to sit, and she’s staying the night. So guess what? You don’t have a curfew!”

“Sage, every time we go out and try to find someone to give me an orgasm, it ends up with them either hauling ass toward the door the second they find out I have twins, or it ends up being the worst thirty seconds of my life. And trust me, I lost my virginity to Memphis and ended up with a rash and two babies—it can’t get any worse than that.”

“Listen, that’s why we’re doing something completely different this time.”

I narrowed my eyes at her, and she laid two tickets in between us.

“Speed dating? You have got to be kidding me?”

“What? No! This is a brilliant idea, Sage. You can actually interview the guy before he goes down on you.”

“What guys are you dating? They never go down on me, Aspyn.”

“Dude, you had a C-section with the twins. Your scar is barely visible, and your vagina is still intact. They should be going down on you.”

“Should and do are totally different things. The men who take me to bed have no interest but to get off. Hence, the thirty seconds, and that’s me being kind. Remember the guy who had a foot fetish and tried to jack off with my feet?”

“Oh yeah.” She nodded. “Foot Fetish Fred. But that’s exactly my point! You can actually ask them questions, and pick the right one to suck on your cl—”

“Sage...”

“I already bought the tickets. Plus, it’s for a good cause. It’s a charity for kids with cancer. I spent three hundred dollars on our tickets, so we’re going. Even if I have to drag you there kicking and screaming.”

Aspyn was a lifestyle blogger. She had over a million followers on her blog page alone, not to mention all the other social media she had. The girl liked to shop and had great taste. She made a killing on affiliate codes and brands reaching out to her for sponsored content.

I laughed. “What am I supposed to ask them? Do you know how to find my g-spot?”

“I mean, in this day and age, I feel like that’s a fair question.”

I rolled my eyes at her.

“Don’t give me that look. You’re almost twenty-four years old, and you have a smoking hot body. Have you looked at yourself in the mirror lately? I don’t even know where your kids came from. If I hadn’t seen you pregnant myself, I’d tell you you’re full of shit and they did not come out of you.”

“Sage, I was sixteen when I had them. My body bounced back like it was nothing. Haven’t you seen *Sixteen and Pregnant*? All those moms look amazing too.”

“I don’t know about those moms. I know about you, and I know how your twins always come first. For one night, can you just put your vagina first and act your age?”

“The last time I acted my age, I wound up, up the stick.”

“And look how well that turned out? Your twins are the most beautiful little humans I’ve ever met.”

“Yeah.” I nodded, smiling. “They are pretty awesome.”

“Thank God they took after you and not their piece of shit father.”

“I don’t want to talk about him.”

“Good. Neither do I. So it’s settled. I’ll be back around seven to get you dressed.”

I glanced down at my clothes. “What’s wrong with the way I dress?”

“You dress like you’re a Kindergarten teacher.”

“I am a Kindergarten teacher.”

She pointed at me. “Exactly.”

There was no reason in arguing with her; I’d end up losing. Aspyn always got her way. There was just something about her that you couldn’t say no to. I appreciated that she cared about my vagina; someone had to. If it weren’t for her, I’d probably have cobwebs and end up an old maid. I wasn’t convinced I’d ever find a man who would want to take me on.

One kid was hard enough.

Two brought it to a whole different level.

Why would any man want to carry all that baggage?

Especially when there were millions of women who didn’t have kids. There was no dating for me. I had one boyfriend in all my life, and he turned out to be the biggest douchebag ever. Don’t get me wrong, I wanted to fall in love.

Be in a committed relationship.

Get married.

Have more babies.

I wanted the white picket fence, the storybook happily ever after. Mostly, I wanted my twins to have a dad. One who would love them as if they were his own. Haven and Haiden asked me about their dad every chance they got, but there wasn’t much I could tell them other than they didn’t need him.

They had me.

My family.

Aspyn.

They were loved and cherished. As hard as it was to be a teen mom, I couldn't imagine my life without them. We were a package deal, end of story.

I didn't have much faith for tonight; however, at least I'd have an adult conversation.

And maybe, just maybe, I'd get lucky and have...

The Fling.

CHAPTER 7

—Sage—

We walked into a bar that had tables set up perfectly for everyone to rotate in the same direction. We had three minutes to have a speed date with someone, and then at the end, you decided if you had chemistry with anyone. If you did, you could take it further than a couple of minutes. Just when I thought this was ridiculous and you couldn't have sparks with someone in three minutes, my memory proved me wrong.

"I'm Ashton."

"I don't think I've ever met an Ashton."

"What can I say? I'm one of a kind."

You could say that again...

"Here." Aspyn set a tray of tequila shots in front of me.

"If I drink six shots right now, the only speed date I'm going to be having is with the porcelain God."

"Relax, you're only taking three."

"Only? I don't drink, remember?"

"You'd be surprised how quickly your body grows a tolerance to that 1942 life."

"1942? That's an expensive tequila. Are you trying to wine and dine me, Aspyn?"

"Yes, so you'll spread your legs open for your fling."

I laughed. "You're such a good friend."

"I know." She grabbed a shot and handed me two. "We have sixty seconds before this starts, so hurry and drink up."

I did as I was told. "Whoa. Those went down way too smooth."

"Welcome to the dark side, Sage McCoy." She winked at me, and the announcer's voice came through the speakers.

"Everyone, please take your seats."

You know that game where children walked around in a circle and when the music stopped, you had to sit down in the nearest chair. There was always that one person who didn't get to a chair in time and ended up losing and sticking out like a sore thumb.

Yeah... I'm that sore thumb.

I stood there as if I was standing in front of a classroom completely naked. With all eyes on me, I smiled. Instantly feeling my cheeks burning bright like the morning sun.

“Hi, I’m Sage.” I awkwardly waved. “Anyone’s table need me?”

Out of the corner of my gaze, I saw an arm lift in the air.

“Awesome.” Nervously, I laughed. “I’m on my way.”

I knew this was a bad idea. I was already fucking it up. Bowing my head, I made my way over to the table in the back. Quickly, I sat down, unable to look up at him.

“The timer starts now. You have three minutes,” the announcer stated into the microphone.

Taking a deep, solid breath, I composed myself as best as I could until I heard him say, “I see you’re still a damsel in distress.”

My eyes snapped up, locking eyes with the man I’d least expected.

—Ashton—

Her gaze went wide.

“So I did leave a lasting impression.”

Her stare went wider.

I tried to hide the fact that I was as blown away as she was that we were sitting in front of one another. To say I hadn’t thought about this girl more times than I cared to admit over the years would be an understatement.

She bit her bottom lip, shrugging in a coy yet innocent sort of way. I loved that her hair was still long and framed her pretty face. She looked older, wiser, but still just as fucking shy. Desperately trying to pretend she wasn’t. Her sudden confident demeanor didn’t fool me; I knew what was under that façade. If only I could see what was beneath her clingy dress and lacy bra that was peeking through her cleavage. Her tits were practically on the table like she was serving them on a platter for me.

Since we only had three minutes, I initiated our conversation. I was dying to see if we still had that same witty banter and dynamic that I couldn’t seem to find with any other woman. There was something about her that had never left my mind. I’d placed her on a pedestal, comparing our chemistry to all the women I’d bedded over the years.

I held up my end of the playboy pact.

I was single.

No strings attached.

Never had I fallen in love.

Lust, absolutely. Although, my dick always got bored in the morning.

“I remember you being a little more talkative the last time we saw each other. Cat got your tongue, Sage?”

“Nope.” She shook her head, and I took a sip of my drink, enjoying the look in her eyes as she stared at me. “I’m just trying to figure out why a guy like you needs to be speed dating?”

“I like to offer my services to charity. I mean, come on, who wouldn’t make money off this.” I gestured to myself, grinning at her.

“I see your ego didn’t mature with the rest of you.”

“You should see what has matured.” I winked at her, hinting to my cock that twitched at the sight of her.

Her cheeks turned that shade of red I might have fucked my hand to a time or two or dozen. Again, I lost track. She eyed my drink as if her mouth had suddenly become dry, so I slid it over to her.

She smiled, appreciating the fact that I paid attention to detail. Little did she know, I didn’t do that a lot. Sage took a sip of my drink and choked, triggering my mind to run wild with visions of her choking on my dick.

“Sorry, I’m a picky drinker.”

“I see.” Leaning back in my chair, I rested my arm on the backrest of the seat next to me, finally getting comfortable. This was going to be fun. I couldn’t remember the last time I’d felt like this.

Eager.

Hard.

Thinking of all the ways I could make her come with my tongue.

“So, you’ve always been a pain in the ass?”

She giggled. “Are you flirting with me?” Cocking her head to the side, she pursed her pouty little mouth.

Get ahold of yourself, man. When did you turn into a horny teenager?

“Depends, does imagining your lips wrapped around my cock count as flirting?”

Her eyes widened again before she swiftly recovered. “Typical male. You’re thinking about *me* servicing *you*.”

“Sorry, let me be a gentleman. Does my head between your legs, eating your pussy, count as flirting?”

Her mouth basically dropped to the floor, and I loved how much of an effect I was having on her. Most of the time, my Tinder dates didn't exactly do anything for me other than get me off. There was no courting, flirting...

Connection.

We were both there for the same reason, fucking.

Not that I didn't show up to this charity event for the good cause; this was for Sawyer's hospital. He was interning there most nights while his days were filled with med school. I told you he was smart as shit, and his knowledge knew no bounds. I had no idea how he was able to be a full-time med student and work the grueling hours of being everyone's bitch at the hospital.

At least all his hard work would pay off when he started fingering women for a living and called himself a pussy doctor.

"Any ex-boyfriends I need to ward off tonight?"

"That's right. You like to be the hero."

"No, sweetheart. I'm the fling."

She smirked. "I didn't have a boyfriend then, and I don't have one now."

I smiled, showing her the effect she had on me too.

"You have a minute and a half," the cock-blocking announcer informed over the speaker.

"Did you at least end up having a good sweet sixteen?"

"Ummm ... it was definitely a memorable one."

I leaned into the table and stared deep into her eyes. "Is it because I left a lasting impression? Cause let me tell you, I didn't even show you my big move."

"No?" She leaned in, mirroring my stance, placing her elbows on the table.

Moving in closer until my face was only an inch away from hers, I challenged, "We have a minute left, and I don't want to spend our last sixty seconds wasting time. I let you get away once, and I won't do it again."

Her eyes dilated, taking in every word I was expressing. She wanted it all.

Me.

Being the blunt motherfucker I was, I simply rasped the truth. "I don't do relationships, but if you're looking to live in the moment with me, I will happily make you scream my name until you lose your voice from riding my face."

Matching the tone of my husky voice, she practically moaned, “Is that your big move?”

“Only one way to find out.”

“Time is up! Everyone, rotate to the right please and meet your next speed date.”

I stood, not moving an inch, anxiously waiting for her reply. At this point, if she didn’t leave with me, there was a slight chance I was going to throw her over my shoulder like the caveman I was and take her home with me regardless.

“You have got to be kidding me?” her bratty girlfriend intervened, walking over to us. “You’re here too?”

“Nice to see you too, shitty ass driver. Did you almost run anyone over on the way here?”

“Not yet.” She proudly smiled. “But the night is still young. Why don’t you go cross the street, and we can see if I can change that?”

Sawyer busted out laughing, looking only at her. “Darlin’, at least let me buy you a drink first.”

“You coming?” I reached for Sage’s hand. “Because I can guarantee that you will.”

I could see the internal struggle on her face, and I’d be lying if I said I didn’t find it hot as fuck that she didn’t do this often. She was a good girl, and I was going to make sure that I rewarded her morals.

With her clit in my mouth.

She stood, glancing at her friend. “You okay if I dip out?”

Her friend’s eyes went back and forth between Sawyer and me before ultimately landing on me. Grabbing her phone, she snapped a photo. “If she doesn’t text me in the morning, I’ll be driving my car through your house while you’re sleeping, got it?”

I nodded. “Duly noted.”

She gazed at Sawyer. “I guess you’ll do. I don’t cuddle, I don’t spend the night, and if you have no oral skills, then I’m just wasting my time.”

“Holy fuck.” I slapped Sawyer on the back. “I think you just fell in love.”

He didn’t pay me any mind, never breaking stares with the feisty chick who needed a good ass fucking.

At least that’s what I would do if Sage was sassing me like this chick was Sawyer.

Never missing a beat, he declared, “Cuddling is for pussies. I’ll insist you leave after I make you come again on my cock, but only after I’ve given multiples from fucking you with my tongue.”

And ladies and gentlemen, she smiled. Bright and bold. “We’ll see about that.”

After all these years, my boy Sawyer had finally met his match, and she was blazing fucking fire. One of them was bound to get burned, and I for one couldn’t wait to see the shit show. He grabbed her hand, and they walked away.

“Wow,” Sage breathed out, bringing my attention back to her. “So the dirty talking, that’s just an art you’ve perfected with your friends?”

I nodded toward Sawyer. “I’ve taught him everything he knows. So ... you ready for my big move?”

“I think so.”

Not hesitating for one second, I pulled her toward me and whispered in her ear, “Don’t fall in love with me, Sage.”

It wasn’t the first time I’d said this to a woman; although, it was the first time...

I wasn’t sure if I meant it.

CHAPTER 8

—Sage—

Fuck me.

Literally.

I was nervous. I was so nervous I couldn't get my leg to stop bouncing in his truck. I basically creamed my panties the moment he opened the door for me.

Yeah, he opened his door for me.

Granted, the only boyfriend I ever had was a complete douchebag, but Aspyn never talked about the guys she went home with opening doors for her.

Was this normal?

I mean, I was a sure thing. One way or another, he was going to get laid. The moment I felt Ashton's hand on my knee, my heart began racing at the speed of light. I thought maybe he was trying to get my attention, but nope. He was simply trying to calm my overly anxious knee bouncing. Once I stopped, his hand slid down my thigh. In a steady, heated rhythm, his fingers went back and forth, over and over again. They were probably an inch away from the edge of my panties.

I wasn't used to experiencing these emotions. My heart was beating so fast that at one point I thought I might actually pass out.

I wasn't this girl.

I didn't go home with the hottest guy at the bar.

Ever.

The men I did hook up with were friends of friends at parties Aspyn dragged me to go to.

Do you have any idea how hard it was to explain to these men why I'm carrying around a latex-free condom?

Despite being on the pill, I wasn't going to have unprotected sex with anyone until I was married. With my luck, I'd get pregnant with twins again.

I didn't go out much. I had twins at home. My days were consumed with mom life, and I couldn't remember the last time I was doing something for myself.

Right now.

This moment.

This was for *me*.

Which scared me more than anything because this was him. It was Ashton, the one guy I'd compared every other man to.

Should I tell him I have a son and a daughter waiting for me back home? A set of twins that were conceived the very same night we'd met!

He was the first to break the silence between us, calling me out, "You thinking about all the ways you're gonna fuck this up?"

"Am I that obvious?"

"Well, you were about to drill a hole through my floorboard with your bouncing. You do realize there is nothing you could do to turn me off, right?"

"Um ... I can think of a few things..." I honestly replied, referring to my twins.

"Sage."

Our stares connected.

"Would it help if I told you I'd been thinking about fucking you since the moment I laid eyes on you?"

"Actually, that makes me feel worse. Now I know you have expectations."

"Sage, I'm a man. The only expectation I have is to make you come in my mouth."

"Okay, listen," I sternly stated, ignoring the fluttering feeling in my belly from hearing his dirty mouth. "These one-liners are a super turn on for me. But let me tell you right now that I don't do that with the guys I sleep with."

"And what's that?"

"Come. Have an orgasm. See the almighty promise land."

"I'm sorry, what?"

"Yeah, you heard correctly." I gestured to my body. "I'm just not made that way. I'm sure you have talent in those areas that go beyond measures, but I don't want you to be let down. Alright, are you listening?"

"I'm listening."

"So here it is." I turned to face him. "I'm super flattered with you thinking about me for the last seven years, but when it comes to sex, I'm pretty basic. I think you're expecting the time of your life with me, but I'm not the kind of girl that you're used to."

“And what kind of girl is that, Sage?”

I shrugged. “Probably models. Slutty. Maybe not the brightest crayons in the box.”

“Wow.” He flinched; it was quick, but I saw it. “You’re actually judging me?”

I felt bad and was about to apologize. “I’m so—”

“For your information, I didn’t have a type until now. Consider my cock an equal opportunist; he loves being taken for any ride.”

I cocked my head to the side. “Until now?”

“Yes, until now. Until *you*.”

How many women had he said those exact words to?

I couldn’t help myself. “And what type am I?”

“You, sweetheart, are the type of woman you take home to Mom.”

Oh, sweet Jesus! Should I just put his dick in my mouth now?

“How often do you do this?”

“What? Take a pretty girl home with me?”

I blushed, I couldn’t help it. “Yeah.”

“Do you really want to know the answer to that?”

“Huh, that many?”

“Sage, I’m not bringing you home to talk about other women.”

“You just know all the right things to say, don’t you? You have all these moves, and you look like you’re made for sex. Really, really, dirty sex. Like the kind where you’re sweating all over the place, and it’s hot and passionate and lasts five hours.”

“And you’re anxious about that why?”

“Because I don’t have five hours. I barely have five minutes to myself on a daily basis. Just trust me when I say, I’m not the girl you think I am. I’m not the girl you briefly met on my sixteenth birthday, so if you’re expecting her, then you’re going to be severely disappointed.”

He parked his car, and it was only then I realized we were in his driveway.

His eyes landed on mine, looking profoundly into them. “You’re still the very same girl I met, Sage. You want to know how I know?”

I nodded.

“Because you took my hand outside that party in the same way you took it tonight. The girl who wanted to let her hair down then is the same one

I'm looking at now. Girls like you don't change, Sage, they just get better with age."

Holy motherfucking swoon! What the hell do I say to that?

"The way you're looking at me right now is the same way you looked at me eight years ago, and this time, I'm going to make sure I do something about it."

I was frazzled. He rendered me speechless. Ashton didn't dilly dally. He grabbed my hand and led me inside. The first thing I noticed was how much of a panty-dropper his home was. If there was a picture of the definition of a bachelor pad, then Ashton's place would be that photo.

He let go of my hand and nodded toward his living room. I watched as he walked toward the bar in the corner of the room.

"Wow," I breathed out in awe.

Of him.

Of this.

Of all of it.

"What do you do for a living?"

"I'm a real estate agent." He made his way back toward me, handing me a drink. "To calm your nerves."

I smiled. "Well, that makes sense. Your home is staged like one."

"I can't take credit for that. My mom and sisters"—he gestured around the open room—"they did all this."

"That might be the cutest thing I've ever heard. Is that another line?"

He opened his mouth to respond but quickly shut it. He stared at me with an amusing expression on his handsome face as I drank my entire drink in one huge gulp. As soon as I finished, I grabbed his and drank it down too.

"Those are good. Another round?"

He grinned and nodded. Grabbing what looked like a remote off the counter, he turned on the music. Soft jazz played through the speakers, illuminating his stunning home with the most perfect tunes.

This playboy was too much.

"Is this how it goes down for you, Ashton? You bring a girl back to your lavish home and what? Serve her drinks? Tell her all the right things? Until what? She can't take it anymore and jumps your bones?"

He grinned again, making me weak in the knees.

"Is that how you want it to happen? You want to jump my bones, Sage?"

"Maybe. I haven't seen you naked yet."

In what could only be described as the first slow-motion montage I had ever experienced in real life, Ashton didn't have to be told. In one swift, hot as fuck movement, he began unbuttoning his shirt.

One by one.

Little by little.

My will to remain calm crumbled to the floor. With each step that brought him closer to me, his pecs and twelve-pack revealed themselves before me.

“Fuck me.”

“I plan to.”

And just like that, my resolve shattered like a broken mirror by those three words.

The booze.

The anxiety.

The years of thinking about him made me a bit too eager.

I pounced like a lion. Except, in my head, it occurred much differently. I jumped into his arms, catapulting myself off the ground as if I was a gazelle and he was my prey. I barely wrapped my arms around his neck when my knee, the same one that was bouncing like a drum in his car, collided with his balls.

He loudly groaned, instantly losing his footing and falling backward from the swift kick to his boys. The momentum didn't stop me. If anything, I followed his lead, and when he fell to the ground, I tumbled on top of him.

Ashton didn't break my fall, though—his balls did.

—Ashton—

I didn't have to sink balls deep into Sage to see heaven. Fuck no. She made me see God with only her knee to my family jewels. I couldn't fucking see straight as spots instantly danced around my eyes.

“Oh my God! I'm so sorry!”

The only sounds I could make were painful and filled with agony.

Is this what dying feels like?

“Oh my God! I was trying to jump your bones!”

I couldn't speak. I could barely even think. Holding onto my most prized possessions, I laid on the floor and waited for I don't know what.

“I’m going to get you some ice.” She rushed toward the bathroom. “Shit! Where’s your kitchen?”

I wanted to reply, but I couldn’t. Words couldn’t form out of my mouth when I felt like my balls were literally in my throat.

“Why the hell is your house so big?! You’re only one person!” She ran from one end of my home to the other, faster and faster she went, and if I weren’t laying on the ground dying in pain, I’d be laughing my ass off at how adorable she was right now.

Great, she knees me in the balls, and my dick still wants inside of her.

“Ashton! You have a jacuzzi in your bathroom! You think maybe we could—” She halted when she realized I was still in the same spot she’d left me in.

Broken.

Dying on the fucking floor.

“Right! Ice! Where is your kitchen?”

I was able to nod toward the direction.

“Dude!”

I heard my fridge open.

“You have the Samsung Smart Fridge! That’s so cool!”

I waited for what felt like forever as she slammed open and shut the drawers.

“For fuck’s sake, Sage! Just use a towel!”

“Oh! That’s right! I’m so sorry! I’m just so nervous, and I feel so bad! I’m coming!”

I resisted the urge to say, “*Yeah, you would be, if you hadn’t taken me out.*”

From the moment she got on her knees, setting the freezing cold ice on my balls I envisioned this scenario happening in a much different way.

However, when she added, “I’m so sorry, Ashton. Let me make it up to you,” my balls didn’t just ache. They now throbbed from wanting to take her up on that offer.

CHAPTER 9

—Ashton—

“Hell of a defense tactic.”

“Well...” She leaned back, sitting on the heels of her stilettos. “Having a brother, you learn how to defend yourself. Are you alright?”

“I’m not sure yet.”

“Do you want me to take a look, maybe?”

“You want to look at my balls?”

“I mean, I could. If you needed me to.”

“No, Sage. The first time you see my dick isn’t going to be after you put him in a coma.” Sitting up, I groaned.

“Here, let me help you.” She stood, grabbing my hand. Carefully, I limped toward the couch.

Once I was sitting down, she plopped next to me. “Fair. Do you want me to leave then?”

“Do you want to leave?”

She shook her head.

“Good. Wasn’t going to let you.”

She smirked.

“So tell me about your brother.”

“Do you really want to know about my sibling?”

“Considering my balls are frozen, I don’t really have another option at the moment.”

“Right... Again, I’m so sorry.”

“You can’t help the fact that I have huge balls.”

She giggled, and it echoed off the walls. “I believe you. Being the hero and all, I imagine those big balls have come in handy. I feel so bad, though. Is there anything I can do for you?”

“Now that’s a loaded question if I ever heard one. I can think of multiple things you could do for me.”

“For some reason, I don’t doubt that.”

“I’ve been meaning to tell you all night how beautiful you look. You were pretty when we were sixteen, but you’ve really become quite stunning.”

“How many girls have you said those exact words to, Ashton?”

“Sage, if you’re going to ask me that every time I pay you a compliment, then I’m going to have to show you how different you are from all the other girls.”

She blushed, but I could still see it in her eyes. She thought I was lying. Believe it or not, I wasn’t.

“Your opinion of me is going to give me a complex.”

“My opinion of you shouldn’t hold a high regard.”

“Is that right?” I pulled the hair away from her face, tucking it behind her ear. “Your opinion of me is the only one that matters. I can’t imagine I’m the first guy to tell you how beautiful you are.”

“You’d be surprised. I don’t date much.”

I didn’t know what I was expecting, what I wanted from her. This chick had haunted my dreams from the second I first saw her, and that thought alone terrified me. This wasn’t who I was. I didn’t care to learn about the women I was with. They were a quick fuck in the bathroom at a club, an impromptu blowy on the beach. I was a fuck ’em and leave ’em kind of man.

I loved my life.

Every aspect of it was what I wanted.

Yet, there I was, wanting to know every last thing about this girl who’d just kneed me in the balls.

I reached across the sofa and started to lightly skim her thigh. My mind was running wild with all the emotions she was stirring inside of me. Sentiments I wasn’t used to and had no idea how to deal with. Sage was fucking me up. The worst part, I didn’t care that my face wasn’t currently buried in between her legs, making her scream my name.

I liked having her here. In my home. With me.

What the fuck?

The balcony door was open, and a light breeze was blowing the curtains, giving a romantic allure all around us. I couldn’t help myself, not with her. I gripped onto her wrist, catching her off guard, and tugged her toward me.

She gasped, and her hand immediately pressed against my muscular chest, causing heat to soar through my body, starting from my head down to my toes.

Her scent.

Her hair.

Her soft skin.

It all did something to me in a way I'd never experienced before. My mouth collided with hers, slowly at first.

Her lips were as smooth as I remembered.

She tasted exactly how I recalled.

Trouble.

My lips parted, beckoning her to do the same. She followed my lead, softly caressing the tip of my tongue with hers. Our mouths moved against one another as if they were destined to meet and come together again.

A chance.

A circumstance.

Kismet.

I slowly kissed her, trying to simmer down the unexpected movements of our emotional connection. Resting my forehead on hers, I stared openly into her confused gaze.

Over the years, I'd learned a lot about women. Their mannerisms, their expressions, the way I made them feel. Sage felt everything I was, and it frightened her in the same way it did me.

"Tell me you felt that..." I rasped, needing to hear her say it.

"Yes," she breathed out, mimicking my tone.

This was too fast.

Too soon.

So I did the only thing I could think of—I lied, "As much as I would love to hit a home run with you tonight, I don't think my balls are up to bat."

I wanted to talk to her, listen to her voice, get to know her.

Basically...

I. Was. Fucked.

—Sage—

My cheeks flushed, and my belly fluttered. If there was one thing I'd learned about Ashton from the very beginning, it was he spoke his mind anytime he opened his mouth. He never held back, and in the little time we knew each other, it was one of the things I liked the most about him. He seemed as genuine as they could come, and I hadn't met a lot of honest people in my life. Especially when it came to dating random men who were always trying to prove something or another.

It was refreshing.

He was my breath of fresh air.

Which was yet another reason I needed to stay away from him.

I could really fall for this man.

I was a mom, to twins. He had no idea what he was in for with me, and I didn't want to tell him. This was supposed to be a fling—nothing more, nothing less.

I smiled. "I thought all guys could—"

"Do me a favor, Sage. Don't think about other guys when you're with me."

I rolled my eyes, but I still found myself smiling. His eyes bore into mine and once again rendered me speechless. He stared at me with that same swagger and confidence he'd exuded all night. Which was another thing I liked about him, the way he looked at me.

There was something about him, since the first time I laid my eyes on him, that I couldn't tear my gaze away from. This magnetic pull I was instantly drawn to.

It came from something deeper.

More meaningful.

A connection I couldn't explain, growing stronger with each minute that passed between us. I knew he felt it; he was the type of guy who would notice everything. Neither one of us said a word for a couple of seconds, but it didn't matter. Our eyes spoke volumes, causing the nervous feeling in my core to subside.

"Tell me about yourself, Sage."

My heart dropped. "What do you want to know?"

"Everything."

"You say that like you mean it."

"I don't say anything I don't mean."

I ignored his response, asking, "What do you want to know?"

"I mean, you don't have to tell me your blood type, but I do want to know if you're a psycho and I need to be worried that I let you into my house. You can never be too careful. My mom tells me so."

"Your mom, huh?"

He cheekily grinned, arching an eyebrow. "I'm a proud certified mama's boy."

The fact that he admitted that to me was enough for me to orgasm without him even touching me. I was the mother of a little boy; I was a woman raising a man, and if my son ever said that about me, I'd know I did something right.

"I'm not a psycho; although, if you piss me off, I may kick you in the balls." I playfully winked. "Again."

"Oh, so that kick to my balls was just practicing for when I piss you off?"

"Are you planning on pissing me off?"

"Not anytime soon, but I'm a man. It's bound to happen sooner or later. Thanks for the heads-up; I'll make sure to wear a cup."

"Do you own a cup?"

"Wouldn't you like to know..."

"I could see you owning a cup with all the women you must piss off with your bedhopping ways."

"Well, you see, in order to protect my balls over the years, I realized that honesty truly is the best policy. I'm upfront. I don't want anyone falling in love with me."

"Commitment phobic?"

"Quite the opposite. I've committed my entire life to being single, and I've never hurt a woman because of it."

"I see. So you've never been in a relationship? Never had a girlfriend?"

"And that surprises you why?"

"I don't know. You like to be the hero, but you don't want the happily ever after?"

"That's for fairy tales, and you're not a little girl I'm going to lie to. I'll never lie to you, Sage."

"You're implying that you'll see me again? I thought you didn't do relationships?"

"I don't count making you come as a relationship."

I laughed.

"Enough about me. I want to hear all about you."

"You're a paradox of contradictions, Ashton."

"Do you need to start off slow? How about I lead you in the right direction? Tell me about your favorite color?"

"I don't have a favorite color."

"You mean it isn't the beloved pink?"

"Actually, I'm not a fan of pink."

He narrowed his eyes at me.

“I’m more a blue kind of girl.”

“Well, my blue balls agree with you.”

I giggled as he took me in with those eyes again. It made my stomach flutter for entirely different reasons, knowing he could see right through me. And as much as it terrified me, it also thrilled me. Finding someone who could see past the woman I was now.

The mom.

I smiled. Despite the awareness in his eyes, I looked away. I had to. Reaching into my purse, I turned my attention to a Starburst I was pulling out, avoiding the look in his eyes that I wasn’t ready to feel. I put it in my mouth, needing some sort of distraction from the sudden realness between us.

“Sharing is caring.” He nodded toward the wrapper in my hand.

“I think this was my last one.”

“You knee me in the balls and you don’t share your candy. I’m having flashbacks to my childhood. Am I going to have to chase you around my house?”

“I could see you as the little boy who terrorized me.”

“And you would have loved it then as much as you are right now.”

“My mom never told me that boys were mean to me because they liked me.”

“I find that hard to believe. If that were true, you would’ve left with me eight years ago and not the asshole you stayed with.”

As if on cue, my stomach did that somersault thing again. Except, this time it felt like it was never going to end, twisting and turning and flipping.

If I hadn’t stayed, then my twins would have never been born.

Never taking his eyes off mine, he leaned over with a mischievous grin. I felt this jolt. This immediate spark that made my mouth dry and my face flush, a burning sensation all over my body. I had never experienced anything like it before, and yet I couldn’t wait to feel it again.

He cunningly smiled as if he knew exactly what I was feeling, thinking, wanting. We spent the rest of the night talking.

Just talking.

His hand was always on my thigh, brushing his fingers ever so lightly over my sensitive skin. He told me about his best friends, including Sawyer, whom Aspyr had gone home with. The other two were named Leo and

Cain. Leo lived with his girlfriend who had been his best friend since they were kids. Cain lived in St. Thomas, a captain of a sailboat.

I mentioned the Virgin Islands were on my bucket list.

We laughed.

We joked.

We picked on one another.

He asked me about my brother, my parents, Aspyn. The night rolled by, and it was like I blinked and the sun was peeking in through the sliding door that stayed open all night.

We didn't sleep.

I was never bored.

I couldn't even remember the last time I had this much fun, by simply speaking to him. Doing something completely out of the ordinary for me and enjoying every second of it. This night meant more to me than it should, and I was already counting down the seconds until I had to leave and never see him again.

I wanted to see him again.

Desperately.

Shutting off the voice in the back of my head that kept trying to remind me I needed to stay away from him.

He reminded me of the girl I once was, to act my age, and live in the moment with him.

The moment would be over soon...

"Wow. I can't believe we talked all night."

He nodded. "It's a first for me."

"Yeah, me too." I paused, trying to gather my racing thoughts that were all over the place. "I should go."

He stood. "I'll drive you home."

I jumped up. "No!"

He jerked back, surprised by my outburst.

"I already got an Uber."

Before he could reply or see my bullshit, I grabbed my purse and walked toward the door with him following close behind me.

Do we kiss? Say goodbye? What happens now?

Question after question tore through my mind until we arrived at the front door. I opened it; however, it abruptly shut from behind me.

My eyes locked with his.

“I want to take you out.”

“Out?”

“Yeah,” he stated. “When two people go out, the guy pays for everything, and they get to know each other. Maybe there’s a reach-around?”

I giggled with a great big smile on my face.

“There’s that smile,” he groaned, making me bite the corner of my lip.

“I’ve never been on a date,” I blurted, instantly smacking my hand on my forehead. Ashton also had the ability to get the truth out of me, without even trying. “I mean—”

“Me neither. We can be each other’s first. Would you like that? Me being your first?”

My eyes widened, and my belly did this somersault thing that only happened when he spoke to me in that suggestive way. I never had anyone talk to me like he did, and I’d be lying again if I said I didn’t like that too.

“I ... ummm ... I—”

“It’s alright, Sage. I’d love for you to be my first.”

I breathed out, “Ashton, what about your no dating rule?”

“I’m making an exception.”

“For me?”

He leaned in close to my lips, almost knocking me on my ass when he replied...

“Only for you.”

CHAPTER 10

—Sage—

I tiptoed into my house as if I was a teenager who was sneaking in and didn't want to wake up her parents. When, in fact, I didn't want to wake up my kids.

My mom met me at the door, smiling wide. "How was your night, sweetie?"

"It was amazing. Thank you for watching the twins."

"Sage, you know I love being with my grandchildren. I wish you would go out more often."

"I may take you up on that soon."

She cocked her head to the side. "Did you meet someone?"

"How do you know?"

"A mother always knows, Sage. You have that look in your eyes."

"What look?"

"The one that says you're smitten. Must be some man if he was able to pique your interest. You're so picky."

"Mom, I got pregnant when I was sixteen, and their father went running for the hills. I think that proves I had shit taste in men."

"Honey, Memphis was young too. It's a lot for a boy to handle."

Hearing my mom defend him brought me back to the night I told him I was pregnant.

"Are you sure?"

I handed him the ultrasound photo, pointing to the two little circles that indicated we were having twins.

"A picture is worth a thousand words, Memphis."

His eyes went wide. "Sage, I can't do this."

"What do you mean you can't do this?"

"I can't be a father! Are you for real? Twins? What the fuck is that?"

"It's two babies, asshole!"

"Babe, I'm not ready to be a dad."

"I'm not ready to be a mom, but here we are. We have nine months to prepare for it as best as we can."

“You’re out of your mind! You’re sixteen! And I’m going away for college!”

“I know how old I am, and you can go to college here.”

He adamantly shook his head. “I’m not changing my life for something I don’t want.”

“Wow,” I coaxed. “Did you really just say that to me?”

“Sage, I’m sorry, but if you do this ... if you have them ... then you’re on your own. I want no part of it. I used a condom; it’s not my fault your pussy is broken.”

“It’s not broken! It’s just allergic to selfish assholes who can’t fuck!”

“Sucks for you, I got off.”

“Ugh! I don’t know what I ever saw in you! I don’t need you! I can do this on my own.”

“Don’t be stupid, Sage.”

“I am stupid! I was with you, wasn’t I?”

“I’m going to go.” He walked over the threshold of my bedroom door.

“Good.” I stood in front of him, still in my bedroom. “Don’t let the door hit you on the way out!”

“Sage—”

I slammed the door in his face, and it was the last time I ever saw him.

Shaking away the horrible memory, I focused on my mom. “Are you making excuses for him? Since when do you side with him?”

“I’m not. I’m just playing Devil’s advocate. Girls develop faster than boys, and I wouldn’t be surprised if Memphis came around again. His parents’ checks still get deposited into the twins’ account every month.”

When Memphis’s parents found out I was indeed having their son’s twins, they resolved his abandonment of any responsibility by depositing five thousand dollars a month into a private account for Haiden and Haven, twenty-five hundred for each. I never touched the money. I didn’t need it. My parents were just as well off and willing to help me raise our kids. After discussing it with my parents, I decided to leave the money for the twins’ college tuition. Other than throwing thousands of dollars at the problem on a monthly basis, they never asked to meet the twins or be part of their lives.

Honestly, I preferred it that way. It was one less problem I had to deal with. I didn’t want my twins to get attached to his family, only to find out they weren’t good enough to carry his last name. Which they didn’t—they

carried mine. I wasn't going to give that asshole's last name to my babies I raised without him.

"Memphis won't come around, Mom. He's too selfish. Last I heard, he was traveling around Europe or something."

"Never say never, Sage. But enough about him. I want to hear about this mystery man who has you smiling."

My eyes shifted toward the stairs.

"We stayed up late. Haiden wanted to finish watching Transformers, and you know how Haven has to do everything her brother does. They won't be up for another hour at least."

"Mom..." I walked toward the kitchen to make coffee. "Last time he watched Transformers, he thought he could turn into a Camaro, and I spent three days telling him he wasn't Bumblebee."

"I appreciate his enthusiasm."

"More like stubbornness."

"Well, I wonder where he gets that from?"

I shot back, "I'm not stubborn."

"Sage, you're as stubborn as your father."

"Daddy isn't stubborn. He just likes to be right."

"You certainly are your father's daughter."

The front door opened, and I didn't have to wonder who it was; I already knew.

"We're in here, Aspyn!"

She was smiling like a fool when she walked into the kitchen and kissed my mom on the cheek. "Morning, Mom."

We'd been calling one another's parents Mom and Dad since we were little girls.

Taking one look at me, Aspyn grabbed the fresh cup of coffee out of my hands. "I want to know everything, Sage. Dish."

"Nice timing."

She sat next to my mom, both of them anxiously waiting for the details that could only be described as one of the best nights of my life.

"I've been waiting for the scoop too, Sage."

My mom was my other best friend. She knew everything about me. I told her all about my shitty hook-ups in the past. She was grateful I had a friend like Aspyn who looked out for my dating life or lack of. I sacrificed everything for my babies, including my love life. They came first.

Always and forever.

“Did you guys...” Aspyn wiggled her eyebrows. “You know.”

“We did not.”

“WHAT?!”

“Shhh ... you’re going to wake the twins.”

“You didn’t sleep with him?”

I shook my head.

“Then what did you guys do?”

“We talked.”

“About what?”

“Everything.”

“Oh, honey...” Mom chimed in. “That’s amazing.”

“What’s amazing is that he didn’t try to sleep with you.”

“I didn’t really give him much of a choice. I kind of kneed him in the balls.”

“That’s my baby sister,” Brady intervened, walking into the kitchen.

“Whoa. Where did you come from?”

“Your guest bedroom.”

“You crashed here?”

“Yeah.” He nodded, bumping his shoulder into Aspyn who knocked into his shoulder right back.

They always had a flirty dynamic. Although, she swore up and down nothing ever happened between them. There were times, during the last few years, especially that I thought maybe she was hiding something from me when it came to their friendship.

“Mom said she was making dinner over here, so I stopped by on my way home from work.”

“Oh, and Haiden didn’t let you leave?”

“Of course not. We’re best friends.”

I chuckled because they really were. Brady was Haiden’s hero. He wanted to be just like his uncle, and I loved that. My brother was a good man. My parents did right by him.

“What happened after you kicked him in the nuts?” Aspyn questioned, sipping her coffee.

“I ran around the house like a lunatic, trying to find his kitchen so I could get him some ice. A house that his sister and mother decorated for him, and it’s absolutely stunning. After I grabbed the ice for him, I brought it back,

and he placed it on his jewels. We still kissed a bit, but that's it. We spent the rest of the night talking."

"You just talked all night?"

"Yeah, Aspyn. Trust me, I'm as shocked as you are."

"Huh, interesting."

"What?"

"His friend couldn't keep his hands off me."

"Wait?" Brady spoke. "You guys are dating friends?"

"Dating is a term I don't use. As you know."

Aspyn and Brady stared at each other for a few seconds like it was an inside joke between them.

See ... weird, right?

Aspyn didn't miss a beat, she added, "His friend Sawyer sure has some moves. I don't remember the last time I... Mom, cover your ears."

"Aspyn, I know all about moves. I've been married for thirty years to the same man for a reason."

"Ewww," Brady and I expressed.

"Why do young adults always think they invented sex? We have decades of moves that you probably haven't even tried yet."

"Mom!" I exclaimed. "I don't need to know about you and Daddy still doing it. It was bad enough that you locked your door every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday night. Do you have any idea how many times Haven and Haiden have asked me what you were doing in there?"

"Given the divorce rate, I'd think that you would appreciate that your parents still have the hots for each other."

"Ugh ... so gross." I waved her off. "Anyway, Ashton asked me out."

"Like on a date?" Aspyn inquired.

"Yeah."

"For when?"

"I don't know. I told him I'd check my schedule and get back to him."

"I love it! Playing hard to get. I'm sure he's not used to that."

"I don't think I'm going."

"Sage, you're going," Mom informed in that mother's tone that meant business. "I can watch the twins again."

"That isn't why I'm not sure. I didn't tell him I'm a mom. I can't. He's going to go running for the hills. It's hard enough to tell a man like him that

I have one kid... Could you imagine his reaction if I told him I had not one, but two?"

Brady didn't hesitate. "If he's not man enough to handle kids, then he's not man enough to be with you. No loss on your part, sis."

"Brady, when you say things like that to me, it only reminds me of how much of a good man you really are. How are you not married?"

"That's easy. I'm waiting for Aspyn to marry me."

She eyed him skeptically. "Haha. Funny."

He winked at her. "On that note, I'm heading out. Let Haiden know I'll be by at six on Tuesday to drive him to soccer practice."

"Oh, your man time?"

"You know it." Brady kissed my mom, me, and then slapped Aspyn on the butt. "Later."

He'd been slapping Aspyn on the ass since we were kids, and none of us thought any more about it.

"You know you don't have to tell him right now, sweetie."

"Mom, are you saying I should lie?"

"Not lie, but more like withhold the information until you see where this is going. No point in telling him now if you end up not liking him. I'm not saying to lie to him for weeks and months, but at least for a few more dates. See where this is going before you drop that bomb."

"I don't think that's going to be the problem. The issue is that I already like him too much."

"From the little I have seen of this guy, Sage, he acts like a huge kid himself, so there's that."

"It's one thing to act like a kid, and it's another to be around two of them twenty-four seven."

"Honey, your kids are well-behaved. Any man would be lucky to have them in his life."

I sighed. "You think?"

"I know."

"How long should I wait to tell him then?"

"I'd do it when it feels right. It's still so new, and I'm sure there are things he hasn't told you about himself yet. Wait it out. You'll know when it's right to tell him."

"I guess ... I could do that, Mom."

“Mama!” Haven shouted, causing me to jump. Her loud footsteps followed, and it sounded like a stampede was coming through the second floor of our house.

“We’ll talk about this later. I don’t want the kids to know about him.”

They both nodded.

Quickly, Haven barreled into the kitchen with Haiden right behind her.

“Haiden kept me up all night trying to shift into a Transformer.”

“It wouldn’t have bothered you if you hadn’t come into my room.”

“Well, I get scared at night and you’re my brother, so you’re supposed to protect me!”

“Exactly! It was why I’m trying to become Bumblebee.”

“That doesn’t even make sense!”

“Neither does your face!”

“Says, my twin brother!”

“Your fraternal twin brother!”

“Okay,” I ordered, regretting the day I told them the difference between fraternal and identical twins. “Enough, you two.”

“Mama!” Haven jumped into my arms. “Where were you last night? Grammy said you were out on the town. When do I get to go out on the town too?”

“When you grow boobies,” Haiden mocked, making his way over to Aspyn. “Hey, baby.”

“Haiden,” I emphasized. “Don’t call her baby.”

“Why? She’s my girl.”

“She’s not your girl.”

“Yeah! She doesn’t date little boys,” Haven reminded, knowing it would only upset him.

“I’m a man. Uncle Brady and Grandpa said so.”

“You’re not a man,” Haven corrected, rolling her eyes. “You think you can turn into Bumblebee.”

“I can turn into Bumblebee.”

“No, you can’t!” Haven got out of my arms. “You’re just a dumb boy.”

“I’m not dumb. You’re dumb!” He pushed her, and of course, she pushed him back.

“Stop breathing my air!” she screamed.

“You’re breathing my air!”

“Oh my God! It’s not even eight yet, and you’re already fighting. Enough! One more word out of either of you and you’re going into a time-out.”

“No, Mama!” Haven whined. “I hate time-out.”

Haiden didn’t reply; he simply pulled Haven’s hair.

“Ouch!”

Before she could retaliate, he sprinted off, and Haven chased after him.

“You can’t catch me!” he taunted.

“I’m going to catch you and kick your butt!”

“Haven!” I chastised, and Aspyn laughed.

“See, what’s not to love about your twins? They’re beyond entertaining.”

“You’re only saying that because you’re my best friend, and they’re basically your niece and nephew.”

“Nah, I’m being honest.”

I spent the rest of the morning trying to stop them from trying to kill one another until my phone dinged with a text message.

How many times have you thought about me today?

I grinned, texting back. **Miles?**

Who the fuck is Miles?

I knew it was Ashton, but I wanted to keep him on his toes. **Who is this?**

Your hero.

Ohhhh... Hi, Mike.

Now I know you’re fucking with me. Not nice, Sage. After what you put my balls through.

How are your balls?

Ready to be in your pouty little mouth.

My eyes widened.

Are you going to continue playing hard to get? Because I’ll tell you right now, I always play to win. What time am I picking you up?

I never said I'd go on a date with you.

It's why I'm not asking.

I giggled. *Why did he have to be so freaking cute?* **Are you always this persistent with the women you want to take to bed?**

No. You're one of a kind.

Ashton, you can't say things like that to me.

Try to stop me, sweetheart. I'll pick you up at seven on Friday.

He couldn't pick me up. **I don't know if you're a serial killer yet. I'll meet you there.**

Oh, I am. Guilty as charged for wanting to murder that pussy.

ASHTON!

It doesn't make me a serial killer if I want to tie you up and have you at my mercy.

I'm done sexting now.

If this were sexting, you'd send me a picture of your gorgeous tits.

I palmed my forehead.

I can't believe I'm doing this.

Shutting the door to my bedroom, I pulled down my top a little and snapped a picture of my cleavage in my lacy bra. This was one thing I always did for myself. I bought sexy bras and panties—it didn't matter that I was the only person who saw them. It still made me feel sexy.

Seconds later, a text message appeared with Ashton standing in front of a mirror with his shirt pulled up. His abs and muscular chest were fully on display as if I was at a candy shop.

Another text quickly appeared from him. **I showed you mine, now show me yours.**

I couldn't believe I was doing this, I pulled down my bra and snapped one more photo. Flashing him.

Ding.

And there was Ashton in all his glory. A picture of his hard-on through his black slacks, and let me tell you...

He wasn't lying about the big dick. His cock was so huge I didn't know if I'd be able to take it. If it wasn't for the ring I recognized on his finger, then I'd say it wasn't him. This was like porn star dick. I didn't even know cocks like his were a real thing outside of the entertainment industry.

Maybe I should practice my oral skills?

After shaking away the thought and if it would fit in my mouth without gagging or throwing up on him, I read his text.

Thanks for the visual, going to put it to use now. See you Friday.

I spent the rest of the day imagining his huge cock. I had no idea what I was doing or how I would make this work. I never kept my kids a secret, and there I was, trying to hide them from a guy I could see myself falling for.

"Don't fall in love with me, Sage."

Ashton's words rang through my mind the entire day. I didn't want to fall for him, but I was beginning to think I had no choice in the matter.

I was a single mom of twins, going on an official date with the ultimate playboy. I needed to guard my heart, except...

My heart had always wanted him.

Now more than ever before.

CHAPTER 11

—Ashton—

I walked into Sawyer's exam room. He was working at the hospital. He was always fucking working. This was the only way I could talk to him, and this was important. I had to tell someone, and I figured Sawyer would be the one who would understand me the best. Not that I wasn't close to Leo and Cain, but Leo was wrapped around Mila's pussy, and Cain was busy with his catamaran business.

My boy was living the dream in St. Thomas. He was actually selling the dream, to be exact. As in he catered to couples who were trying to reconnect and bring love back into their relationship. He'd take them offshore for a week or two, so the husbands could fish while the wives relaxed, sunbathed, and Cain's "wife" took sexy pictures of her to give to the husband. They'd have moonlight dinners where they danced under the stars.

The list was endless of the shit he'd do to make these couples happy and in love again.

I used the term "wife" loosely since it was a charade. Cain was adamant couples would trust him more if he was happily married himself. For months he was in search of his perfect partner-in-crime until he'd finally found her. Her name was Lively, and I hadn't met her yet. However, from the photos he'd sent me of her, she was a fucking knockout.

The business idea occurred to Cain a few years ago while all of us, including Mila, were in Cancun together. It was our college graduation trip, and we just so happened to book a booze cruise on a catamaran for the day. He was inspired and decided he could successfully sell the dream of love for a living, and the crazy part was, he was making a killing doing so.

Lately, he'd been on my ass to visit him and meet Lively. For someone who said they had no interest in their fake wife, he sure as shit talked about her a lot.

Maybe I should take Sage with me? Where the fuck did that come from?

"Look at you," I announced to Sawyer, trying to ignore the thought that had just stirred in my mind as I sat on the exam table in the hospital room. "You're all dressed up in your doctor clothes."

“Their my scrubs, you dick.”

“Bro, I think I have a problem. I think I’m dying.” I grabbed the stethoscope from his neck and placed it over my heart. “You hear that? I’m fucked.”

He tore it out of my grasp. “Stop touching my shit, Ashton.”

“Sawyer! I have a real problem here! Okay? Are you paying attention?”

“You sound like a needy chick.”

“Speaking about needy chicks. How did it go with the best friend?”

“What best friend?”

“That memorable, huh?”

“Who, Aspyn?”

“No, Sleeping Beauty ... yes, the shitty fucking driver.”

He smiled, beaming. “She is a ride.”

“She is a ride? Or she rode you?”

“Both.”

“You going to see her again?”

He didn’t answer my question. “That’s like asking you if you’re going to see her best friend again.”

I winced.

“Shut the fuck up.”

I shrugged. “It’s why I’m here, Captain Obvious.”

“She must have been quite the lay.”

“I wouldn’t know.”

“Now I know you’re messing with me.”

“Nope. The only thing I got was a knee to my balls.”

“Wait, what?”

“Let’s just say we spent all night talking.”

“Like dirty talking?”

“No, you shit, like talking, talking.”

“I don’t understand.”

“And here I thought you’d be the one who would understand the most out of all of us.”

“Me?” he snapped. “Why me?”

“I don’t know. We’re the only two left who haven’t settled down yet.”

“Cain hasn’t settled down. He’s pretending to play house to make money.”

“Bullshit. You know he’s fucking her.”

“Of course he’s fucking her, but he’s not marrying her.”

I jerked back. “Are you saying Leo is marrying Mila?”

“I’m sure it’s coming. They already live together.”

“Our boy is getting married?”

“Ashton, don’t go—”

“We’re going to Vegas for the bachelor party, and there’s going to be titties everywhere. I’ll call up Blue Diamond, let him know we need the cream of the crop of his strippies for the weekend.”

“You would be thinking about that right now.”

“It’s better than what I’ve been thinking about all day.”

“Which is?”

“Sage. I can’t get her titties out of my head.”

“I thought you said you didn’t have sex?”

“We didn’t,” I explained, jumping off the exam table. “We were sexting.”

“Well shit, are we back in high school?”

“Fuck you, man. I like her.”

“You like a lot of things.”

“No, I mean—I *really like her*. I like her so much I asked her out.”

“Wow.” His face was shocked. “Hell has officially frozen over!”

“Dude.”

He put his hand up to his ear. “Excuse me? I’m sorry. What was that? Can you say that one more time? I don’t think I heard you the first time.”

“You heard me, fuck face.”

“Oh come on, this is a monumental moment. A fucking universal standstill. Pigs are flying all around us.”

“No shit! Hence, why I’m dying, jackass! This isn’t who I am. I am not this man. I asked her out on a date, Sawyer. I’ve never been on a date in my whole life. I’ve turned into this pubescent boy overnight, and I even fucked my fist to a photo of her tits.”

“Wow, we really are back in high school.”

“I didn’t jerk off to pictures in high school, asshole. I didn’t need to.”

“Nurse!” he exaggeratingly shouted. “My boy here needs you to blow him so he remembers he has balls.”

“Bro.” I shook my head, standing my ground. “I came here for advice, and this is what I get from you?”

“You’re right. We should take you to the ER instead. You need a radiologist to x-ray your head on the fact that you’re pussy whipped and

you haven't even seen hers yet. For the first time in our lives, you got a girl, Ashton."

"I got a dick, Sawyer. That's what I got, and I don't want to mess it up with her."

"So, you're saying this isn't about pussy? It's about love?"

"Love? You're getting ahead of yourself. I said I like her, not love her. Big fucking difference, dude."

"You like her? Like, you want to date her and see where it goes?"

"I don't know. That's why I'm here."

"And you think I would know?"

"Yes, you're smart as shit, and you know everything."

"Bro, I'm the last person to be giving you advice on liking a girl. The only bitch I like is my dog."

"She's different. Not like the girls we're used to." I smiled, glancing over at him, watching his gaze get wide the more I talked about her.

"Tell me if I'm following correctly... You don't want to just sleep with her, but you want to date her? Like after you fuck her?"

"I think so."

He reached over, trying to feel my forehead. "Do you have a fever?"

"Fuck you again, ass wipe! Forget about it. Forget I ever said anything. I'll figure this out on my own, douche bag."

"Ah, hell, can't take a joke now, playboy? Man up. She know how you feel?"

"I don't know. Don't chicks have a sixth sense about this shit? She can probably smell it on me."

He leaned forward. "You do kind of smell like a pussy."

I shoved him, and he laughed. "Then go for her, Ashton. You like her, show her. Simple as that. Think and act with your head, and I'm not talking about the one on your cock."

I inhaled a deep breath, contemplating what to say next. In the end, I decided to change the subject. "So no do-over on the shitty driver?"

"Now I didn't say that."

"Sawyer, you haven't said shit."

"Since when do I ever talk about the chicks I take home?"

"There's a first time for everything. I mean, look at me. I sound like a chump, and you're loving my pain and misery."

“I’m emptying bedpans tonight, Ashton, so you’re far more entertaining. You do realize that you just sounded like a pansy, right? Please tell me you know that?”

I rolled my eyes.

“You ask a girl like her out for one reason and one reason only. Do I have to spell it out for you?”

“I get it.”

“No, I don’t think you do. Girls catch feeling quick, so I would make sure you understand what you’re doing. And like you said—she’s different than the girls you’re used to. We made a pact for a reason, but maybe that reason doesn’t matter to you anymore.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“It means maybe you’re ready to settle down, have a girlfriend. Or maybe you’re just fucking lonely.”

“I’m not lonely, I have you,” I mocked, grinning. “There’s something about her, there’s always been something about her.”

“Always?” he exclaimed, glaring at me as if he was a deer in headlights. “You mean you’ve been thinking about her all these years?”

“Maybe.”

“Holy shit! How are you just now telling me this? Has she been on your mind since you met her?”

“I’ve thought about her a time or two.”

“Must be a hellauva time or two if you’re still barking up her tree. Maybe you just have to bang her to get her out of your system?”

“Are we still using the word bang?”

“Yeah, bang is still an appropriate term to use in this conversation that I never thought I’d be having with you.”

“Trust me, hearing me say these words to you also has me up in arms, okay? I’m confused as fuck. I don’t want to like her. I wish I could just *bang* her and get her out of my system. She’s messing with my head, both of them! But here lies the problem, Sawyer. I know once I thrust balls deep inside of her, I’m going to want to live there, and I’m not sure I’m ready for that kind of commitment of a permanent home.”

He nodded. “You’re fucked.”

“No shit, Sherlock.” I pointed at him. “You know what? This conversation hasn’t helped me in the least. If anything, you’ve made me more fucking confused.”

“Well, pull up those panties, Ashton, and start acting like the best friend I know because you’re honestly full of shit right now. You know you can’t be in a serious relationship. You get bored with everything. You have the attention span of a five-year-old, particularly when it comes to women.”

“I paid attention to everything she said last night, Sawyer. I paid so much attention to what she told me that I’ve been contemplating it all day. Here’s the real fucking kicker—I want to know more about her. I want to know everything, especially what she looks like when I’m going down on her.”

“See, this is about sex. I bet once you diddle her, you’ll be over it and moving on to the next pussy waiting for you to make her come. Moral of the story, though—at least you tried.”

“That’s the shittiest advice you’ve ever given me. I feel personally offended by what you just said.” I shoulder-checked him and walked toward the door.

“Ashton.”

I snapped around. “No. We’re not best friends right now. I need a break from you because you don’t understand me or anything I’ve said.”

“You need to stay away from her. You’re losing your man card the more you talk about Sage.”

“I’m going out on a date with her on Friday night.”

“Good. Fuck her and be done with her already. I’m tired of hearing you whine like a lost puppy.”

I deeply sighed. “Maybe you’re right. Maybe I do need to just rail her and get it over with. That makes sense. She’s like the forbidden fruit I want to eat and make come down my chest.

“And finally, he sees reason.”

“You’re a good friend, man.”

“I do what I can.”

“So are you going to see Aspyn again?”

He smiled, spewing...

“She’s riding my face tomorrow.”

CHAPTER 12

—Sage—

I blinked, and it was Friday.

The date I had been thinking about all week was finally here, and I was trying my best to not freak the hell out about it. We texted on and off all week. The truth was I couldn't be more excited to get dressed up to the nines and just be a normal woman my age for the night.

Not the mama of twins.

“Sage, honey, you look beautiful,” Mom declared as I walked into the living room, doing a little twirl in place.

I felt young.

Carefree.

Light as a feather.

I was wearing a light-blue spring dress that hugged my curves perfectly, subtly flowing out around my knees. My hair was curled and tied to the left side of my head, with a few strands framing my face. Aspyn helped me with my makeup, going heavy on the eyes with dark black eyeliner and thick mascara. Some blush and a soft shade of nude for my lips.

“Wow, Sage ... you look... Jesus... I hope this guy is worth it, or he's going to have to answer to me,” Brady spoke, eyeing me up and down.

My brother had always been protective over me. Ever since I could walk, he was right there by my side. He'd put Memphis in the hospital the night I told my family he didn't want anything to do with our babies. That was the last time I saw him. I was eight weeks pregnant at the time.

Brady said he came over to hang out with Haiden and Haven, but I knew he was lying. Mom was cooking dinner, and he never passed up a home-cooked meal by our mother. She was the best chef, and I had learned a lot about cooking from her over the years. My kids always ate my food, and they were picky eaters.

Haiden was sitting on the couch playing his Xbox, glancing over at me from the television. “You look nice, Mom. Where are you going?”

“Oh... I'm going out with Aspyn.”

He looked over at her. “But she's not dressed up.”

Knowing I was keeping this date from the twins, Brady replied, “She doesn’t need to get dressed up, bud. She looks good in whatever she wears.”

“Facts,” Haiden agreed, turning his attention back to his game again.

Aspyn bent her body into a flirty pose for my brother.

See ... fucking weird, right?

I gazed into the foyer mirror, reapplying my lipstick before I kissed my kid’s goodbye. Aspyn left with me so the twins wouldn’t get suspicious. She was driving me to the address Ashton had text messaged earlier this week.

“You really do look amazing, Sage. You nervous?”

“Is it that obvious?”

She laughed. “Stop letting your thoughts get the best of you. Just let down your hair and have a good time.”

“That’s the problem. Me having a good time.”

“What’s wrong with you having a good time?”

“I’d be having a good time with Ashton, the eternal playboy.”

“So what? You act like that’s a bad thing.”

“It’s the worst thing.”

“Why?”

“I’m going to want to see him again, and I’m already falling for the guy whose last name I don’t know.”

“So you get to know him.”

“He’s not the type of man you get to know, Aspyn.”

“Sage, he asked you out on a date, so he obviously wants to get to know you too. Why do you find it so hard to believe this guy might actually like you and want to get to know you too?”

“What if he does?”

“Now you’re worried if he likes you?”

“It’s not just me he has to like...”

“Oh, you’re nervous about him liking the twins?”

“Of course I am.”

“How many times do I have to tell you that your twins are the best, and he’s going to fall for them as well?”

“I don’t know. He’s a man. Men don’t usually find kids a positive, especially when they aren’t his.”

“You’re jumping to conclusions before you’ve even given him the chance.”

“Maybe you’re right. I’m just nervous. I’ve never lied about being a mother.”

“You’re not lying now. You’re just not telling him.”

“I’m pretty sure that’s the definition of a lie, Aspyn.”

“It’s not. It’s withholding information. And you’re going to tell him if he’s worth knowing them, so calm down.”

“I can’t calm down. I already like him too much. More than I should. I can’t help it. Every time he’s texted me this week, I’ve gone back and reread it. I have every text memorized. Talk about clingy and psychotic.”

“That’s not either-or, Sage. You’re allowed to like a guy. There’s nothing wrong with that. You’re allowed to put yourself first. It’s only going to make you a better mother, and you know that.”

“That’s easier said than done.”

“I know. You spent months crying that you couldn’t breastfeed because you didn’t produce enough milk to fill both their bellies, but hey! Look at the bright side—now you have an amazing rack, and your titties aren’t touching the floor.”

“Only you would turn that into a positive.”

“I turn everything into a positive. You can manifest the life you want.”

“Okay.” I nodded. “I’m manifesting great sex tonight. Not just great sex, mind-blowing, passionate, animalistic sex tonight.”

“Are you having sex with Ashton or a lion?”

I chuckled. “Am I manifesting too much?”

“Not at all. He’s best friends with Sawyer, and that man fucks like a god. I have never come as much as I have this week from any man before. He’s like a fucking sex magician.”

“How many times did you see him this week?”

“Ummm ... almost every night. Sometimes during the day.”

“The day?”

“Yeah, he’s a med student. His hours are all jacked up.

“He’s going to be a doctor?”

She smirked, wiggling her eyebrows. “A gynecologist.” She gazed up at me. “Maybe that’s why he knows my body like the back of his hand?”

“I don’t know what’s crazier—the fact that he’s going to be a gyno, or that you know he’s going to be one.”

“Oh, come on. I ask my bed buddies questions. I’m not made of stone. Plus, I like to know whose name I’m screaming out, and let me tell you, Dr.

Sawyer sounds really fucking hot in the heat of the moment.”

I busted out laughing. “Aspyn! You didn’t tell me that!”

“You’ve been freaking out about Ashton all week.”

“True, but still! Every day?”

“You’re making it sound deeper than it really is.”

“He’s been deep in you all week. How much deeper can it get than that?”

“Sage, I leave after we’re done. It’s a straight-up sex session. Sometimes, during sex, we just randomly start asking each other stuff. I don’t know, it’s weird and hot all at once.”

“It sounds like you like him, Aspyn Rose.”

“I like his dick. It’s nice.”

“How charming.”

She winked at me.

“When are you seeing him again?”

“After I drop you off. He’s feeding me take-out and then eating me.”

“He’s feeding you take-out? Like a date?”

“It’s not a date. He’s just ordering take-out for us. We go for hours, and I need fuel. The man has stamina like his balls just dropped. He’s insatiable, and I’m taking advantage of his big dick and sexual appetite. If he wants to feed me to boot, then I will happily oblige.”

“What are you eating?”

“Thai.”

“He likes Thai?”

“Not sure. He asked what I wanted, and that’s what I said.”

“Wow. He asked what you wanted. Sounds like a date to me.”

“He also asks me to ride him harder, Sage. Trust me, it’s not that deep.”

“So you guys just do it, and then you leave?”

“Yeah, but sometimes we go again and again. I leave after that.”

“How does that play out? Do you say thank you, come again?” I playfully mocked.

She chuckled. “Something like that.”

“Do you like him?”

“I don’t like random men, Sage.”

“You like Brady.”

“Brady doesn’t count. I grew up with him.”

“I still think you’re lying, and something has happened between you two.”

“Brady can’t handle me. He’s too much of a gentleman.”

“What’s wrong with being a gentleman?”

“Gentlemen lead to heartache, and I don’t have time for that.”

I shook my head in astonishment. “You’re like a dude.”

She shrugged. “Believe it or not, that isn’t the first time I’ve been called that.”

Aspyn continued talking about all the things Sawyer could do with his tongue, and I couldn’t help but wonder if he’d taught Ashton how to use his mouth in the same way. When she started driving toward what looked like a drive-in theatre, my heart raced a mile a minute. The closer we got to my final destination, the clearer the flashbacks became of the last time I was in the woods alone with a guy, and we all know how that turned out.

What the fuck? Are the dating gods punishing me?

My first real date ever, and I was reminded of Memphis!

Why, God, why?!

“Oh. My. God,” Aspyn acknowledged. “You’re thinking what I am, right?”

“Yeah.” I shook my head at the tragedy that was my dating life. “Is this a bad sign?”

“No. It’s just a coincidence.”

“That Ashton chose the woods as our first date?”

“We’re technically at a drive-in that is located in the woods. It’s different.”

“Aspyn, there’s even a river.”

“I don’t know what you want me to say, but I don’t think it’s a bad sign.”

“Why not?”

Since Aspyn was the best friend a girl could ask for, she boasted, “Because you made the twins, and they’re the coolest little humans in the whole wide world.”

I smiled, nodding.

“Now go make Ashton the best lay you’ve ever had.” She stopped her car next to his Chevy. “Okay, you be a good girl and make sure to text me when you get home, so I don’t send a search party to his house.”

“Who are you kidding? I’ll see you in the morning when you’re walking into my kitchen, stealing my coffee, and asking me to dish all the dirty details.”

“Great. I’m glad we have that settled. Love you. Be safe, and whatever you do, don’t tell him how much you already like him. That’s a sure way to get him running out the door.”

“Right. I know. Love you too.” I blew her an air kiss and stepped out of the passenger seat.

Ashton was sitting in the bed of his truck, and as much as I desperately tried to not picture Memphis, I was shit out of luck.

Stop, Sage. You’re here with Ashton. Your dream guy.

It helped that Ashton looked handsome, cocky, radiating sex appeal, just sitting there waiting for me. He didn’t have to try—he was the epitome of sex on a stick.

“Did you dress up for me?” He grabbed my hand to help me up onto the bed of his truck.

“What? This old thing?”

He laughed, pretty much catapulting me in front of him as if I weighed nothing. “You look beautiful.”

Before I could thank him, he effortlessly gripped onto the back of my neck and brought my lips to meet his. Without any hesitation whatsoever, like we’d been kissing our entire lives. Ashton could kiss.

His lips were passionate.

Tender.

Panty-dropping.

I was under his spell, and there, under the moonlight I didn’t want to leave this little bubble we’d suddenly found ourselves in.

Pecking my lips one last time, he rested his forehead on mine. Looking deep into my eyes, he murmured out of nowhere, “I missed you.”

Those three little words caught us both by surprise.

My head couldn’t catch up to my feelings fast enough, and I blurted, “I missed you too.” Quickly, I swallowed the lump in my throat, pulling away from him. I needed a second to catch my breath and reel in my emotions that were getting the best of me.

When I turned back around, Ashton was still sitting where I’d left him. Completely consumed with me. It was one of those stares you’d see in a romantic movie and swoon over the rest of the night. There was no denying I was having a crazy effect on him too. I wanted to ask him what he felt. It was on the tip of my tongue, bursting to fly out.

I didn’t.

I held back.

Even though I didn't want to.

Even though it felt wrong.

I simply changed the subject. "You don't look too bad yourself."

"What? This old thing?" he teased in a flirty tone.

I smiled, sitting on the edge of the truck. "You got a beer in there for me?" I nodded toward the cooler.

"Oh, you're a beer-drinking girl?"

"I am. I am."

"What kind of beer do you like?"

"My favorite is cider, but I'll also drink a Corona Light if you have one."

"You're in luck." He opened the cooler, grabbing an Angry Orchard.

Opening it for me, he handed it over.

"Wow. Care to share how you knew I'd like cider?"

"That's easy. You're a chick. You like fruity shit."

I nodded. "Fair."

For the next thirty minutes, we just talked and hung out. It wasn't weird or awkward. Again, it felt like we were old friends doing what we'd done for years. When the Uber showed up with food, I thought this guy couldn't get any better until he showed me what he'd ordered. He had a whole spread of different kinds of food. Obviously, he didn't know what I liked, ordering a bit of everything.

"What are you thinking about over there?"

"Nothing."

He raised an eyebrow. "You know when you lie, your lip twitches a little."

"Are you always this perceptive?" I taunted, bringing the attention back on him.

"It's how I make a living."

"Oh yeah? You use it a lot as a real estate agent?"

"I know what you're doing. Just in case you don't realize it, I'm aware that you're trying to change the subject." He flashed me one of his full-on dimple smiles I had become familiar with. "Fully aware."

I rolled my eyes, giving him my undivided attention. "Okay, buddy, new rule. This." I pointed from him to me. "If it's going to work, this perfect thing you got going on, it's got to be taken down a few notches."

"Perfect thing?"

“Don’t act all coy, Ashton. You know what you’re doing.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about, but thanks for the boost to my ego.”

“Yeah, Ashton, because you need a boost to that.”

He chuckled, making those damn dimples prominent and enticing, and I wanted nothing more than to reach over and touch them. I blushed just thinking about it.

“I love it when you say my name.”

I slapped his arm. “Stop that.”

“Stop what, telling the truth? You want me to lie? Tell you that I’m not thinking of all the dirty stuff I want to do to you?” He glanced over with a mischievous stare. “You caught me, sweetness. Can’t get anything past you, huh? I’m trying to impress you; is it working?”

I giggled. “I’m here, aren’t I? I’m kinda digging you calling me sweetness. No one’s ever called me that before.”

“I’m almost certain no one’s ever done a lot of things to you or for you before,” he hesitated, speaking with conviction...

“And I’ll tell you what, I really love that.”

CHAPTER 13

—Sage—

“Yeah, yeah, yeah, just eat, Casanova.” I sat forward.

The entire time we ate, we spoke about nothing in particular, getting to know one another. I truly enjoyed being the center of his attention. The movie began, and Ashton still didn’t take his eyes off me.

“Are you going to watch the movie or me?”

He grinned. “I’ve seen this movie.”

“Then why did you choose it again?”

“It’s my favorite movie, but it’s my second favorite thing about tonight.” He leaned against the back of his truck, and I followed suit.

“I’ve never been here.”

“That’s a shame.”

“Yeah,” I replied, taking in the fresh air. The breeze was a nice change of pace from the hot, humid summer. I forgot how much I loved it outside during this time of year.

“Aren’t you going to ask me what my favorite thing about tonight is?” He moved a little closer to me, causing his cologne to instantly assault my senses. It was difficult not to turn into him just to breathe in his scent.

“I don’t know. Are you going to say something dirty or flirty? Or are you going to be honest?”

“I’m always honest. You, Sage, you’re my favorite thing about tonight.”

Our eyes connected, and for the first time I didn’t have to question him.

The truth was written all over his face.

“Tell me something about yourself that no one knows,” he inquired. “Not even Aspyn,” he added.

“Now that’s a hard one. There isn’t anything Aspyn doesn’t know.”

“I find that hard to believe.”

“Why is that?”

“Because you seem like the kind of woman who might keep some things hidden.”

Yeah... I’m hiding the fact that I’m a mother of twins!

Instead of blurting my life story, I nonchalantly shrugged, and he accepted my silent request by not pressuring me to give him more than I

wanted.

“Let’s talk about you,” I reiterated.

“I’m an open book, so ask me anything.”

“You tell me something you’ve never told anyone.”

“Alright.” He nodded, carrying on. “When I was sixteen, I made a pact with my boys to stay single and never fall in love.”

My eyes widened. “Is that why you’re still single?”

“I don’t know anymore.”

I wasn’t sure if he was implying that I was the reason, but if the expression on his face was any indication, then he totally was.

“Was it your idea?”

“No, it was Leo’s.”

“Isn’t he living with his girlfriend?”

“Mmm-hmm.”

“So? Is that pact broken now?”

“For him.”

“Not for you?”

He shook his head. “Not for me.”

I’d be lying if I said it didn’t feel like his response wasn’t a slap in the face.

“Don’t fall in love with me, Sage.”

I didn’t hold back. “What about you falling in love with me, Ashton?”

“I made the pact a few hours before the first time I met you at that party. You were all cute and awkward, and it’s the only time in the last eight years that I wished I could take it back.”

“Ashton…”

“I’m lying. It’s not the only time in the last eight years. Last week, when I saw you standing in front of everyone at that speed dating event, looking all beautiful and stunning and still just as awkward, I wished for it again.”

We locked eyes.

“I’ve never told anyone that.”

My heart pounded in my chest with heavy thumps. “I’m really glad we ran into each other again.”

That was all it took for him to lean in and claim my mouth once again.

—Ashton—

I leaned in and kissed her.

At first, it started innocently enough, but after a couple of seconds she parted her mouth and moved her lips. Her mouth became more demanding, wanting me to respond, and I gently started to, which earned me a moan from her lips.

She tasted like cider beer and peppermint, and I couldn't get enough. Her tongue was smooth and felt like silk. I'd only just kissed her, but it already felt so fucking long.

I began to lean forward, wanting to feel her body beneath mine. The second I was above her, my hand started roaming. It started at her hair and then traveled down to her face. She writhed and moaned under me, enticing me to go further. My hand moved to the top of her breast and I could feel her nipple hardening through her cotton dress. She pushed her breast further into my hand, and I immediately gripped it harder, earning me another moan.

It was the first time I'd ever felt her in this way, rubbing my hard cock against her core. She followed my lead pretty quickly and started doing the same against me. I kissed her with all the passion and hunger of a famished man. She met each and every push and pull I delivered. My hand moved under her bra, and I knew I needed to stop, but I couldn't fucking help myself.

I wanted this all week, and I allowed the desire and yearning for her to completely take over me. She felt fucking incredible against my fingers and in the palm of my hand. Everything with Sage was indescribable. It didn't matter how many girls I had been with nothing came close to this.

It excited me in ways I never thought were possible. The emotions and lust I felt for her made everything more real and complete.

Our movements became headier and more urgent since we were both searching for something. When I pushed aside her bra and kissed my way down to her breasts, her back arched off the bed of my truck. Her hips moved faster against my cock, and I kept up the same momentum. I opened my eyes to look at her, desperately wanting to see her breasts. I cupped it again, and it fit flawlessly in the palm of my hand. Her cherry nipples were just the right size. Taut, just waiting for me to suck them into my mouth.

I did.

Through a hooded stare, I looked up at her. Sage's mouth was parted, her face flushed, her chest rose and fell at a rapid speed as she fisted the blanket beneath her. This embrace was much different than the last. My lips were

rough but smooth against hers, my touch firm yet gentle. Her heart drummed so unbelievably fast, I felt it against my chest.

Her body molded perfectly with mine. It was the most overwhelming and consuming feeling I'd ever felt in my entire life. There would be no coming back from this.

From her.

Us.

This deep connection was evident from the first time we'd laid eyes on one another.

Sage's lips were meant to be on mine. My body was meant to be on top of hers.

She was my girl.

Had she always been my girl?

"Fuck ... you feel good," I painfully groaned.

My thoughts.

My words.

They all seemed to be scrambled together.

"Ashton," she erratically breathed, panting breaths on my lips.

"What, baby?"

"I want you."

"I want you more than I've ever wanted anyone," I confessed, holding on by a thread.

"Please..."

I wouldn't fuck her here. I'd have to wait. Though, I could give her a taste of what was to come.

Her.

A lot.

I slid my hand down her body until I reached the edge of her panties, and she spread her legs wider. I could already feel the wetness through the silk when my fingers found her pussy.

She shamelessly moaned, leaning her head back and urging me to keep going. Thank God no one was here but us. I shifted her panties to the side and touched her pussy for the first time. She shuddered, kissing me deeper, harder, faster.

Her pussy lips were soft.

Bare.

No fucking hair.

Just the way I loved it.

My fingers moved to her opening, soaking up her wetness and rubbing back and forth on her clit.

“Fuck, you’re so wet.”

The only reply she could muster was another heady moan as I glided my fingers into her opening, going right for her g-spot while she swayed her hips with the same momentum.

“Oh, God...”

I released a growl from deep within my chest, watching her come apart, or at least I thought.

“You like that, baby? Does that feel good? Huh? Tell me, tell me it feels good,” I huskily urged.

“Ashton...” was all she managed to say.

In less than a couple of seconds, her body turned scorching hot and her face bright red.

“Oh, God...” she repeated, panting. “This can’t be happening again. I’m burning up!”

“Good, babe, I want you to feel like you’re on fire for me.”

“No! Ashton, I’m actually burning! My vagina is two degrees short of boiling fucking water!” She pushed me off of her, and I could honestly say, this was the first time a woman had ever done so.

“Sage, what’s wrong?”

She instantly grabbed my hands, reaching for my finger with the band-aid on it. “Oh. My. God. Of course! Of course, this would happen to me!”

“What?” I couldn’t keep up with how irrational she was being.

She didn’t waver, immediately trying to jump out of my truck. I saw it happen, but I couldn’t stop it. When I went for her, I was too late. Sage stumbled over her own two feet, falling flat on her face in the grass.

“Oh shit!” I jumped off, crouching beside her. “You okay?”

“No,” she bellowed, almost on the verge of tears.

“What do you need? What can I do?”

“I need to go to the river to soak in water while I wait for Aspyn to come get me and take me to the emergency room.”

There were a hundred and one questions I wanted to ask her, but I didn’t. I simply picked her up off the grass and carried her in my arms down to the river.

She hissed with each step I took, and I hated that I was hurting her. Unsure of what to say or do. I didn't say a word, holding it all in. Once we were there, I carefully sat her in the water. Resisting the urge to laugh my ass off at how adorable and pathetic she looked all at the same time.

"I'm not crazy."

"No." I shrugged. "This is totally normal. Women usually have to soak in rivers after I finger fuck them."

She chuckled despite herself. "I'm allergic to latex."

I narrowed my eyes at her, still not understanding.

"Your band-aid."

And just like that, it all made sense. I jerked back, shocked was an understatement. "That's really a thing?"

"Yes! Now I need you to call Aspyn. I need to go to the ER."

Never in a million years did I think this would happen. I went from wanting to take her to Heaven to actually delivering her straight to Hell.

Flaming pussy and all.

Fuck. My. Life.

Actually, fuck you, Johnson and Johnson.

CHAPTER 14

—Ashton—

“This is definitely a first for us,” Sawyer expressed, walking into my house with the shitty ass driver behind him.

She hurried to Sage who was sitting on the couch in my living room.

“How’s your vagina?” she asked.

Sage lifted her dress, showing her friend the washcloth that was soaking in between her legs.

“At least we’re not sitting at the emergency room this time with a bunch of strangers judging you.”

“Not helping, Aspyn.”

“This time?” I asked, unable to hold back.

They both locked up; it was quick, but I saw it.

What was that?

“How many times has this happened?”

They both eyed each other before Sage replied, “This is only the second time.”

“When was the first?”

Her eyes widened for a moment. “The first night we met.”

As if right on cue, Sawyer brought everyone’s attention over to him when he knelt in front of Sage and grabbed her foot.

“Ah!” she hissed as he pushed the heel of her foot back, biting down on her lower lip.

“On the scale of one to five, five being the worst, where is your pain level when I do this?”

“Not too bad.”

“What about this?”

“A little pain when you do that.”

He did a few more twists and turns before reaching into his medical bag and pulling out a needle. “It’s just a minor sprain. You’ll be good as new in a day or two. I’m going to have to give you a shot for the allergic reaction.”

She nodded, never taking her eyes off me.

“How did you figure out you were allergic to latex when we first met, Sage?”

The expression on her face was one I recognized all too clearly.

Cautious.

“Are you weighing your words, sweetness?”

“No ... yes ... maybe.”

“What Sage is trying to say,” Aspyn intervened like the good friend she was to her, “is it’s a sore subject for her, and we don’t really need to talk about it right now.”

“Interesting.” I grinned. “Considering I didn’t ask you.”

“Oh, Sage didn’t tell you? Now that you’re dating her, you get me too.”

“I don’t do threesomes with friends, but thanks for the offer. Plus, you’re already fucking Sawyer, and he wouldn’t like that very much. Neither one of us like to share.”

Everyone laughed, fully aware I was being a smart ass but still serious. We didn’t go to pound town together. Although I truly didn’t do threesomes with friends, in the past, I’d fucked two chicks at once a few times and they were never quite like the magic of watching porn. The girls usually got jealous of one another because neither were really into going down on the other. It wasn’t what it was hyped up to be. Besides, my favorite part about sex was focusing on one woman and seeing all the ways I could make her come on my own.

To me, fucking was like a video game—the more you played, the more expert you became.

“Sawyer doesn’t need to worry about sharing me. We’re not dating, and I can do as I please,” Aspyn announced, and Sawyer’s jaw clenched.

She was going to get spanked later.

Hard.

His eyes met hers. “You’re sleeping with other men?”

“You’re not sleeping with other women?”

“No, Aspyn, you’re the only one riding my cock, and I’d like to keep it that way.”

“I’m not talking about this right now.”

He eyed her for a couple more seconds until he held the needle up, shifting his gaze back to Sage. Sawyer was a private person, and it didn’t surprise me he didn’t want to talk about whatever was happening between them in front of us.

“I need you to pull down your pants for me.”

Sage’s stare locked with mine at Sawyer’s request.

“So the first guy who gets to see my girl’s ass is you? Awesome.”

He arched an eyebrow. “Your girl?”

Fuck me.

How did I keep putting my foot in my mouth? Why did it feel so good to call her my girl?

I couldn’t keep up with my rambling thoughts that crossed my mind at warp speed in a matter of seconds. There were moments in life when you just know you’re royally fucked, and I truly believed this was mine when it came to Sage and me. It was one of those instances I’d recall later and be like yep...

This was where I came to terms that having Sage in my life as my one and only didn’t freak me the fuck out. If anything, it made me happy.

Again, who I am?

“Rather me than the on-call physician,” Sawyer remarked.

Sage countered, “I thought you were a med student?”

Sawyer didn’t hold back the satisfaction in his expression as he smirked at Aspyn. “Talking about me, I see?”

Aspyn smiled. “Only in your dreams.”

With nothing but amusement in his eyes, they fell back on Sage again. “I am, but I called in a favor.”

She nodded and stood, lifting her dress. The only reason I resisted the urge to cut off Sawyer’s hands for touching her in a way I hadn’t yet was that he was completely professional. Watching him in his element was a sight, and Aspyn’s face literally melted as he tended to her friend. Slowly, and carefully, he poked the needle into her skin. Once he finished injecting her with the longest needle ever created, her face instantly felt the relief.

“Thank you.”

“On that note...” I walked toward my bar, needing to shove this emotional bullshit out the door. “I’m going to make us a drink.”

Booze.

Alcohol always fixed everything.

I was fine. This was fine. No big deal that I want to wake up next to Sage every morning and go to bed with her every night. It’s totally dandy. I don’t sound like a pussy in my own thoughts or anything.

Get. Your. Shit. Together.

On my way to the bar, I thought about the last time I was here with Sage.

The first time we technically hung out, I almost threw down with her ex-boyfriend, the second she'd kneed me in the balls, and the third, I gave her an allergic reaction by death of a Band-Aid and fingerbang.

What's next? We have sex, and she gets knocked up?

I internally laughed at the thought. Handing Sage and Aspyn their drinks and then Sawyer, I sat next to Sage and put her hand on my lap.

"You alright?"

"I am." She smiled. "Thank you for handling that."

"I'm good under pressure."

"I see that."

I kissed her hand.

"You guys are just like the cutest thing ever," Sawyer chimed in a mocking tone.

My stare snapped to him. "Says the man who showed up with his one-night stand."

"I never said I was keeping her around for only one night."

"Keeping me around?" Aspyn interrupted. "What am I, a dog?"

He chuckled, winking at her. "I mean, you do love me fucking you from behind."

"Because I have a great ass."

"That you do."

Before I could continue to bust his balls, his phone started ringing.

"It's Cain." He answered, putting him on speaker. "Hello?"

"Bro, what the fuck do you do when you put numbing cream on your dick to last longer, and she gets it in her mouth?"

I answered for him, "It depends on the numbing cream you used. I recommend Adam and Eve."

Everyone looked at me.

"What?"

"I didn't use that," Cain replied. "I don't know what the fuck I used. All I know is that Lively can't feel her throat or mouth."

"Doesn't sound like an issue to me," Sawyer responded. "Enjoy the peace and quiet while you can."

We all laughed. At least these chicks could take a joke and understood our humor.

Fuck. Now they fit in with us? Are they our perfect match?

What happened next occurred so fast, I never had a chance to say no.

The worst part...

I didn't want to.

"Bro," Cain declared in a sarcastic tone, "I said that to her, and she didn't appreciate it very much. But since you dick fucks are together, I'm not booked next week. This is the perfect time for you guys to come visit and stay with us for the week."

"Oh," I mocked, "you're an us now?"

"I don't know, Ashton," Cain mimicked my condescending tone. "Is Sage there with you right now?"

I punched Sawyer in the arm. "You fucking told him, asshole?!"

"Dude." He punched me back just as hard. "I had to. You freaked me the fuck out. I had to tell someone."

"Aww..." Cain drawled out. "Hi, Sage. Is Aspyn there with you too?"

Both girls sat there with sassy smirks on their faces, loving the fact that we were outed. All our truths were spread on the table, no secrets. The confidence they exuded was hot as fuck too.

Sage was cocky.

Flirty.

Delicious.

"Hi, Cain. Nice to meet you. Heard all about you," Sage informed in a girly tone that made my dick twitch.

"All good things I hope?"

"Of course."

"Great. Because you girls should come visit with them. We'll make it a threesome. Drink, sightsee, go offshore, and if bikini tops come off and titties are free, then no tan lines."

This. Right. Here.

This was the second moment in just a couple of minutes that I realized I was truly fucked.

I wanted to take Sage to St. Thomas and have her all to myself. I couldn't think of a better idea in all my life.

Bathing suits.

The Caribbean.

My tongue up her ass.

It all sounded appealing.

My dream vacation with my dream girl.

I didn't hesitate...

I went with my gut.

My instinct.

The way I felt in my heart.

I turned, looking deep into her eyes, and spoke with conviction...

“Let me take you to paradise, sweetness.”

CHAPTER 15

—Sage—

“I can’t believe I’m doing this, Aspyn.”

My best friend looked at me like I’d lost my mind, and maybe I had. I was sitting in the passenger seat of her car while she drove through the airport parking garage, trying to find a spot for her vehicle.

“You can’t believe what? That you’re going on a free trip to an island with a hot ass guy? Is that what you can’t believe? Because that doesn’t sound like the worst way to be spending the next week, Sage.”

“Yes, all of that makes perfect sense. Let me go on a free vacation with a man I barely know who has no idea that I’m a mother who’s freaking the fuck out she’s leaving her twins for the first time.”

“Dude, you just answered your own question. The. First. Time. Your kids are seven years old, so for the last eighty-four months, or two thousand, five hundred and fifty-five days you’ve done nothing but be in mom mode.”

“Whoa. How did you calculate that so fast?”

“Oh.” She nonchalantly shrugged. “I’ve been preparing this speech since I said we were going last week.”

“Exactly, you told them we were going. I never agreed to this. If it weren’t for you and my mom, I’d be home with my babies.”

“Thanks for the play by play, Sage. I was there, remember? Brady had to practically throw you into my car. I packed most of your clothes too.”

“Ugh ... this doesn’t feel right.”

She swerved into the first spot we found after searching for the last ten minutes. “It’s just normal flight anxiety.”

“You know it’s not.”

Aspyn parked the car and turned to face me, grabbing my hands in hers. “Look, I get it, okay? Mom guilt is real, but for once, Sage. Pretty, pretty, pretty please, for the next seven days can you just enjoy yourself? Everything lined up perfectly with the twins and your work schedule. You’re both on spring break this week. Your mom doesn’t even have to drive the minions around. They’re literally at home all week. Where she is spending time just being their grandmother. Buying them whatever they

want. Catering to their every need. Spoiling them until their heart's content."

"I know."

She was right. I couldn't have left them with a more responsible adult. My parents were the best substitution for me; however, I still felt awful I was going somewhere without my twins. We did everything together. What was plaguing me the most was that Ashton still didn't know about them, about *me*.

Granted, I hadn't seen him since the night we were all together. We'd spoken several times throughout the day via text or him calling me to say goodnight.

Yep, you read that correctly.

He was extremely attentive when it came to how my day was going. Always asking me what was the high and low of my day, in a genuinely interested kind of way.

"Your parents have been begging you for years to please take a vacation for yourself, and now the time has finally come to put yourself first. I'm not going to allow any more of this guilt trip you're taking yourself on. Do you understand me?"

I opened my mouth, and she put her hand up, silencing me.

"Nope. We're not having this discussion anymore. You're going to get out of this car and grab your carry-on, and you're going to live your best life." She smiled. "Okay?"

I sighed deeply; she was right. "Okay."

"Great. I'm glad that's over. Now move your ass. We're meeting them at baggage claim."

Instead of focusing on the guilt, I shifted gears and let the excitement I felt take over. This was the first time I was going away in I didn't remember how long. Sure, I'd taken vacations with my parents and the twins every year, but this was much different. This wasn't Disney World or a camping trip. This was an island, where the only responsibility I had for the next week was myself. Not only that, but I was alone with Ashton.

Uninterrupted alone time with him. Except when I face-timed with Haiden and Haven, which I had no idea how I was going to pull that off yet. It was like I was living a double life, and at any moment I might blurt out the truth. We told the twins I was going on a work retreat, and Haiden wasn't happy about it in the least.

He threw the biggest fit, and I almost backed out of going, but my mother wouldn't allow it. She knew I needed this trip and how to handle him, reassuring me over and over again he'd be just fine. I had nothing to worry about, which was much easier said than done.

"Sage, I can feel your conflicting emotions. We're getting you a stiff cocktail at the bar."

I chuckled. "I could go for a cock right now."

"You're going to get a cock up the ass if you don't stop your pouting."

I laughed, following her into the airport. Aspyn traveled a lot, so she knew her way around.

I felt him before I ever saw him. There was a change in the air around us, like it almost seemed lighter when Ashton wrapped his arms around me from behind.

"Hey, stranger," he murmured in my ear, triggering my belly to summersault out of my skin.

"Interesting choice of words considering you're whisking me away with you to an island."

"It wouldn't have felt right coming without you."

"What does that even mean?"

He nibbled at my neck. "It means you feel right."

I giggled. "Such a charmer."

"Baby, you haven't seen anything yet."

Suddenly, I was riding this high that Ashton always brought with him, and the anxiety I felt subsided, standing there with his arms around me. Each time I saw him, felt him, or spoke to him, our connection grew in ways I hadn't expected or believed was even possible at this point. He was making me feel like the girl I once was, and all I could do was hope that when I did tell him the truth about the twins, he'd understand. I didn't want to lose him, not when I'd only just met him again.

He grabbed my hand and carry-on, and we walked like that through the airport terminal until we got to the line of body and luggage scan. Everyone went through perfectly fine, and I was the last one to walk through.

"Ma'am," the male attendant behind the computer announced after I walked under the scanner with no issues. "We're going to need to check your bag."

"Oh." I nodded. "Okay. Is something wrong?"

"No, it's just precaution. Did you bring any weapons with you?"

I shook my head, caught off guard by his question. “Of course not.”

“I see.” He pushed a button on the screen of his computer, and my bag went back and forth a few times under the security detector.

“Is there a problem?”

“Yes.”

“Alright, I have nothing to hide.”

“There appears to be a rather large object that’s vibrating in your bag, ma’am.”

“Large object that’s vibrating in my bag?” I repeated, confused. “Oh! I bet it’s my toothbrush. It must have turned on.”

“It appears to be shaped like a gun, ma’am, so I’m going to ask you again. Do you have any weapons with you?”

I fervently shook my head, and Ashton stepped up beside me. “Sir, I think you’re mista—”

“I need you to step away. This isn’t your bag—it’s hers.”

“Right, but I can assure you she’s not carrying any sort of weapon in her luggage.”

With a serious, intimidating expression that made my palms sweaty, the attendant raised his eyes to me.

“I’m going to need you to follow me.”

I nodded.

Maybe one of Haiden’s toys made it into my carry-on? Shit.

Quickly, the attendant grabbed my luggage, and I followed him to the end of the table like I was some criminal about to get asked to bend over and cough. Aspyn stayed at my side, as did Ashton with Sawyer standing behind us. We were all ready to start our vacation, and this was definitely putting a damper on things.

The attendant put on gloves before opening my bag, and the buzzing sound went from a low roar to a high rumble.

My heart dropped to the floor.

My face paled.

I couldn’t move.

I couldn’t speak.

Immediately recognizing that sound.

Oh please, God, no.

The man moved around my things.

Bikinis.

Thongs.

Lingerie.

Could this get any more embarrassing? Absolutely, and it would in about two point five seconds.

My eyes instantly shut when I saw my bright pink vibrator appear front and center in front of everyone who was standing there, including a bunch of strangers who all began laughing their asses off at my expense, realizing what was buzzing in my bag.

I was mortified. “Oh my God. I’m going to kill you.” I opened my eyes, glaring right at Aspyn. I didn’t pack my bag—she did.

She was grinning like a fool, trying to hold back the laughter from taking over her body. Aspyn put her hands out in front of her in a surrendering gesture. “Relax, it’s just Ashton.”

“Aspyn!”

I could feel Ashton’s stare burning a hole in my back.

“Wait a second…” Sawyer chimed in, chuckling. “Am I understanding this correctly? You named your dildo after Ashton?”

My eyes snapped to his. “It’s not a dildo. It’s a rabbit.”

“Well, it looks like a gun, ma’am. Maybe next time put your toys in your luggage and not your carry-on,” the attendant scolded, making my face turn a brighter shade of red.

“I didn’t put that in there, sir.” I glared at Aspyn again. “She did.”

She smiled, not feeling embarrassed at all. My best friend was shameless.

“If you packed her a dildo, I can’t wait to see what you packed for us,” Sawyer added, not helping my humiliation.

“Oh totally. I have handcuffs, whips, and duct tape to shut you the hell up.”

I scoffed out a chuckle at Aspyn’s reply to him.

Sawyer winked. “Kinky. But I’ll be the one who’s doing the tying up, baby.”

“Ma’am.” The attendant handed me my bag. “Have a nice day.”

“Oh, so now you’re cordial?” I grabbed my bag and left them all standing there, thinking it was too easy.

Ashton wasn’t going to let me live this down. Throwing his arm around my neck, he tugged my body into his chest.

“Sweetness, I’m still stuck on the part of you naming a toy after me. Is this a new toy or is he your designated battery-operated boyfriend I’m

going to have to unplug?”

I bowed my head. “This is the worst day of my life.”

Aspyn laughed. “Is it, though? Do you remember that time in 7th grade when you—”

“Aspyn, if you don’t shut it, I’ll tell Sawyer about the time you—”

“Sage...”

“About the time you did what?” Sawyer asked, arching an eyebrow.

“Why would you bring my vibrator?”

“I brought Ashton”—she gestured to him—“so he could meet Ashton.”

“That doesn’t even make sense.”

“It will once you have both of them working you over. I was just trying to help you achieve the best orgasms ever while on vacation.”

My eyes widened when Ashton replied, “Not only do I get to ruin you for every other man who tries to get between your legs, but for your toy too. Because I’ll tell you right now, sweetness, I don’t need recharging after two rounds.”

—Ashton—

To say I wasn’t flattered that Sage named her toy after me would be an understatement—my ego and cock were on the same page.

Make Sage come until she thought I was God.

We had a few drinks at the bar, and by the time our flight took off, she was calm and cool, slightly tipsy and giggling over everything.

She looked better than I remembered. Her hair was a mess of waves, she smelled like sunscreen, and it was doing all sorts of things to my dick.

How the hell did she look this good in the morning?

I watched the way her lips moved with each giggle that left her mouth.

I watched the way her body leaned into mine with each second that passed.

I watched the way I made her smile.

Laugh.

Especially, blush.

Unable to stop myself, I grinned. “I couldn’t help but notice your Ashton is pink. I thought you didn’t like the color pink.”

“That’s what you couldn’t help but notice? I didn’t buy it. Aspyn did for my birthday.”

“Oh, so it was the gift that kept on giving?”

“Maybe.”

“For what birthday?”

“I know what you’re doing. You’re trying to find out when I named him Ashton.”

“I’m just trying to figure out everything about my competition.”

“I thought you could go more than two rounds?”

“Verdicts still out on me. Well...” I cocked my head to the side. “That is until we get to our suite.”

“What happens when we get there?”

“Happiness.”

She smiled, big and bright. “You know I once read an article that it’s good for your asshole to see the sun. It makes you happier.”

I busted out laughing. “I’m sorry, what?”

She wiggled her eyebrows. “Yep. I’m serious, I can’t make this shit up.”

“And where did you read this?”

“A women’s magazine. It’s actually a proven fact. They did studies on it.”

“Studies, huh? The asshole chronicles?”

She laughed so hard it shook her entire body.

God, she was fucking beautiful.

“I wonder how they performed that study.”

“What do you mean?”

“What’s the visual here? Like spread eagle? Butt to the sun?”

“I was thinking more like downward dog, butt stuck up in the air... You know, better direct visibility that way.”

“And you would do this?”

“I mean, not at the beach, but definitely in a private place. I don’t get a lot of alone time to myself. If I ever do it, I’ll let you know how it works out for me.”

Little did she know, I was already planning on how to have front row seats to her downward dog in my face.

CHAPTER 16

—Ashton—

Since this was our first trip together, I decided staying in our own room would be better than crashing on Cain's catamaran. I didn't know if Sage was a screamer yet, and the last thing I wanted was someone ruining the moment between us if she was being too loud.

I flew her all the way to St. Thomas just to hear her scream my name, and no one was going to fuck it up for me.

Sawyer booked a suite in the same hotel as us, and I imagined it was for the same reasons. The little time I'd spent with Aspyn was enough for me to know she was a firecracker, and I'd bet my right nut she was a spitfire in the bedroom too. We were staying at The Marriott Frenchman's Cove, and I booked a suite with a balcony overlooking the water.

I made a great living as a real estate agent. Being the ladies' man came in handy for selling a home. I knew what women wanted, the kitchen and master closet were always the best-selling points of any house, and I made sure my clients were happy. I sold more homes than anyone in my division in the last year alone, coming in first for quarterly sales.

I worked hard and played even harder.

But for the next week, Sage was my only priority.

"Wow," she breathed out, walking into our place.

I was used to being in expensive, lavish homes; however, the view to the Caribbean crystal blue water in this suite was probably one of the sickest views I'd ever seen. Still, I watched Sage take everything in because she was quite the sight. This might sound cliché as fuck, but the water was only the second-best view in front of my eyes.

The smile on her face was enough to bring any man to his knees, and I resisted the urge to do exactly that.

"I have a surprise for you."

She glanced in my direction. "Ashton, you're too much. What more of a surprise could you possibly give me other than this trip?"

She was glowing.

Fucking radiant.

Bright, shining, stunning.

“Why are you looking at me like that?”

“How am I looking at you?”

“Like you’ve never seen a woman before.”

“Not one like you.” I nodded toward the bedroom, and she narrowed her eyes at me. “This is where I’m going to need you to get naked. Today is the day.”

“For what?”

“For me to make you come.”

Her gaze widened.

“Better hurry before the water gets cold, Sage.”

“The water?”

Grabbing her hand, I led her into our bedroom. Going straight for what I asked the hotel to do for her before we landed. I wanted her to really relax on this trip. What better way to begin than with her naked and wet.

During our conversations on the phone, I noticed that Sage was extremely busy most of the time. It was hard to get her to myself, even for a phone call. She didn’t talk much about her life, and it was what I wanted to know about the most. She kept our conversations focused on me, despite my efforts to get to know her better.

It was almost like she was hiding something. I could tell by the sound of her voice when I reverted our talks back to her. She had no interest in telling me what I casually asked and craved to know. Not to mention, she’d mute our call sometimes when we chatted. I noticed when the line would go silent.

Why couldn’t I hear what was happening at her house?

One of my goals of this trip was to figure out what she was holding back on.

Was it me?

If our relationship was going to keep heading in the direction that it was, then I needed her to open up. This was a two-way street, and so far, it felt very one-sided.

“You made me a bubble bath?” she asked with glossy eyes when we made it to the bathroom, showcasing a huge tub.

I had the staff go all out.

Bubbles.

Rose pedals.

Bath bombs.

Even that shit that was called bath salts.

A bottle of Dom Perignon chilled in the corner of the tub.

“I can’t take all the credit. The staff put this together for you.”

“Ashton, this is... I mean... I don’t...” She shook her head, trying to gather her words. “What are you doing to me?”

“I’m making you wet.”

She blushed, and it was my new favorite shade of red.

“Now, get naked for me.”

“You first.”

I grinned. “No, sweetness, this is for you. Not for me.”

“What about us?”

“We have the rest of the week to focus on us. Right now, this is about you. For you. From me.” Slipping my fingers into the thin strap of her dress, I knew Sage was shy, and I didn’t mind helping her get undressed.

Her breathing hitched the moment she felt my fingers on her silky skin. In one swift motion, her dress hit the floor and pooled at her feet. She stood there, only wearing untouched silk panties. My predatory stare rolled over her body as I snatched the sides of her panties and slid them down her luscious thighs and ass. Getting on my knees in front of her, I dragged her panties to the floor, and she stepped out of them.

Through hooded eyes, I looked up at her while she gazed down at me with a heady expression I recognized.

“Need me to eat anything while I’m down here?”

She smiled. “That smile is going to be the end of me.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Yeah, and your pussy.”

“My bath is getting cold.”

Only because I couldn’t fucking resist, I stuck out my tongue and slowly licked the slit of her pussy. I groaned when the tip of my tongue slightly touched her clit. She tasted like everything I ever wanted and didn’t think I could ever have.

Her eyes widened, and her mouth parted as if she couldn’t believe I’d just done that.

“Trust me, baby—I want nothing more than to put your pretty pink pussy on my face, but right now, I only get a taste. Get in that bubble bath before I change my mind, Sage, and have you come in my mouth instead.”

She hesitated, and I didn’t resist. I spanked her ass, causing her to yelp.

“Be my good girl, sweetness, and listen, or I’ll have no mercy on you in a second.”

On unsteady legs, Sage did as she was told, and I took the opportunity to take in her delicious ass. She was curvy in all the right places with an hourglass figure that most women would kill for. I for one couldn’t wait to ravish her body from here to Kingdom Come.

Once she was sitting in the tub, I let her do her thing, giving her the privacy she said she didn’t have on our flight. After about thirty minutes, I got antsy and impatient, deciding that it was time to give her a happy ending. I strode into the bathroom with the determination of a man possessed, and in a way, I was.

Coming up behind her in the tub, I sat on the edge with her back to my front. She was wearing her ear pods, listening to music, and didn’t hear me come in. Her eyes were shut, her lips puckered, her skin slightly flush from the hot water. The bubbles and jets blocked my view of her perfect body.

Although, I could still see the top of her tits. My cock was rock hard, straining against my swim trunks. Begging to be set free, except this wasn’t about me.

This was all about her.

The last time I had my hands on her, it didn’t turn out as I’d hoped, and I wanted to make it up to her.

Careful not to disturb her sanctuary, laying there in a bubble bath made for a queen, I set my legs beside her body and placed hers in between mine.

Not wanting to startle her, I pulled out her left ear pod. “It’s me, sweetness.”

She peered up at me with the biggest smile on her face. “Are you joining me now?”

I shook my head. “Close your eyes.”

“What are you planning in that head of yours?”

“Close your eyes, and you’ll find out.”

After a couple of seconds of her questioning eyes, she shut them.

“So tell me, Sage. Other than the allergic reaction I gave you last week, when was the last time you were touched?”

“What?” she replied, taken aback.

“Kissed? Loved on? When was the last time someone made you come?”

She lowered her eyebrows in a contemplating gesture.

I grinned. “That long, huh?”

“I’m not having this conversation with you.”

“Great, seeing as I don’t plan on talking about other men when I’m with you. Let me give you what you need,” I paused, allowing my words to linger and then drawled, “I’m going to show you what you’ve been missing using your battery-operated boyfriend and how the Energizer Bunny doesn’t have shit on your man.”

Her eyes immediately opened. “What?”

“Did I stutter?”

“Ashton, did you just say you’re my man? You can’t just—”

“I can’t? Tell me, sweetness, what else can’t I do?”

“Ashton, please...”

My hand slid down her body into her bubble bath until it was where I wanted it to be the most.

Her cunt.

“Okay, but only because you asked so nicely.”

For the first time in my life, I was touching a woman who felt like she’d belonged to me from the moment I’d laid eyes on her eight years ago. My touch made her shutter. The feel of my fingers made her lips part.

“No Band-Aid this time.”

She smirked, and it lit up her entire face. “You make me laugh.”

“I’m also going to make you come. But tell me first, if you’re allergic to latex how do you—”

“I’m on the pill.”

I jerked back, not liking her response.

“You know there are more reasons to take birth control than—”

“I’m not concerned with anyone else’s reasons but yours.”

“I’ve never had unprotected sex, and I carry around latex-free condoms. To answer your question, I don’t have sex that often. I don’t like answering questions like the ones you’re asking me. Besides, who wants to sleep with the girl who carries around latex-free condoms?”

Softly, I brushed the tips of my fingers against her bare folds.

“I don’t have sex without a condom, though, so...”

“I don’t have sex without a condom either, Sage. What kind of man do you think I am? I have no intention of becoming a father anytime soon.”

She flinched, unable to hide it.

What was that? “Something I said?”

“Your hand is rubbing my ... me.”

Ignoring the sudden shift in the pit of my stomach, I continued with my descent. If she wasn't willingly going to answer my questions, then I was going to fingerfuck it out of her.

"When was the last time you used Ashton?"

"Wouldn't you like to know?"

"Were you envisioning me fucking my fist while you touched your pussy, Sage?"

"So the dirty talk only gets dirtier when your hand is in between my legs?"

"Sweetheart, you have no idea."

"Ashton—"

"When was the last you got off?"

"I..."

Leaning forward, my mouth slid down her neck toward the top of her breasts.

"I mean..."

"I'm sorry, am I distracting you?"

"Yes."

"Good." I moved my fingers toward her clit. "Answer or I'll stop."

"I... I can't... I mean ... sometimes it's hard for me ... to..."

Ever so lightly, I rubbed her nub.

"Oh God..."

"I've barely touched you, and you're already calling me God."

I would never forget the sound of her erotic moan. It erupted from deep within her chest, full of emotion and mixed with pure lust. Her thighs clenched in anticipation of what I was going to do to her next.

"I can make you come with just the touch of my hand and fingers," I groaned in a heady tone. "Spread your legs for me, baby, and I'll prove you were meant to be mine."

I wasn't going to stop there; I'd only just begun.

I wanted to show her what it was like to be with a man who wanted to know her inside and out.

Her pleasure was mine to own.

"The feel of you is fucking addicting. Are you going to tell me the last time you came, or am I going to have to fuck it out of you?"

"Mmm..." she moaned.

“Do you want me to rub you here in circular motions?” I baited, stimulating her bundle of nerves.

“Yes...”

“Like this?”

“Oh God, yes...”

“You want your clit to come out and play, Sage?” I gradually caressed her. “It’s always best to start slow so I can add a little bit of pressure at a time. You see, baby. Your pussy wants me to pet it, lick it, eat it; not only does it want to be fucked, but it wants to be loved. By *me*.”

Her legs trembled.

Her body shook.

Her hips swayed without even realizing she was doing so.

“The water can’t hide the fact that your greedy little cunt is getting nice and wet. Making it easy for me to slip my middle finger into your tight, warm, cunt. All I have to do is bend my finger right ... here.”

She gasped, panting heavily. She was close, and I wanted her first orgasm with me to be in my arms, in my lap, or on my cock. With my arm around her waist, I pulled her up to sit on my legs, her back against my chest.

“The angle of me sitting behind you is making it much easier to slip another finger inside you.”

“Oh, God...” She melted into my touch as I hit her g-spot harder and faster.

“Your pussy is pulsating on my fingers which tells me I can go a little faster, a little harder. Pushing right against here...”

“Ashton, please...”

“That’s me fingerfucking your g-spot, sweetheart. Now, the question is, do I make you come, or do I make you squirt for me?”

She panted, purring, shaking, and coming apart at the seams. What started tender, became rough and hard.

“All I have to do is push further back and hit ... right ... here...”

“Oh, God! Oh, God! Please ... right there ... please ... don’t stop...”

“Especially when I do this.” I moved my fingers back and forth, getting right up in there. “Now if I do this...” With the palm of my other hand, I stimulated her clit side to side, never letting up on my assault inside on her. “I want to see how loud I can make you scream my name.”

It didn't take long for her to do exactly that, shouting, "Ashton!" in pure abandonment as she almost pushed my fingers out of her core. She went crazy with need and desire, coming so goddamn hard over and over again.

"Good thing we didn't stay on Cain's boat." I chuckled, allowing her to ride the wave of ecstasy before growling, "Next time I make you come, it's going to be on my tongue."

Our eyes connected.

"And after I'm done swallowing your salty sweetness, baby." Placing my fingers into my mouth, I licked them clean.

"I want to see how long it takes you to beg me to do it again."

CHAPTER 17

—Sage—

We'd been on the island for three days, and we still hadn't had sex yet.
I know, I know, fucking crazy, right?

I couldn't believe it either, but that didn't mean Ashton had kept his hands off me.

His hands.

His mouth.

His tongue.

The number of orgasms this man was delivering was mind-blowing, in every sense of the word. Every time I tried to touch him and return the favor, he'd stop me. Saying it wasn't about him, it was about me and my pleasure.

"Wait a minute," Aspyn stated, changing into her bikini in one of the private bedrooms on Cain's catamaran.

He was taking us offshore today to go fishing and cruise around.

"You haven't had sex?"

I shook my head.

"Why?"

"Every time I try to touch him, it only leads to him getting me off again."

"Huh, maybe he has a small dick?"

"No. If there's one thing I know it's how well-endowed he is. Trust me, I've felt it enough. Plus, he texted me a picture of his dick when he was hard a few weeks ago; he's built bigger than my battery-operated boyfriend, and we both know how big that Ashton is. But I have a bigger problem, Aspyn."

"What?"

"Haiden won't stop calling and texting me."

Her eyes widened.

"Yeah, exactly. I don't know how much longer I can pull this off. Ashton is getting suspicious."

"Has he asked?"

"Not in so many words, but I know it's coming, and what am I supposed to say?"

“I wouldn’t tell him about the kids now.”

“Why not?”

“Because he whisked you away to an island, and I think you should wait until we get back.”

“I—” My phone rang, cutting me off. “And there it is.” I held up my phone before answering Haiden’s Facetime call, “Hey, baby.”

“Mom, when are you coming home?”

“Babe, I told you already. I’ll be home on Saturday.”

“But, Mom, I want you home now.”

“I know, honey. I’ll be home very soon, and I’ll tell you what, we’ll spend all of Sunday together.”

“But, Mom...”

“Haiden, is something wrong?”

“Yes. I miss you, a lot.”

Talk about a kick in the gut. “I miss you too. We’ll be together soon.”

He grumbled, handing the phone to his sister.

“Hey, Mama. Haiden is very sad. He’s being a big fat baby.”

“Shut up!” I heard him yell on the other end.

“Haiden. Don’t tell your sister to shut up.”

“Yeah, Haiden, it’s not nice, you ugly face booger.”

“Oh my God. Guys, don’t start.”

“He started it!”

“Yeah! And I’m gonna finish it!” He pushed his sister.

“Ow! You’re nothing but a bully! Mom!” she screamed, loud enough to break glass.

My heart dropped, and I hoped no one else had heard that.

“Honey,” Mom announced, showing up on the screen of my phone.

“They’re fine. I have everything under control. Go enjoy yourself.”

“Haiden is acting out because I’m not there. How am I supposed to relax when my boy is—”

“Sage.” Ashton knocked on the door. “Everything alright?”

Instinctively, I hung up the call. Mouthing to Aspyn, “Did he hear them?”

“Uh, yeah,” she responded to him. “We’re just changing. We’ll be out in a couple of minutes.”

Footsteps descended while my heart slowed down. “I can’t do this anymore.”

“Sage, it’s fine. He didn’t hear.”

“I’m serious. I can’t keep lying and living this double life.”

“It’s fine. You’re fine. Just a few more days and you can tell him. Alright?”

I sighed, feeling like the worst mom ever. “Aspyn, he also keeps referring to himself as my man.”

“Dude, are you for real? You haven’t had sex, and he’s still calling himself yours?”

“I know! I don’t know what to do with this, Aspyn. He’s messing with my head. And don’t get me started on his oral and fingering skills. I’ve never come as much as I have in the last three days. He’s been waking me up with his head in between my legs, saying he’s eating me for breakfast.”

“Interesting.”

“Why?”

“Sawyer has been waking me up the same way. I wonder if they exchange this information?”

I laughed. “It wouldn’t surprise me.”

“You can count Cain in on that too.”

Our eyes shifted toward Cain’s fake wife, Lively. We met them the first day we got here, when all of us went to dinner together. She was lovely, stunningly beautiful, and her personality was something else. She said she was a starving actress, and this was the best gig she’d ever had. Cain was paying her a shitload of money to pretend to be living the dream of love they were selling. Watching them together, though, you’d think they were actually happily married.

They fit together perfectly. Their personalities were one and the same. Not only that, but they were both extremely attractive. In my opinion, Lively could be a model if she wanted to with her long legs and slender, toned figure.

Of course, she didn’t work out; she was naturally born perfect.

“Cain has been waking me up with his head in between my legs since I said my fake, ‘I do.’”

“How does that work?” I asked, my curiosity getting the best of me.

“What do you mean? Sometimes he sucks on my cli—”

“No, not that. I know how that works. I mean your relationship. You guys seem like you’re actually in love.”

She smiled, beaming her straight white teeth. “Thank you. I’m a good actress. I hope to win an Oscar and Academy Award one day.”

“So you don’t have any feelings for him?” Aspyn questioned, looking just as curious as I was.

“I’m a professional, and Cain is just another job for me.”

“How long do you plan on pretending?” I followed up.

“As long as his checks still clear.”

“But you’re having sex?” Aspyn added.

“It isn’t any different than what you’re doing. Except, I’m getting paid. Wait...” she paused for a few seconds, giggling. “That makes me sound like a prostitute, and I’m not. I’ve never done anything like this before, but the way I see it is that it’s no different than playing a role in a movie.”

“You don’t really fuck your co-star in movies,” I pointed out.

“You’ve never been to Hollywood if you think that, Sage.”

I nodded. “Fair.”

“Besides, Cain isn’t paying me to have sex with him. That’s just a bonus. You’ve seen what that man looks like. I’m definitely attracted to him. Every woman on the island wishes they were me, and that hasn’t stopped them from trying. You’d have to be blind not to try to hit on my fake husband. Plus, to boot, he’s amazing in bed, and I’m enjoying my time with him. Our fake vows were the talk of the island. It’s why we became successful so quickly. Who doesn’t want to be wined and dined with a couple who have been together since they were kids?”

“I get it.” I nodded again. “You guys are great together. It’s why I find it hard to believe that you’re not actually in love with each other.”

“Cain isn’t interested in anything serious or settling down. He’s taking the Playboy Pact to his grave.”

“Playboy Pact?” Aspyn chimed in, looking confused. “What’s that?”

“Sawyer hasn’t told you?” *Uh oh... That wasn’t going to end well.*

As if on cue, he strode into the room like he owned the place. In the little time I’d been around him, Sawyer exuded confidence without even trying. His presence was daunting, and there was something about him that made your eyes gravitate to his impressive stature.

I guess you could say he looked like a doctor, and I knew he wasn’t going to have any problem finding women to be his patients for reasons that had nothing to do with his medical skills.

He pointed at Aspyn, grinning. “I tried to tell you last night, but you were more interested to have my cock in your mouth than to hear anything out of mine.”

“On that note.” I wrapped my sarong around my hips. “I’m going”—I looked back and forth between Sawyer and Aspyn— “anywhere but here.”

There was no way I wanted to get involved in that conversation. Aspyn claimed she didn’t want anything serious with him either; however, I’d never seen her with a guy more than once.

Like ever.

She didn’t do relationships, not even casual ones. I could tell by the way she looked at him that there was a spark inside of her when it came to Sawyer. I’d met all the Playboy Pact boys other than Leo, and they all had this demeanor about them. It was hard to resist. For the first time in my life, I’d met men who all had this allure about them.

They were like catnip to our pussies.

Making my way onto the deck, I found Ashton standing there with the wind blowing in his hair.

“Hey, dimples.”

“Dimples?”

“Yep, it’s my new nickname for you.”

“We’ve stepped into the nickname stage of our relationship, sweetness?”

“You’ve been calling me sweetness since we saw each other again, so we’re long past that now. Don’t you think?”

“I approve of your nickname for me. Although, I’m not going to lie and say I don’t prefer it when you call me God instead.”

I chuckled. “You’re impossible.”

He tugged me toward his body. “Impossibly addicted to you.” His lips were on mine, kissing me deeply before pulling away. “Want to see the best view on the island?”

“Of course.”

“You afraid of heights?”

“No.”

“Good. Sage is going to go first,” Ashton announced to Cain.

“You’re going to love it,” Cain encouraged.

“Love what?”

He smiled, showing me what I’d signed up for. “This is a spinnaker swing.”

“It looks like a large parachute.”

“It is. And with the breeze it will let you glide in the air behind the boat.”

“Ummm ... is it safe?”

“For the most part.”

“Cain—”

“I’m joking. You’ll be fine, and you’ll have a bird’s-eye view of the water. You’ll love it. I promise.”

“Okay,” I warily stated.

Cain suited me up in the makeshift seat and nodded toward the ocean. “All you have to do is jump in the water, and I’ll do the rest.”

“I don’t know about this.”

Ashton stood in front of me. “Sweetness, I’d never let anything happen to you.”

“That’s reassuring.” I glanced at Cain. “How do I get down?”

“You unclip your seatbelt and jump.”

“How high up am I going to be?”

“Maybe thirty feet.”

“Okay ... that doesn’t sound too bad.”

“It isn’t,” Lively stated, stepping out onto the deck. “I’ve done it probably a hundred times by now. You’re going to love it, Sage.”

“Oh!” Aspyn exclaimed, walking out behind Lively.

She was walking funny, and for a moment I wondered what Sawyer might have done to her.

“I want to go next!”

“You can go first,” I told her.

“Nah, you’re ready to go.”

“I can go—”

“Sage,” Lively interrupted. “Live a little.”

She was right.

What’s the worst that could happen?

I kissed Ashton before I jumped in.

“Swim out a little,” Cain ordered, and I did.

The catamaran started moving and so did I, until the wind caught the parachute and I was lifted into the sky. My nervousness subsided when I realized it wasn’t as bad as I thought it was going to be. They were right—the view from up here was incredible. I could see everything: the colors, the waves, the island.

I loved that Ashton was making me try new things. I wanted that in a boyfriend.

Shit... I just called him my boyfriend. Is that what he meant when he referred to himself as my man?

I shook away the questions that seemed like they'd become a part of me now, living in the moment instead. We did a lap around the ocean, and I couldn't have been happier; this was the best.

"You ready to come down?" Cain hollered.

"Yeah!"

The motor slowed down. "Okay!" he informed. "When you jump, make sure..." The wind picked up, and I couldn't hear the rest of his sentence.

"Okay! Jump now!"

I didn't hesitate, wanting to listen to the orders of the captain, so I unbuckled my seat belt and propelled my body into the ocean.

"No! Sage, like a pencil!"

"Wha—" My ass was the first thing to hit the water...

Really. Really. Hard.

Making me think I'd torn my asshole.

—Ashton—

Watching Sage up in the air so carefree was a sight I'd take to my grave. She looked beautiful.

Laughing.

Smiling.

Enjoying herself completely.

I wish I could tell you I knew this was going to happen; however I didn't see it coming. In one swift motion she jumped into the water beneath her, and I was immediately aware this wasn't going to end well for her.

Or for me.

"Oh fuck," I expressed, watching Sage's ass hit the ocean at the speed of light. "She's going to be feeling that for a minute."

Cain nodded, looking every bit concerned as I was. "She must have not heard me."

I punched him in the arm. "Bro, way to fucking ruin my girlfriend."

He grabbed my arm. "*Girlfriend?*"

I jerked back, surprised by my own outburst. Before I could give it any more thought, Sage resurfaced. The expression on her face said it all—no one had to ask if she was okay.

She wasn't.

Aspyn stepped forward.

"I got her."

Despite wanting to tell me no, she reluctantly nodded, and I dived in after Sage.

"Ashton—"

"I know, baby." I tugged her toward me and held her in my arms, swimming us back to the deck of the boat.

Cain grabbed her hand, helping her up onto the platform. "I'm so sorry, Sage."

She shut her eyes, and I knew she was trying to hold back the tears. Picking her up bridal style, I flipped off Cain and led us into one of the private bedrooms.

Once we were in the room and away from prying eyes, I stood her in front of me.

"Babe," I informed. "Bend over. I need to see your starfish."

"What?" She jerked back, hissing from the movement. "See what starfish?"

I gave her a stern look.

"Oh, no. What is this? Am I arrested? You need me to cough too?"

I laughed. "I've been where you are. I know it hurts like hell right now."

"Yeah, but I'm fine. I'll be fine. I just need to ice it or something."

"I'll get you ice after I check to make sure you're alright."

She adamantly shook her head. "You are not seeing my bottom, Ashton."

"I'm not interested in your bottom at the moment. I need to see what's in between your cheeks."

She gasped. "You are definitely not seeing my asshole."

"You may not even have a butthole left!"

"It's there. It's just tender right now."

"All the more reason for me to look. I just need to make sure you aren't bleeding."

"Bleeding?"

"Sage, either we do this the easy way which is you bending over for me, or we do this the hard way and I hold you down until I can check it for myself."

"Maybe you can just see it from the outside?"

"I'm not Superman, Sage. I don't have x-ray vision."

“Ugh! Go to St. Thomas, they said! It’ll be fun, they said!”

Using her momentum, I picked her up again.

“You better not set me down! I swear to God if you set me down on my butt, Ashton!”

I carried her outside onto the back of the catamaran where no one could see us, and we were alone.

“Why are we—”

“We’re going to kill two birds with one stone, sweetness. You wanted to see if showing your *bottom* directly to the sun would make you happier; well, here’s your chance.”

“Oh my God.”

“I know. Don’t say I don’t make your dreams come true.”

“Ashton—”

I planted her face-first into the pillows onto the floor, her butt sitting high in a downward dog like she’d talked about on the flight over. She opened her mouth to object, but I didn’t give her the chance. Instead, I dropped her bikini bottoms to her ankles with direct sunlight to her starfish.

She groaned into the pillow, mortified. Reaching for her hand, I placed it over my now hard cock.

“Trust me, baby. The things I want to do to you right now would definitely make you happier, and it would have nothing to do with the fucking sun.”

I checked, and everything was intact.

And because I couldn’t resist and I was a kinky fucker, I licked her pucker.

“Ashton!”

Grinning, I professed the truth, “I licked it, so now it’s mine.”

We locked eyes.

“Do you want me to kiss it and make it better too, Sage?”

Her gaze widened, turning me on even more. I went to kiss her, but we were interrupted by her damn phone again. In the last three days that thing wouldn’t stop ringing or dinging with text messages.

Who the hell keeps calling her?

Suddenly, my mind was once again reeling with the endless questions that assaulted my head the instant her phone would disrupt us. It went from one end of the spectrum to the other, and despite trying not to allow my irrational thoughts to get the best of me, I was only human after all. My

biggest concern was the elephant in the fucking room the size of Clifford the Big Red Dog.

Could it be ... another man calling her?

CHAPTER 18

—Ashton—

Three days had passed since Sage's ass got attacked by the ocean, and let's just say I was making sure she was very well taken care of. I was basically her bitch and I had no problem carrying that title; except, I had one huge dilemma. My balls were so fucking blue I didn't know how much longer they could hold out.

My cock was up, it was down; it was hard, it was soft. By this point, it was confused as shit as to why it hadn't been formally introduced to Sage's pussy. Considering my mouth, tongue, and fingers were best friends with her cunt, my dick was feeling left out.

Since this was our last day here, I decided it was time to come together...

Literally.

I just hoped her phone didn't interrupt us again. Sage was getting more calls than an NBA player who was now a free agent. It rang so much I memorized her ringtone, and I didn't even know my own fucking ringtone.

Sage was in the shower when her phone rang as if it knew I was thinking about it. She'd left it on the bathroom counter, and before I knew what I was doing, I was walking toward it.

"Sweetness, your phone is ringing again. I'll let you know who it is."

Please dear, God, don't let it be another man.

The thought barely crept into my mind when Sage hauled ass out of the shower, shouting, "Nooooo!"

I jerked back because one, she was butt-ass naked and soaking wet, and two, she looked terrified.

Snatching her cell off the counter like it was on fire, she immediately realized how absurd she appeared.

Unable to contain it in any longer, I blurted, "Are you dating someone else, Sage?"

Her eyes widened. "No. Is that what you think?"

"I can't think with your gorgeous tits in my face." I threw her a towel, and she wrapped it around her body.

"What else am I supposed to think? Your phone is going off more than you've been getting off, and we both know you've been coming as much as

a damn waterfall.”

She scoffed out a chuckle. “Ashton, you’re enough man for any woman. I don’t need to be with anyone but you.”

I grinned, loving her answer. “Then who’s been blowing up your phone, sweetness?”

“I’ll tell you when we get back.”

“How about you tell me now?”

“No. I promise I will when we get back.”

“Why can’t you tell me now?”

“I don’t want to ruin the moment.”

“So, what you’re telling me is it’s going to ruin the moment?”

She nodded. “Maybe. I’m not sure.”

I narrowed my eyes at her. “Sage, can you not speak to me in circles?”

She deeply sighed. “I’m not trying to confuse you. I just don’t think right now is the best time to tell you what you need to know, but I swear I will when we get back. Can you please give me that?”

I shrugged. “What other choice do I have?”

“I’ll tell you what ... let me make it up to you.”

“What do you have in mind?” I grinned, walking over to her.

She didn’t cower when my large, muscular frame overshadowed hers as I pressed her against the wall. Closing her in with my arms at the sides of her face, I needed to remind her who was in charge at all times. Her resolve shattered when I leaned forward, slowly moving my lips over to her ear.

My hot breath ignited tingles to run down her spine.

One by one her reactions radiated off her skin, causing all sorts of other sensations. I had my girl right where I wanted her.

At my mercy.

I could feel her tense frame tremble, knowing damn well I was at her mercy too.

It didn’t take much for my mouth to be near hers, pulling her closer to me by the nook of her neck until I could feel her unstable breath against my lips and assaulting every last fiber of my fucking being.

I groaned, inches away from her mouth, “What if I fuck the truth out of you, baby?”

For a few seconds, I had all of her...

Her mind.

Her body.

Her soul.

Her heart.

They catapulted toward me like they had always been mine to begin with.

Her breathing hitched as I abruptly grabbed her wrists and brought them above her head, holding them hostage in my tight grasp while I softly gripped onto the front of her neck. My thumb and index finger clutched over her pulse that simply heightened with my touch.

I wanted to caress her.

Kiss her.

Mostly, I wanted to fucking claim her.

She said it wasn't another man, but I couldn't help feeling like it was, and I wanted to prove to her that she didn't need anyone else but me.

"You're enough man for any woman."

Fucking A I am.

I had one plan and one plan alone—take out my frustrations on her pussy by seeing how many times I could make her come on my cock and down my balls.

"What are you doing, Ashton?" she breathlessly asked, licking her lips as if she was preparing them for me.

"Letting you make it up to me." Softly, I pecked her lips, waiting for her reaction.

Igniting the spark that always existed between us, she moaned, giving me exactly what I wanted, needed, and couldn't live without.

It was all I needed to lose control.

Roughly, I gripped onto her waist and lifted her up so her thighs could straddle my waist, pulling her close to my body.

To my chest.

To my heart.

On my cock.

I kissed her again, parting her lips with my tongue as I carried her over to the bed. Gently laying her down, I spread her legs to lay in between them and lowered myself onto her heated body. Cradling her face, I never once broke our kiss.

Our connection.

Our lust for one another.

There was something different about how I hovered above her in a way I'd never experienced with any other woman. Tenderly, I kissed her deeply

while my hands gently ran down her shoulders to pull the towel off her body.

“Ashton,” she rasped, trembling beneath me, and I was barely even touching her.

She had no idea what she was in for.

Her thighs clenched together when she felt my stare roaming down her body. Sage’s face turned another shade of red with a mixture of desire and shyness from being spread wide open for me. She always did this, and I couldn’t help but adore it.

Look forward to it.

The wetness pooling in between her legs fueled my desire to feel her in every way possible.

“Baby,” I huskily groaned in a voice I’d never heard before.

I released the breath I didn’t realize I was holding and locked eyes with her hooded stare.

“Dimples, I want you.”

“I’ve never wanted anyone as much as I want you.”

“Then take me.”

I didn’t have to be told twice. Removing my shirt, I threw it onto the floor beside her towel and then buried my face between her legs.

“Mmm,” I hummed, sucking her clit into my mouth.

Her back jolted off the bed, making me chuckle as I moved my head up and down, side-to-side, using my tongue to vibrate against her core.

“Uh...” she purred, grabbing ahold of my hair while I continued with my oral assault. I never stopped working her over with my lips and tongue when I began to slide my finger into her soaking wet welcoming heat.

“Oh, God...” she moaned, curving her back into the mattress beneath us. Entirely coming undone from my touch.

I devoured her with my tongue and fingers, making love to her with my mouth. Sucking harder and more demanding with each passing second. I’d done this to women before, but with Sage it evoked entirely new sensations. My mouth and hand were controlling her body, but her reactions were controlling my willpower to stay in control.

“Jesus... Ashton... I can’t ... it’s too much...”

A loud, rumbling growl escaped from deep within my chest. I didn’t let up. If anything, I fucked her pussy with my mouth with more conviction to make her come.

Hard.

And goddamn did she come...

Still, I didn't let up, making her come over and over again, against my fingers and mouth. She started to convulse, her body moving on its own accord. I instantly locked my arm around her lower torso, holding her in place.

Her back arched off the bed.

Her hands white-knuckled the sheets.

Her body shook with so much force that I never wanted her to stop coming.

"Oh, God ... ahhh..." she profusely panted.

Orgasm after orgasm.

Climax after climax.

They were coming quick and fast, one right after the other with no end in sight. At least, not while my face was in between her legs.

"Please ... Ashton ... please..." She squirmed, begging me to stop, tugging hard at my hair to the point I thought she was going to rip it out.

I released her clit with a pop and an unrelenting groan, not wanting to stop, but allowing her mercy.

For now.

Only for a moment.

Thrusting my tongue into her heat, licking, eating, swallowing all her juices like she was my favorite fucking meal on a Sunday morning.

Slowly, I sat up with a pleased and satisfied expression on my face, grinning as I shamelessly wiped my lips and chin with the back of my arm. Showing her precisely how much I'd made her come.

"That's all you, Sage. Your sweet pussy fucking squirted all over me, you dirty, dirty girl."

My filthy words had as much effect on her body as did my touch.

I smiled, sliding down my jeans and letting my hard cock jut free. It stood at attention, parading in front of her eyes for the first time.

"You have the biggest dick I've ever seen."

I mischievously smiled, crawling up her body, kissing and sucking my way up to her lips.

"And you have the sweetest pussy I've ever tasted. I can't wait for you to ride my cock like you've been my face."

Grabbing her hair by the nook of her neck, I brought her lips up to meet mine, pecking her at first. Teasing them with the tip of my tongue, outlining her pouty little mouth. My tongue sought hers out, and our kiss quickly turned passionate, moving on its own. Taking what the other needed and vice versa.

She kissed me with everything she could muster.

We couldn't get enough of each other.

Our bodies moved in sync, made for one another; nothing could ever compare or come close to this. She placed her hand on my rapidly beating heart that was pounding against my chest, and I opened my eyes, staring profusely into hers.

The devotion.

The adoration.

The love...

It spilled out of her, intensely piercing into my heart.

"There's my girl," I rasped, slowly thrusting inside of her.

It was heaven.

It was hell.

We sure as fuck weren't in limbo.

"Ahhh ... Ashton..."

I felt every last inch of her until I filled her to the hilt. Tenderly, I thrust in and out, trying to steady my breathing.

My emotions.

I was all man, yet I felt as if I were reduced to a pussy from all of the emotions she evoked from me. Sentiments I'd never felt before flowed through my entire being while I thrust harder and deeper into what would now be described as home. I couldn't do anything but surrender to her.

With every kiss.

Every touch.

Every thrust.

I made unspoken promises to her.

I adoringly kissed all over her face, along her jawline, her forehead, and on the tip of her nose. Her head fell back, and her breathing became heady, urgent, and so fucking good...

I immediately lapped at her neck and breasts, leaving tiny marks all over. If she was seeing another man, then I hoped he would see my branding all over her.

Mine.

I didn't want to move. I wanted to enjoy the sensation of being on top of her. She could ride my cock next—fuck, she could do whatever she wanted to me except put anything in my ass. Although, I couldn't wait to claim hers as mine too.

I had no intention but to fuck her all night long.

Slow.

Fast.

Hard.

“That feel good, baby?” I groaned, making my way back up to her mouth.

She nodded, unable to form words. Her arms reached around me, hugging me closer against her body, wanting to feel my entire weight on her.

I breathed out, “Your pussy is pulsating down my shaft. My dick belongs to you, Sage.”

Our mouths were parted, still touching and panting profusely, trying to feel each and every sensation of our skin-on-skin contact.

“Fuck, baby... Come ... come on my cock ... just like that...”

Still no words.

She was coming.

When I angled her leg up higher, she lost her fucking mind. Hitting her g-spot better from this angle.

“You like that, do you?”

“Ashton...”

She fell.

I fell.

We met somewhere in the middle.

My entire world spun out of control, and so did hers as she shuddered beneath me, and my body tensed above hers.

“I have another secret.” I kissed her. “You're the best thing that's ever happened to me.”

Nothing existed at that moment but her and me.

Right in this room.

This was our beginning.

“Sage, for the first time in my life, I'm falling in—”

Her. Fucking. Phone. Rang.

She reached for it and hit silent, but it didn't matter; it simply began ringing again. Hitting silent two more times, she apologized and moved her body out from under mine.

What bothered me the most was that it felt as if I'd just made love to her, and she had to leave the room to answer her fucking phone. Not only leaving the room but having to shut the door behind her in the bathroom.

“What the fuck?”

The sudden anger I felt deep in my bones took over. I was standing, throwing on my gym shorts, and stomping into the bathroom behind her before I knew what I was doing.

“Ashton!”

I snatched the phone out of her hand, fully aware I was being irrational, but I didn't care. I looked at the screen. “Who the fuck is Haiden?”

She fervently shook her head. “It's not what you think.”

I didn't allow her to finish whatever excuse she was going to say.

I whisk her away to an island to be with me, and she was talking to another man this entire time?

My blood was boiling.

Searing.

Fucking fuming.

She was supposed to be nothing more than a fling.

No feelings.

No past.

No strings attached.

I broke the rules.

I broke the pact.

I fell for her.

“Listen, asshole!” I seethed on the phone.

I never imagined that the scariest words a man could hear would come from a little boy who was half my size but had bigger balls than me...

And trust me, my balls were fucking huge.

When he spewed,

“No you listen, asshole! What are you doing with my mom?”

CHAPTER 19

—Ashton—

“Your mom?!” I roared, staring at Sage in disbelief. She stood there frozen, mirroring a deer in the headlights.

“Yeah! You’re with my mom, and my sister and I are—”

“Your sister?! How many kids do you have?” I questioned Sage, still holding the phone up to my ear.

“She’s my twin, butt munch!”

The sound of her cell hitting the ground rumbled through the room, closing the walls in on us.

Quickly, she picked up her phone. “Haiden, I’ll call you back.” She stepped toward me, and I held my hand up, stopping her dead in her tracks.

“Ashton...”

“Jesus fuck, Sage. You have a kid? And not even one kid—you have two? Twins?”

“I ... I ... I...”

“So I just fucked a MILF? Are you a wife too?”

She shook her head. “No! I swear I’m—”

“You swear? Because I’m supposed to believe whatever comes out of your mouth?”

“I didn’t lie to you.”

“Not telling me the truth is a form of lying, Sage!”

“I was going to tell you when we got back. I promise!”

“You should have told me the first time we saw each other again!”

“I’m sorry! I didn’t know how to say it. I didn’t want you to run away when I’d only just found you again. Please ... try to understand.”

“Try to understand? Try to understand?! You’ve been lying to me for weeks!”

“I know. I just—”

“I can’t talk to you right now. I can’t even be near you.” I snapped around.

“Ashton, you don’t mean that!”

Before I could say something I truly regretted I left, slamming the door behind me.

I didn't know where to go.
I didn't know what to think.
I didn't know how to do anything other than want to tear my hair out.
It all made so much sense now.
Why she was always busy...
Why she muted her phone...
Why she never had time for herself...
Why...
Why...
Why...

I couldn't believe this.
The first woman I'd ever really wanted to know.
Be with.
Love.

Was a fucking mom of twins?!

I pounded on Sawyer's door.

"Get lost!" he shouted.

"It's me!"

Moments later, the door opened, and he appeared holding a washcloth over his dick that barely covered anything.

"Dude."

"I said get lost. What part of that didn't you understand?"

I cocked my head to the side, taking him in. "Is what whip cream?"

"No, it's Cool Whip. Works better than whip cream."

"Duly noted."

"Ashton, I'm kind of in the middle of something."

"You need to tuck your dick back into your pants. I need you."

"What's going on?"

"Oh, nothing. Just that the girl of my dreams is a *mom*. Of *twins*."

He jerked back like I had hit him.

"My reaction exactly."

The door opened wider, and Aspyn appeared wearing a silk robe, but I could still see the Cool Whip under the fabric.

"She told you, and your reaction is to run away?" she asked in a disdainful tone. "Why do you think she didn't tell you, Ashton?!"

"Oh, no fucking way you're turning this around on me like I'm the bad guy, sweetheart. I never lied to her. She's known who I am and what I'm

about since the moment we saw each other again. Unlike Sawyer, I told her about the Playboy Pact.”

“Bro, way to throw me under the fucking bus. What the hell did I do to you?”

“It’s not exactly easy to tell an eternal bachelor she’s raising a little boy to become a good man. Maybe she should give your mom some pointers.”

“Oh, fuck no—you’re not talking about my mom!”

“Can you guys not argue with the door open?” Sawyer pulled me inside and closed it. “I’m going to go take a quick rinse. Try not to kill each other while I’m gone.” With that, he left.

Pussy.

“I have been honest with Sage since day one because my mother raised me right, but the next time you talk about my mom, I’m going to make Sawyer bend you over his knee to teach you some goddamn manners!”

“Unlucky for you, I actually enjoy that!”

“You would! Maybe he’ll spank you enough until you turn into a lady!”

She gasped, clenching out, “Sage didn’t tell you because she really likes you.”

“Oh, because that makes sense! Let’s start a relationship based on lies. What is she going to do next? Tell me she was a virgin?”

“Actually! She was! She got knocked up by Memphis the night she met you, asshole! It’s how she learned she has a latex allergy too. There, now I’ve told you everything, so you better go back into your suite and apologize to her.”

“Apologize? Are you smoking crack? What the fuck do I have to apologize for? I just gave her multiples with my cock, and I get served with nothing but lies!”

“Do you see how you’re reacting? It’s why she didn’t tell you!”

“I wouldn’t be reacting like this if she had told me from the start! I actually love kids, and they fucking love me. What’s not to love?! I kick ass at Call of Duty! And I respect the fact that her kid was calling her all week. It shows me she’s a helluva good mother. Because I’ll tell you something, Aspyn, if my mom was out of town with some man I didn’t know, I’d be blowing up her fucking phone too!”

Now it was her turn to jerk back. “You love kids?”

“Have you not met Ashton?” Sawyer reappeared dressed. “He’s a huge fucking kid himself.”

“Well... Sage didn't know that.”

“She didn't give me a chance to know that.”

She took a deep breath. “Fine. You win, okay? You're right. She didn't give you a chance, but from her perspective, she didn't want to lose you, and most men aren't keen on dating a single mother. Come on, you know that more than anyone. You know how men are. Their own father has never met his twins.”

“So that piece of shit ran out on her too?”

“Yeah,” she muttered, bowing her head.

“I knew that motherfucker was up to no good. He used to cheat on her in our neck of the woods all the time.”

Her mouth dropped, gazing up at me. “What?!”

“You heard me, and don't act so surprised. You think a guy shameless enough to abandon his own blood would be anything other than a selfish fuck?”

“Why didn't you tell her that night then?”

“I was going to. She didn't want to leave with me, remember?”

“Well, I mean, you punched Memphis in the face as your best friend was climbing down the side of a house like he was fucking Spiderman and had just got caught with his dick in some wife's mouth. What was she supposed to do? Jump in the back of the truck with you?”

“Good point.” I nodded. “We were young and stupid.”

“Speak for yourself,” Sawyer chimed in. “I've never fucked someone's wife. Or been the reason we've almost gone to jail. Half the time I'm the one getting us out of trouble. Jesus, I need new friends.”

I chuckled despite myself. “Oh, you need new friends? You just left me to fend for myself against your”—I pointed at Aspyn—
“whatever she is.”

“I had Cool Whip sliding down my balls and toward my asshole, *asshole*.”

“Bro, there is no one, and I repeat, no one who wants to know about where Cool Whip was going. That image is burned into my mind forever now.” I cringed at the thought.

“There is one person.” He winked at Aspyn.

“That mood is killed now, Casanova. Thank your friend for that.”

“I swear I might kill you. I know I say that often, but right now, I want to really kill you.” He opened the door. “Come on. I'll buy you a drink at the

bar downstairs.”

“You’re going to buy me the whole fucking bottle.” I walked toward the door.

“Ashton,” Aspyn called out, making me turn to face her.

“Do you really like Sage? Like really, really like her?”

“Of course I do.”

“Then man the fuck up. Because right now, my best friend is probably having deja vu of her piece of shit baby daddy who bolted on her. If you really like her, even with the rug rats, then you need to grow some balls, apologize, and tell her. She was only protecting herself and her babies. Don’t let her be the one who got away. Again.”

I narrowed my eyes at her before I turned and left with Sawyer. Cain met up with us, and for the next hour we stayed at the bar trying to figure out what I should do.

I was confused.

Torn.

“What do you guys think I should do?”

“Ashton, we’re the last people you need to be getting advice from,” Cain stated, taking a swig from his drink.

“Then what the hell are you guys good for? I’m dying here, man. Give me something.”

“Sage has a banging body for having two kids,” he added.

“For fuck’s sake, that’s what you reply?”

Cain shrugged. “What else do you want me to say? She has a great rack too. You motorboat those bitches yet?”

I pinched the bridge of my nose. “You fucks aren’t going to help me at all, are you?”

“Man, listen,” Sawyer intervened, patting my back. “If you can see yourself sliding into home base with Sage, then you have your answer. You don’t need us to guide the way for you, Ashton. You’re a big boy, and she’s a package deal. You date her, you’re dating her kids too.”

“I’m fully aware of what she is, Sawyer. I can’t imagine not giving this a shot with her, though. You know all that bullshit we’ve been hearing for years about finding the one, blah, blah, blah... Well, I feel that with her.”

“So then what’s the problem?”

“What if I fuck it up? I’m good with kids, but I’ve never had to make them like me. There was never anything to lose if they didn’t.”

Cain replied, "I see your point."

"I don't know if I'm cut out for this. It's not like I've thought about it before."

"So think about it now." Sawyer set down his drink. "Are you going to let your insecurities interfere with a woman you could see yourself ending up with?"

"Fuck... I don't know how to take care of kids. I barely know how to take care of myself."

"They're not babies. What were we, sixteen when you met her?" Sawyer inquired. "That would make them what? Seven?"

"Something like that."

"Seven isn't so bad," Cain voiced, ordering another round with a nod to the waitress.

"Did you just order drinks and not hit on the hot ass waitress?" I questioned, momentarily blown away by what I'd witnessed.

"I'm tending to your wounds, dipshit."

"Since when have my wounds stopped you from getting your dick wet?"

"I'm married." He held up his ring finger. "Remember?"

"Wait a second. Are you telling us that you've only been banging Lively?"

"We're married."

"You're fake married."

"I run my business here, Ashton. I'm selling the dream of love, and I highly doubt I'd be as successful as I am if people gossiped that I was sticking my dick into pussy that doesn't belong to me."

"So now Lively belongs to you?"

"Dude, what the fuck?" Cain scoffed out. "Why am I, suddenly on the stand and getting the third degree?"

"You and Lively seem awfully chummy for having a fake marriage," I mocked.

Let's see how much he likes it...

"Now you're just being a moody dick, Ashton."

"At least I can admit where I want to keep thrusting my dick in, Cain."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

Sawyer interrupted, "Why are you two arguing about bullshit?"

"Look who's talking, Sawyer," Cain countered. "Your balls are so attached to Aspyn, she's basically carrying them in her hands."

“Eat shit, man. I don’t have time for a girlfriend, nor do I want one. She sucks my cock like a Hoover vacuum and works around my hectic schedule. I’d be an idiot to pass that up.”

“If you ask me,” the waitress exclaimed, setting our drinks on the table. “You guys all sound like pussy-whipped chumps.”

“Finally. Someone who sees reason.” I chugged down my drink. “Do you remember us at seven?” I reminded them once she walked away.

“Yeah,” Cain answered. “We were little shits.”

I grinned. “There’s never been anything little about me.”

He laughed. “Just tuck your cock in between your legs and go do what you feel is right. We’re not going to judge you if you want to settle down like Leo. Look how happy that son of a bitch is.” Cain’s smile widen. “All thanks to me.”

Sawyer arched an eyebrow. “I’m sure Leo felt that way when he knocked you out.”

“He did not knock me out. He sucker-punched me, and you know it.”

“I don’t know shit; I wasn’t there. What I do know is he walked in on you with your dick on top of *his* pussy.”

“My cock was covered.”

“You were hard.”

“Mila is hot as fuck, of course I was hard, but I wasn’t going to do anything about it.”

On that note, I stood. “This was a waste of time. Thanks for nothing, assholes.”

They smiled.

“Have fun groveling on your knees, bitch boy.”

I winked at Cain’s retort. “Have fun paying the bill, motherfucker.”

“Hey!”

I left, flipping him off on my way out of the bar. I went for a walk on the beach, needing some alone time to think about what I was going to do. When I made my way back up to our suite, I knew the moment I stepped into the room...

I. Was. Fucked.

Simply expressing, “Just call me Daddy, baby.”

CHAPTER 20

—Sage—

“I knew this was a bad idea! I never should have listened to you and my mom. Now look, Aspyn, he thinks I’m a liar. How am I going to come back from that?”

She’d knocked on my door shortly after Ashton left, saying she already knew what had happened since he’d gone to their suite looking for Sawyer.

“I told you. I think it’s going to be fine, Sage. He really likes you; he told me so.”

“I don’t doubt he really likes me. I doubt what he’s going to do about it and how he’s going to trust me after I lied to him about two of the most important people in my life.”

She shrugged. “You were just trying to protect you and your kids.”

“I know that, and you know that, but he doesn’t. How do I come back from this?”

“He knows the truth now, so it’s all out in the open. You have nothing else to hide.”

“That’s super reassuring, Aspyn.”

There was a knock on the door, and for a second I thought it was you know who until I opened it and Lively was standing there with her arms full of stuff.

She smiled. “I heard, and it didn’t feel right not coming here and seeing if you were okay.”

I smiled back. “That’s really nice of you. Come in.”

She did, and I closed the door behind her.

“Is Cain here too?”

“He told me what was going on and drove over here to man chat with Ashton and Sawyer. I’m assuming their conversation includes a bottle of Jack and calling each other motherfucker and asshole.”

We laughed.

“Okay so I didn’t know what ice cream flavor you guys liked, so I got vanilla, double chocolate, and mint chocolate. I also grabbed tissues. I didn’t know if this was going to be a crying kind of thing or not. Twizzlers, Skittles, oh and I brought tequila!”

“Wow,” Aspyn rasped. “This is how to cure a heartbreak 101. Snacks and booze.”

“Exactly.” She nodded.

See, she was the best. I couldn’t imagine Cain wasn’t falling in love with her or had already.

After a couple of shots, things started looking clearer, or maybe that was blurry; either way, I began feeling better.

Thank God for Don Julio.

“Men are so stupid,” Lively spoke, taking down another shot.

“Tell me about it,” Aspyn agreed, chugging down hers as well.

“Have you ever been in a serious relationship?” I asked Lively, clinking my glass with hers and swallowing my shot whole.

“Define serious?”

“A boyfriend?”

“Oh, I’ve had many.”

“You ever been in love?”

“Hmm...” She thought about it for a moment. “I’m not sure. I think I’ve been in lust.”

“With Cain?”

“Can you keep a secret?”

We nodded.

“I’m not sure what I feel for Cain, but it’s more than lust.”

I opened my mouth to reply, but all of a sudden, the door flew open, and Ashton appeared, exclaiming, “Just call me Daddy, baby.”

We all looked over at him as if he were crazy. It was obvious he’d been drinking, and I assumed it was the liquor talking.

Doesn’t alcohol make you say the truth?

“If you ladies can excuse us, I’d like to talk to this lying mama alone.”

“I’ll see you tomorrow at the airport.” Aspyn kissed my cheek and Lively hugged me.

“So great meeting you. Come back anytime.”

I really liked her. I could only hope Cain wouldn’t mess it up. He was never going to find a chick like her, even if he tried.

Once they left, the nervousness I felt in my belly resurfaced as Ashton walked toward me in that demanding sort of way that drove me wild.

Taking a seat on the accent chair in front of me, he leaned forward and set his elbows on his knees like I was in trouble.

Why did that pose turn me on so much?

“Before we address this any further, is there anything else you need to tell me? An ex-husband? Another boyfriend? Sixth toe?”

“No. You know it all.”

“You lied. I hate liars. I always have. I didn’t leave because I don’t care. I do care. I just hate when people lie to me.”

“But—”

“But nothing. You hid the fact that you have kids. That’s a big fucking deal, Sage.”

“I know. I’m sorry.”

“And look at that—I got an ‘I’m sorry’ and I didn’t even have to put you over my knee.”

“Ashton—”

“Don’t Ashton me.”

“Okay, screw this!” I stood. “First of all, stop interrupting me. Second of all, I was protecting myself against men like you.”

“Men like me?”

“Yeah. The ones who swoop in like a knight and shining armor and leave the second something gets difficult. I wasn’t mending another broken heart because of a guy who couldn’t commit. Been there, done that. I could write the book. I needed to make sure you could handle me. That you could handle my kids.”

“Are you done?”

“Done?”

“Yes, going all mama bear on me.”

“What do you expect from me? You hurt my feelings. My kids are the best, and you’ll be lucky if you ever get to meet them.”

“If?”

“Yes, *if*. Just because you know about them now doesn’t mean I’m going to introduce you to them. They’ve never met any man before, and I’m not entirely sure you’re going to be the first one to break that streak. Especially after you ran out of here so fast you left track marks.”

“I never intended to hurt your feelings, Sage, but I was a little taken aback.”

“I know. I get that. But what if I had told you about them? What then, huh? You still would have wanted to get to know me? Knowing I was a single mom of twins?”

“Listen, angry mama, you never gave me a chance to make that decision. You chose it for me.”

“I didn’t mean to. I didn’t know how to tell you. After you left that first night we met, I wound up knocked up. I lost my virginity on my birthday and got pregnant with twins. Not to mention, he was horrible. It was horrible. I ended up in the emergency room with my legs in stirrups while the doctor on-call inspected my vagina. Do you have any idea how traumatizing that was?”

“I can only imagine.”

“I did everything right, Ashton. We used protection. I even took the morning after pill just in case. The doctor was adamant about it, but it didn’t matter because God had other plans for me. And you know what?”

“No, what, sweet mama?”

“I wouldn’t change it for anything in this world. My twins are everything to me.”

“As they should be.”

“Oh my God! Why are you saying all the right things?”

“Don’t you want me to say all the right things?”

“Not unless you mean them.”

“Do I ever say anything I don’t mean? Unlike you, I’ve never lied to you.”

“You said you understood.”

“I do understand, but that doesn’t mean I’m not upset that you hid the truth from me.”

“I feel like we’re running around in circles.”

“Then stop running and stand still with me.”

“What does that mean?”

He grabbed my hand and tugged me toward him, making me straddle his waist.

“It means I want to see where this can go. *With* your twins.”

“Really?”

“I like you, Sage. A lot.”

“I like you too, Ashton. A lot.”

“I’m still not happy that you lied to me, but I’m willing to overlook it this one time and get to know you and your kids.”

To say I was a little shocked would be an understatement. However, when he swept the hair away from my face, I was putty in his hands.

The worst part...
He knew it too.

—Ashton—

“You do know what you’re signing up for, right?”

I nodded. “I have siblings who have kids, and I’m their favorite uncle.”

“You’re not meeting my kids anytime soon, Ashton.”

“Alright, I can respect that. The day you decide I can meet them, I will happily introduce myself to...”

“Haiden and Haven.”

“Damn, you didn’t even give them a chance,” I joked, trying to lighten the mood between us.

She smirked, playfully slapping me on the chest.

“I’m kidding. It’s cute. And I’m sure I’m going to like them as much as I like their sexy mama.”

“They are pretty awesome.”

“You’re pretty awesome.” I kissed her. “Now, the real question is, how are you going to make up your lies to me, sweetness?”

“Oh, I have to make it up to you, do I?”

“It would be the right thing to do.”

“And what right thing would that be?”

“I have one thing in mind.”

She pecked my lips. “I really am sorry, Ashton.”

“I know. Now get on your knees and show me how sorry you really are, Sage.”

She blushed.

“I do love that shade of red on you, baby.”

“Charmer.” Slowly lowering her body to the floor in front of me, she gripped onto the seam of my gym shorts. “I think I can do that. Very well, actually.”

“Well, you do have a lot to make up for.”

From the moment she pulled out my dick and deep throated it into her pouty little mouth, I was hers.

Knowing all along...

I always had been.

CHAPTER 21

—Sage—

“Mom, are we there yet?” Haven asked, sitting in the passenger seat near me.

She was the only one who was excited about today; Haiden not so much. Four months had passed since Ashton found out about them, and it's been about five months since we began dating. The time had finally come for him to meet my twins. The nervousness I felt since I'd told him that I was ready to introduce them to each other last week was an uncertainty I didn't think I'd ever truly felt before.

Everything was going amazing between us. Ashton was patient, attentive, loving...

He didn't give me shit if I couldn't see or talk to him. He always understood no matter what. There were a few dates that I had to cancel on him last minute, and his response was to send me flowers.

I know, right?

The last bunch came with a super sweet card that read: “You're the best mom, and they're lucky to have you.”

“We're almost there,” I replied, trying to drive as slow as possible. “Haiden, you okay back there?” I questioned through the rearview mirror.

I basically had to bribe him to come.

He was not happy about me dating someone, and it had nothing to do with Ashton. Haiden had been the only man in my life all his life, and he wasn't used to my attention being on anyone other than him. All the dates I canceled were because of Haiden. I didn't want to lose Ashton, and I silently prayed Haiden would eventually warm up to him. I couldn't be with someone that my boy didn't approve of; it just wasn't in me, so the pressure for them to hit it off was layered on thick.

“Whatever.” He shrugged, not looking at me.

“I know you're mad at me.”

“He's not mad at you, Mama. He's mad at your boyfriend.” Haven giggled.

Haven, on the other hand, was thrilled to be meeting Ashton. She'd asked me hundreds of questions about him, and they never stopped. Especially

after I told Ashton that Haven loved the tulips he'd sent me, and the very next day there was a delivery for her from him.

Pink tulips, her favorite color.

Haven wasn't the only one who relentlessly asked me about him. The curiosity was very much mutual. Ashton wanted to know about Haiden and Haven as well. I told both of them everything they wanted to know about one another, so they both knew a lot about each other already.

I showed Haven pictures of Ashton and me together, and she thought he was the cutest guy aside from Harry Styles. Again, Haiden couldn't care less. He showed no interest in anything when it pertained to Ashton.

"I know you're unhappy, bud, and it kills me that you're upset about us dating. But I'll tell you once again that no one is going to replace my love for you."

He rolled his eyes.

"Haiden..."

"Mom, I don't care if you have a boyfriend. I just don't understand why I have to meet him?"

"Because if he's going to continue to be in my life like I hope he is, then I need to make sure you approve of him."

"And if I don't?"

"I need you to really try, Haiden. I need you to give him a chance. Can you do that for me?"

"Yeah, Mom. I already said I would. Why do we keep talking about the same thing?"

"Hey! Enough with the attitude."

"Yeah, Haiden, enough with the attitude."

He kicked the back of Haven's seat.

"Haiden!" I shook my head in disappointment.

"What? She started it."

"Maybe this wasn't such a good idea, and we should go back hom—"

"No, Mama! I want to meet Ashton." She glared back at her brother.

"You'll be fine once we get there. Won't you, Haiden?"

He smiled at her.

This was the first time he had smiled all day which aided my nervousness a little.

"You're right, Haven. I'm sorry, Mom. I'll behave."

I arched an eyebrow. "Why the sudden change of heart?"

He smiled at me through the rearview mirror. "You're happy, I'm happy."
I beamed. "Do you mean that?"

He nodded, still smiling at me. "I love you."

My heart melted. "I love you too, bud."

We drove in silence for the rest of the fifteen-minute ride until we pulled into Ashton's community and then his driveway.

"Is this his house?" Haven questioned, grabbing her unicorn backpack.

"This is his house."

Haiden grabbed his Transformers backpack and jumped out of my SUV with Haven right behind him.

Taking a deep, solid breath, I followed their lead and locked the door to my vehicle. We were standing ringing Ashton's doorbell with my heart in my throat.

The instant I saw his dimples when he opened the door, I felt this huge sense of relief. Ashton never hid his emotions, and right now, he was genuinely excited to meet my babies.

"Hey, little mama," he answered, kissing me on the cheek.

This was his thing. He called me mama with almost anything.

Sexy mama.

Pretty mama.

Feisty mama.

It changed with whatever mood I was in, or what he saw in me at that moment.

I loved it.

I loved him?

I shook away the question for what felt like the hundredth time that week.
"Hey, dimples."

He winked at me, looking down at the two little humans who were standing beside me. Haven was hiding behind my leg, slightly peeking out through the fabric of my maxi dress. She was always shy when she met new people. Haiden was the opposite. He was standing like the man of the house, even though we weren't home.

Ashton didn't waver. He crouched in front of Haven to be at eye level with her. "Hey, baby girl."

She smiled; it was what my dad and Brady called her too. "Hi."

"And you must be princess Haven?"

She gasped. "I am a princess! How did you know?"

“Because all princesses have magic around them.”

She gave him the biggest toothless smile, stepping out from behind my legs to stand next to me instead.

Ashton’s eyes shifted to Haiden, but for him he stood up, fully aware that Haiden wouldn’t want to be treated like anything less than the man he felt he already was.

Sticking out his hand, Ashton introduced himself. “I’m Ashton, and you must be Haiden, the man of the house, right?”

“Yeah.” He shook his hand. “That’s me. We talked on the phone, remember?”

Ashton nodded, picking up on the animosity in Haiden’s tone. “Right. At the time I thought you were someone else, so I apologize for that. I hope we can put it behind us and start fresh. I’d really like to get to know you.”

Haiden simply gave him a curt nod, and Ashton and I locked eyes before he opened the door wider.

“Come on in. If you’re hungry, I have finger foods for you on the kitchen island. There are also all sorts of drinks in the fridge. Blue Gatorade, right, man? It’s my favorite too.”

Haiden wasn’t impressed by Ashton’s hospitality. However, Haven and I were.

“I’m thirsty,” she informed, still holding my hand as we walked into Ashton’s kitchen designed for a five-star chef.

Speaking from someone who loved to cook, his kitchen was goals. I’d cooked him dinner a few times, and I cherished every second of it. He’d thought of everything when it came to designing his entire house. From the crown molding to the travertine floors. His place resembled a model home.

Haiden made his way directly toward the pool. He and Haven knew how to swim; with the lake behind our house I’d made sure of it.

“One Tropicana orange juice coming right up.”

“Ashton, you know my favorite drink?”

“I know a lot of things about you, baby girl.”

“You do? How?”

“I asked your mom to tell me all about you.”

She let go of my hand and sat on the kitchen island stool, sitting her butt on her legs to reach the high counter.

“I asked my mama about you too. She said that you love kids.”

“I do. I have two nieces about your age.” He handed Haven her drink, and she drank the whole thing before she wiped her face with the back of her arm.

“Oh really? Maybe next time we come here, I can play with them. Mama says she wants us to be here a lot. Do you have a room for us to sleep in?”

“Haven...” I murmured, glancing at Ashton warily, who was standing there like she'd just told him he'd won the lottery.

He was loving the fact that Haven was thinking about having a sleepover at his house; it meant she liked him.

“Haiden has bunk beds in his room. Maybe you can sleep on the top bunk when you sleep over at our house too?”

“I'd love to sleep on Haiden's top bunk.”

“It's super comfortable.” She traced the granite lines on the counter. “This is really pretty. What's it called?”

“Quartz.”

“Oh! Like Mommy has in her bathroom. Look, Mama, it's just a different color than yours.”

“It is.” I looked for Haiden through the screen doors. “Where did your brother go? He was just out by the pool.”

“Maybe he had to take a poop.”

Ashton instantly laughed, and I turned thirty shades of red.

“Haiden likes to poop in my bathroom, and I get mad because his butt stinks really bad.”

Ashton laughed so hard his head fell back.

“Oh my God. Haven!”

“What, Mama? You don't like it when he uses your bathroom either. Haiden says he takes man poops like Grampy and Uncle Brady. Do you take man poops too, Ashton?”

I shut my eyes for a moment, shaking my head before mouthing, “I'm so sorry,” to him.

And what did my dream guy reply?

He mouthed back, “Don't be, she's adorable.”

CHAPTER 22

—Ashton—

This fucking kid.

“Honey, let’s not ask Ashton about his man poops, okay?”

“But, Mama.” She scratched her head, watching as Sage went toward the slider. “You said everyone poops.”

“Yes, but we don’t need confirmation.” She opened it. “Haiden!”

“I’ll tell you what?” I announced, bringing both their attention over to me. “Why don’t you girls go change into your bathing suits, and I’ll go find Haiden?”

“Yeah!” Haven excitedly shouted, grabbing her mom’s hand. “Let’s go!”

“Okay, let’s grab our stuff.” Sage gazed around the kitchen. “Where did your backpack go?”

“Umm... I put my bathing suit in your bag.”

“Why did you do that?”

Haven shrugged, dragging Sage out toward the pool.

“I’ll find him and be right behind you.”

They both nodded, smiling at me. I could tell Sage was nervous about leaving me alone with Haiden, but how bad could this kid be?

He was seven.

“Haiden!” I hollered, peering down the hall.

No answer.

I searched all the rooms of my house until I finally found him in my bedroom, as if he was waiting for me.

“What are you—”

“Let’s cut the nice guy act, alright?”

I expected him not to like me. What I didn’t count on was for him to come at me right from the beginning.

“I don’t like you, and I’m never going to, so you can save the ‘I’m a nice guy’ act with me. I don’t buy it. You just want my mom all to yourself.”

That was my ding to tap into this sparring match. “That’s the furthest thing from the truth. I’m not trying to steal her. I care about her. All I want to do is get to know you too. If you gave me a shot, we could be friends. I

play a mean game of Call of Duty,” I expressed, thinking maybe we could reach neutral ground.

Fuck no.

What was I thinking?

This kid was out for blood.

“You think a video game is going to have me calling you daddy?”

“How about we start with Ashton?”

“I’ve never had a dad, and I don’t need one now. Especially one who dresses like a dork and has a stupid haircut. My mom is mine. Mine and Haven’s. This is your one warning. Leave her now, or you’re going to regret it.”

Ignoring his digs, I stayed calm. “Unlucky for you, I don’t scare easily, Haiden. You’re the man of the house, right?”

“The one and only.”

“Listen, bud—”

He stepped toward me, looking up to my face. “I’m not your bud.”

Biting my tongue, I spoke the truth, “I know it’s probably hard trusting a new person in your life. But I like your mom, a lot.”

“I’m not going to share her. With you or anyone else.”

What the fuck do I say to that?

Without even trying, I’d become his number one rival, his mortal enemy, and suddenly I’d found myself at the receiving end of a boy half my size who was ready to throw down and punch me in the balls if needed. Considering he was close to my family jewels with his height, I wasn’t convinced he wasn’t going to.

Haiden didn’t stop there. Blow after blow erupted from his mouth as if I was listening to the kid on the other end of my Call of Duty warfare game.

He must have smelled my hesitation because he squared off to me with the swagger of a man. Standing tall, his shoulders rigid. “This is war.”

Unable to hold back, I sneered, “Good thing I don’t lose then.”

“Oh!” Sage announced, walking into my bedroom with Haven. “There you two are. What’s going on? Everything alright?”

Haiden’s glare instantly vanished as if it was never there to begin with, and in one quick motion he wrapped his arms around my waist.

“Mom! You were so right!” he boomed, hugging me tightly. “Ashton is the best! We’re going to play Call of Duty later! I’m so glad we met him!”

Oh, this little brat...

This was how he was going to play it?

To me, he was Haiden the Hellion.

To his mother, he was her precious angel.

Little did he know who he was fucking with. He wasn't the only one good at playing this game. Women were my specialty.

Plus, I wouldn't go down without a fight.

For the rest of the day, everything proceeded without a hitch now that the lines had been drawn between me and Sage's son. Any chance he'd get when his mother wasn't looking, he would slice over his neck with his index finger. From one ear to the other, his beady little eyes glaring right at me.

I ordered five different pizzas for us, chicken wings, breadsticks, a smorgasbord of food, and the hellion pretended like he had a stomachache only after it was delivered. Leaving me with an obscene amount of food. I ate as much as I could and took a shower, contemplating my next move.

Should I retaliate?

Should I pretend like it doesn't bother me?

What's the right thing to do in this situation?

The more I thought about it, the harder I scrubbed my head. Getting extremely agitated, I took out all my frustrations on my scalp while I roughly washed my hair.

Would he stop?

Could I make him stop?

What were his plans for me?

Turn his mother against me?

His sister?

Why the hell is my scalp burning?

"What the fuck?"

Quickly, I washed it out as fast as I could and rushed toward the mirror in my bathroom.

"Oh ... no, no, no, no!"

My hair was blond.

My hair was fucking blond!

"I'm going to kill him!"

It didn't take a brain surgeon to know that Haiden was behind this. He must have put bleach in my shampoo when he was roaming around my house alone.

What else did he booby-trap?

It was worse than I thought. This kid was going to make my life hell until he got what he wanted.

Me. Gone. Forever.

I refused to give into his terrorist tactics. Remaining calm, I breathed in a heavy, solid breath. Trying to govern my anger that was boiling from the inside out.

“He’s a kid, Ashton. He’s just a little boy. You can do this.” Grabbing my cell phone off the counter, I texted my barber that I needed an appointment as soon as possible. Throwing on my gym shorts next, I sat on the edge of my bed and chuckled to myself.

If it wasn’t me who this kid was torturing, I would have probably shaken his hand on a job well done.

He definitely knew how to get to me, except I wouldn’t give him the satisfaction to know that.

I’d say nothing.

Not. One. Thing.

Absence makes the heart grow fonder, right? Well, maybe ignoring your adversary had the same effect? I mean, he’s seven for Christ’s sake. Can I really be punked by a seven-year-old?

My phone rang, breaking that train of thoughts. Sage’s gorgeous face appeared on my screen, and suddenly I wasn’t so upset anymore.

This woman had the power to bring me peace...

And to drop me to my knees.

Voluntarily.

“Hey, pretty mama.”

“Hey,” she greeted. “I feel terrible about leaving you hanging with all that food.”

“It’s not a problem.” My jaw clenched. “How’s Haiden?”

“Oh, he’s fine. He was fine once we got home. I think he was just overwhelmed with meeting you today.”

“I’m sure he was something.”

“I’m so happy you guys hit it off. He talked about you the entire ride home.”

“Is that right?”

“Yes! He asked me if you’ve ever colored your hair blond,” she giggled. “What a random question. Have you ever colored your hair blond, Ashton?”

“Not by choice.”

“What do mean?”

“Nothing. How’s Haven?”

“She wouldn’t stop talking about you either. I think you won over my kids, dimples. You’ve made quite an impression on them.”

“I do what I can.”

“Want to come over for dinner tomorrow night? Haiden even offered to help me cook for you. Isn’t that sweet?”

“He’s just the sweetest, almost like a Sour Patch Kid.”

She laughed. “Okay, so we will see you tomorrow?”

“I can’t wait to see what Haiden has in store for me next.”

Her voice was my saving grace. At least for the following ten minutes until I became rather itchy.

“Holy fucking—”

“What? Are you okay?”

“No, I’m...” I scratched my balls profusely.

Oh that little brat...

“Sweetness, I need to go.”

Scratch.

Scratch.

Scratch.

“Is everything alright?”

“Mmm hmm, I suddenly have to call Sawyer.”

“Are you sure everything is okay?”

“Just peachy fucking keen, babe.”

Scratch.

Scratch.

Scratch.

“I’ll see you tomorrow then?”

“I’ll be there with my balls... I mean bells on.”

She chuckled. “Sounds good. Goodnight, dimples.”

“Goodnight.” I hung up and called Sawyer. “Dude, I need you.”

“What happened now?”

I didn’t hesitate, snarling,

“Haiden the Hellion.”

CHAPTER 23

—Ashton—

Three months.

Three fucking months.

Not one step in the right direction when it came to Haiden. If anything, our relationship took a drastic turn into the danger zone. Most of my time was spent with Sage and her kids now, quickly becoming friends with the baby girl who had already stolen my heart. Sage and Haven were always the only two out of the three who were actually excited to see me walk through their door. Waiting for me with open arms and lots of hugs and attention.

I wasn't lying.

Exaggerating.

Trust me, I wished I was.

From the moment Haiden found out about me, he decided I was public enemy number one. Taking it upon himself to screw me over every chance he'd get. I had no fucking clue how he was able to pull off half the shit he did to me.

The truth was, I was fucked...

Exactly how I predicted I was going to be. However, I never imagined it was going to be from the receiving end of her boy. Things between Sage and I were great. Aside from the fact that her kid was plotting my death, we were moving along rather smoothly. The nights Sage stayed the night at my place, she'd sleep in my arms, making an unbreakable bond I'd never experienced with anyone only stronger. Holding her in my arms was becoming my new favorite thing.

My cock, though...

Had a mind of its own.

There was something about Sage that captured my heart and soul.

I didn't hide it from her. She knew how complete I felt when we were together. Haiden was doing everything and anything in his power to get rid of me. Her son put me through the wringer with some sort of new war tactic to take me down and to keep me there. He hated me in every sense of the

word, and I knew he wouldn't stop until he succeeded in getting rid of me completely.

And by that, I meant me breaking up with his mother.

No one knew what Haiden was putting me through other than my mom and the boys. I couldn't tell Sage he was playing her like a fiddle, pretending we were the best of friends whenever she was in our presence, but the second she'd left us alone his true colors would show bright and bold. I wasn't going to come between Sage and her son, no matter how hard he fucked with me.

This was between me and her demon spawn.

Besides, I liked her way too much to let him win, and if I told her, it meant he did. She wasn't going to believe me; her kid laid it on real thick. At times I thought maybe I was hallucinating, and he actually liked me, until he'd kicked me in the balls with his tactics. Haiden's bullshit never ceased to amaze me, though. I swear they were getting more and more inventive as the weeks went by.

His creativity knew no bounds.

Our future was filled with uncertainty.

Him.

Haven.

Sage...

What if I lost her?

This plaguing question assaulted my mind when I was awake or sleeping. I began dreaming about her saying those four words to me.

I can't do this.

I turned into a complete and utter pussy. Since I couldn't tell her what Haiden was putting me through, I remained like a fucking force field of withholding the truth.

In the last three months, it was one thing after another. It didn't matter if we were at my house or his, he was still able to mess with me.

First, it started off with innocent little things.

My hair.

The itching power.

All the batteries out of everything in my home.

Switching the sugar to salt.

Gum at the bottom of all my shoes.

Cutting holes in my socks.

Flour in my fans.
Glue on my steering wheel.
Those were just to name a few.
Although, in the last month he'd brought out the big guns.
Told Sage I taught him the word fuck.
He peed on my carpet.
Put clear plastic on my toilet seats.
Changed out my Sloppy Joe to wet dog food.
Dropped my phone in the pool.
Sling-shot a pebble at my cock and claimed I'd got in his way. That stunt put me out for several days. He literally bruised my dick.
Turned my refrigerator off so all my food inside spoiled.
Put cottage cheese in my milk.
There weren't any boundaries he wasn't willing and able to cross.
Not. One.

Since I couldn't do anything about his full-blown World War III battle, I called in for reinforcements. Today was the first time we were uniting forces. Sage and her kids were meeting the other half of me.

My family and the boys.

"Honey, are you okay?" Mom asked, cooking her best recipe in my kitchen that was always a huge hit at any function.

"I'm nervous."

"Why? We're going to love Sage."

"It's not Sage I'm worried about."

"We're going to love her kids too."

"Exactly. What if Haiden makes you fall in love with him? Huh, what then? I'll tell you what— he's going to turn you against me."

"Honey, that would never happen. You're my baby."

I smiled. "I know. I'm just running my mouth. I'm more nervous about what he's going to do to me this afternoon."

"Maybe he will give you a break."

I scoffed out a chuckle. "I highly doubt that. Everyone who is important to me is going to be here, so I imagine he might poison me."

"Ashton, he can't be that bad. He's just a little boy."

"Mom, I'm telling you he may look like a kid on the outside, but inside, he's pure evil. Just ask my balls."

"Ashton!"

“What? I’ve told you everything he’s done to me. Whose side are you on?”

“Have you tried to talk to him?”

“Gee, why didn’t I think of that?”

“You know, when you were his age, you weren’t exactly an angel?”

“Yeah, I’m aware. I had three best friends who were the worst influences.”

“Bro,” Cain snickered, walking into my kitchen with Lively. They were here visiting. “I was an angel. *You* were the bad influence.”

“Why do I know that’s a lie?” Lively bit, smirking.

He winked at her. “What time is everyone getting here?”

“Soon.”

“Did you wear a cup like I told you to?”

“No, I’m not putting a plastic cup in between my legs.”

“Then I don’t want to hear your whining if he comes for your di”—he stopped himself, looking at my mom—“dingdong again.”

I opened my mouth, but the doorbell rang. “Speak of the Devil. I wonder if his ears were ringing?”

“Don’t sweat it, bro.” Cain wrapped his arm around my neck. “We’re here to protect you from the big bad seven-year-old.”

I glared at him, slapping him in the chest. “Ha, ha, very funny. I hope he pisses in your shoes, so you know what it’s like.”

“He pissed in your shoes?”

“Carpet, shoes, same thing.”

“Hey, Ashton!” Haiden hollered from the entryway. “We’re here, and I’m so excited to meet your friends and family!”

“Awe.” Lively smiled. “What a sweetheart.”

“Great. He only just got here, and he already has you wrapped around his finger.”

“Honey, we’re on your side. Relax,” Mom reassured.

She underestimated his acting capability, but I, on the other hand, knew better. Not even an hour in and Haiden the Hellion had the boys and my family eating out of the palm of his hand. They were enamored with him.

If I heard my mother say, “What a sweet boy,” one more time, I was going to lose my shit.

At one point, Leo even questioned me, “Are you sure you’re not just being a pussy about it? The kid seems fucking sweet.”

“Hey, Ashton.” Haiden pulled my attention. “Will you help me figure out this new toy Uncle Brady got me outside?”

Suddenly, all eyes were on me in my living room, and I had no choice but to say yes. I followed him out onto my porch, keeping my focus on him. Knowing he was up to no good.

“Can you help me with this? I can’t figure out how to get this remote car into high speed.”

I zeroed in on him. “Depends, is it going to blow up in my face?”

He smiled, big and wide. “Of course not. I’d never hurt you like that. You’re my mom’s boyfriend, remember?”

“I know who I am, Haiden, and I know who you are too.”

“Oh, come on. I was just playing around with you. Don’t be such a girl.”

“You little—”

“You forgot your drink,” Sage announced, coming up behind me. “I thought I’d bring it to you.”

Wanting to prove to him that I wasn’t going anywhere, I set down my drink and kissed Sage right in front of him.

Slow.

Tender.

Mine.

Pecking her lips, I leaned my forehead against hers. “Thank you, baby.” For good measure, I smacked her butt when she was walking away.

“Ashton!”

“What?” I grinned at her. “Couldn’t help myself.”

Once she was out of sight, Haiden stood beside me. “Listen, Asher.”

“It’s Ashton,”

He waved me off. “Same thing. I wanna call a truce.”

I jerked back, caught off guard. “Excuse me, what?”

“Yeah.” He shrugged.

“Why?”

“I know I’ve been mean to you, and I just want to say I’m really sorry. My mom is happy, and that makes me happy too. She’s never been this happy before.”

“Really?”

“Definitely. She wakes up with a great big smile on her face every morning. She’s singing in the shower. I even heard her tell my girl Aspyn that you’ve become so clingy that she can’t get a break from you.”

My eyes widened. “She told Aspyn I’m clingy?”

“Yeah. Clingy. Needy. Kind of like you’re one of her kindergarten students.”

“When did you hear this?”

“Last night.”

“What else did you hear?”

“She just thinks you’re still in it for her, you know? And man to man, I know you like me and Haven. But she told Aspyn that she thinks you need to take us out more without her. Show her you can be a responsible adult or something.”

“I see.”

“But anyway, I’ve been a punk.”

“Clearly.”

“You didn’t deserve it. Maybe you could take us out tomorrow? You know, without my mom. Just Haven, you, and me. We can get to know each other more.”

Is he fucking with me?

Do I trust him?

Against my better judgment and instincts, I grabbed his olive branch, saying the words I never thought I’d say to the little spawn, “I’d love to hang out with you guys. Just us. One on one.”

—Sage—

“Mom, Ashton wants to take us to the carnival tomorrow. Can we go?” Haiden asked as soon as we walked back inside. “Please, Mom!”

Haven overheard his request and ran toward me. “Yessss! Mama, can we go! Please!”

I smiled. “Sure, we can go—”

“I’d actually like to take them on my own,” Ashton intervened. “If it’s alright with you?”

“You want to take my kids out? Alone?”

“Yeah, I’d love to.”

“Oh ... ummm...” I bit my lower lip.

“Mama, please!” Haven pulled on my maxi dress.

“I’ve never let them go out with anyone other than my parents and Brady.”

“There’s a first time for everything.”

“Ashton, I don’t kn—”

“Sage, you should let him.” His sister treaded up to her brother’s side. “He’s taken my kids out several times on his own. He’ll be great,” she reassured. “You don’t have to worry.”

“I know. Ashton is great. It has nothing to do with his parenting ability. It’s more like Haiden loves to wander, and Haven runs everywhere, so they’re a lot to stay on top of. You have to watch them like a hawk.”

Ashton stepped toward me, sweeping my hair away from my face. Making my insecurity ease up. “Little Mama, don’t you trust me?”

“Yeah, Mom, don’t you trust him?” Haiden repeated in a tone I’d recognized all too clearly.

“Of course I do.” I felt like I was being put on the spot.

“Mama, please!” Haven begged, her hands in front of her in a prayer gesture. “Please!”

“I guess...” I hesitated for a second. “That would be okay.”

Ashton smiled, caressing my cheek with his knuckles. “I’ll have them home to you safe and sound. I just want to get to know your twins better, protective mama. I can be a responsible adult, baby. You don’t have to worry.”

I nodded. “I know you can.”

“Great. I’ll pick them up around noon.”

“Sounds good. Would you like to have lunch with me before you guys go?”

“No, it’s fine. I don’t want to be too clingy and needy. You have enough of that with your kindergarten students.”

I narrowed my eyes at him. *Where did that come from?*

“Ashton, I—”

“Yay!” Haven exclaimed, jumping up and down. “We can go, Haiden! I’m so excited! I can’t wait!”

All I ever wanted was for my kids to be happy, and Ashton was amazing with them when we were together. At times it felt as if we were one big happy family, and he if wanted to take my twins out by himself, I could honor that.

But why did it feel like something else was going on?

CHAPTER 24

—Ashton—

“Ashton, can I get cotton candy?”

“Your mom said not to give you too many sweets, and, baby girl, you already had an ice cream and a brownie.”

“I know.” She innocently smiled, posing all cute and adorable. “But Mama doesn’t have to know. It’ll be our little secret.”

I nervously chuckled, wanting Haven and Haiden to like me. I didn’t know what the right or wrong answer was.

Reluctantly, I gave in, “Alright. But this is the last sweet, okay?”

She beamed, nodding vigorously.

For the last few hours, we rode most of the rides at the carnival, and the twins seemed like they were having the best time. Considering this was our first official outing together on our own, it wasn’t so bad. Haiden and I were getting along, and he seemed genuinely interested in getting to know me. Asking me all sorts of questions about my life which he’d never done before. I eagerly replied, hoping that after today we’d be on solid ground and could move forward in the right direction.

“Let’s go on the Ferris wheel!” Haiden started running, and Haven wasn’t far behind him, so naturally now I was hauling ass behind two little humans.

There were beer tents, casino tents, game tents—any kind of attraction you could think of, it was there. All of them surrounding the carnival-style rides and booths. Music blasted through the speakers, bells rang out announcing winners, and screams echoed off the rides. The kids were loving every minute of today, smiling, laughing, and without a care in the world.

Despite wanting to stay in the moment with them, I couldn’t stop thinking about what her son had told me yesterday.

Was I too clingy?

Needy?

One of her Kindergarten students?

I shook away the thoughts, focusing on the carnival and kids instead. The boys and I looked forward to it every year, hitting on all the girls with short skirts and crop tops.

Oh, how the times have changed...

If someone would have told me a year ago that I would show up with two seven-year-olds that were my girlfriend's twins, I would have laughed in their face.

Yet, there I was, truly enjoying myself with these minions. I thought I was having more fun with them than when I was with the guys. Watching how excited Haiden and Haven were over just about anything was as contagious as if I was experiencing it myself. I was living vicariously through them, wishing I could get as excited as they were about the candy, rides, and games.

I always understood why people had children. I saw it with my nephews and nieces. They brought so much joy and laughter into your life. Don't get me started on their energy which was definitely wasted on the youth. How they could run a fucking amok from one place to another without breaking a sweat was an art they'd perfected.

My legs were on fire chasing after them, never letting them out of my sight for a second. Sage gave me the rundown before we'd left.

What I needed to do.

What they couldn't do.

What they loved to eat.

What they hated.

The list was endless, and I tried to make a mental note with all the new information that left her mouth, but it was a bit overwhelming.

Who was I kidding?

I was anxious as fuck.

If there was one thing I was fully aware of, I had one shot at this, and I didn't want to mess it up, purchasing them whatever they wanted. Sure, some would consider it bribery or maybe buying their affection. However, at this point, I would do anything to have Haiden accept me.

"Winner, winner, chicken dinner!" the carnival worker's voice boomed over the crowd at one of the pitching games. "To the little girl in the unicorn dress! What can I get for you, babe?"

"Oh my God! Ashton!" Haven exclaimed, doing a little dance that made me smile.

This kid.

She reminded me of her mother. I'd seen Sage do that same number anytime she was excited over the last seven months.

"Take that, Haiden! I can win at the games too!"

He shrugged. "I let you win, baby sister."

"You're only older than me by three minutes, and I won fair and square, butt face."

"Hey, hey, hey, let's quit that while we're ahead, okay?"

"Fine, but I still beat him," she grumbled under her breath.

Bumping Haiden's shoulder with the side of my body, I winked at him and mouthed, "I know you let her win."

The expression on Haiden's face was one I hadn't seen before. At least not toward me.

Appreciation.

Haven picked out a purple pony that was the size of her, and I ended up carrying it around most of the day. Prior to today, I didn't realize the bond they had. At times it felt like the twins had their own language. Although they fought and bickered, it was obvious they still loved each other very much.

We finished a couple more games and rode a few more rides when Haven pointed to the ladies' room. "I need to go to the bathroom."

"And I'm thirsty," Haiden added, grabbing my arm.

"I'm thirsty too!" Baby girl acknowledged.

"Alright, let's take your sister to the bathroom, and then we'll get you a drink."

"How about I take Haven to the bathroom, and you can get us a drink?"

"No, let's go together. It's already dark out."

"It's not a big deal, Ashton. I take her to the bathroom while my mom gets groceries all the time."

"Mama—"

"Haven, I can take you to the bathroom. It's not a big deal."

"Bud, I don't think—"

"The bathroom is right there," he insisted. "And the drinks are over there. You can still see us."

"Haiden—"

"I have to go to the potty! I'm going to pee my pants!"

“Look, there’s no line for either. Just go. We will be done at the same time.”

“Guys, I don’t—”

“If I pee my pants, I’m going to die!”

“Fine,” I breathed out, letting him have his way. “Take your sister to the bathroom. I’ll go get the drinks. We will meet right here, alright?”

“Okay, let’s go!” She grabbed her brother’s hand, and off they went.

Rushing over to the concession stand, I could still see them from where I was standing. I watched as they walked into the ladies’ room before I turned my back to order three drinks and a large popcorn.

Gesturing to the attendant, I paid him and grabbed our stuff. In less than five minutes, I was back to the spot we were just standing and agreed to meet back up in.

I didn’t know how long I had been standing there waiting for them when my phone rang, and Sage’s beautiful face appeared on my screen.

“Hey, sexy mama.”

“Hey, dimples. How’s it going?”

“We’re having a great time.”

“Good. What time are you guys headed back, so I can have dinner ready for us? I’m making your favorite.”

I looked down at my watch. “Wow, time must have gotten away from me. I didn’t realize it was almost eight.”

“Time flies when you’re having fun, handsome.”

“They wanted to ride one more ride, and then we’ll take off.”

“Awesome. Can I talk to one of them? I miss them so much.”

I didn’t want her to know I wasn’t with them. “Do you miss me?”

“Hmmm…” she playfully teased. “Maybe.”

“Maybe you could show me how much you missed me later tonight.”

“I think I could arrange that. The twins will be exhausted and will wipe out fast.”

“Yeah, me too.”

She laughed. “Welcome to parenthood.”

“So I’m a responsible adult now?”

“I never said you weren’t, Ashton.”

Not according to Haiden.

Hearing the honesty in Sage’s voice had an uncertainty wash over me. All of a sudden, my face paled, and suspicion assaulted my mind.

Was he lying?

Playing me again?

Why weren't they back from the bathroom yet?

"Sweetness, the twins are finishing this fishing game. I'll have them call you back."

"Do not bring a goldfish home. I brought one home last year, and it died in two days in. Haven found him, fins up in the morning, and I had to tell her that he was sleeping and fell into a coma."

"Got it. No goldfish. We'll call you back in a few." With that, I hung up and booked it toward the ladies' room.

Waiting another couple of minutes, I paced back and forth in front of the door on the edge of my seat. Woman after woman exited the restroom, and I couldn't take it anymore.

"Ma'am," I greeted one of them. "Are there two twins in there? A little boy and girl, they have blond hair and about this tall."

She shook her head. "I don't think so."

Fuck me.

He wouldn't...

I thought Haven liked me?

Not wavering, I pushed open the door. "Haven, Haiden!"

No answer.

"Haven, Haiden!" I shouted louder, panic quickly overriding every single one of my senses. "Guys! Are you in here?!"

Still, not one word.

"Come on. This isn't funny! I'm not laughing! Where are you?!"

Since the bathroom was empty, I ran in and checked each stall, and they were nowhere to be found.

"Fuck!"

I didn't know what to do, so I called my mom.

"Hey, hon—"

"I can't find the twins!"

"What do you mean you can't find them?"

"I brought them to the carnival alone, remember? They went to the bathroom, and they're not in here!"

"Okay, calm down."

"Mom, I can't calm down! I don't know if they're playing me for a fool, or they were kidnapped!"

“Find security or a worker, and tell them you can’t find them. They’ll lock the gates. Go! I’m leaving now.”

I didn’t have to be told twice. I hung up and sprinted toward the first employee I saw. “My twins! I can’t find my twins!”

Her eyes widened.

“Did you hear me? I can’t find my twins! They were in the bathroom. I saw them go into the bathroom! I took my eyes off of them for two seconds to pay... Oh my God! I really am an irresponsible adult. How could I turn my back on them?!”

My heart was in my throat.

I couldn’t breathe.

I couldn’t fucking breathe.

What if they had been taken?

CHAPTER 25

—Ashton—

“Sir, please relax. This happens all the time, and we always find the kids. Come on.”

I followed her to the gates where we told the cops what had happened, showing them a picture of Haiden and Haven on my phone. In an instant, the fair was shut down. No one could leave or come in, although that security measure didn't grant me peace.

Where were they?

“Are you their father?” one of the cops asked.

“No.”

“Does their mother—”

“Fuck, I need to call her.” I shook my head. “I'm sorry, I'm just ... fucked.”

“I understand.” He gripped onto my shoulder. “It's best that we get the mother here. She can answer more questions if this becomes a missing kids —”

“If? You think they're missing? Do you think they were kidnapped? Taken?”

“Sir, I don't know, but I can tell you we're going to do everything we can to find them.”

I couldn't believe this was happening.

How could this be happening?

I reached for my phone in my pocket.

How do I tell Sage I lost her children?

I hit the call button, knowing there was no coming back from this.

It would break us.

I would break us.

“Ashton—”

“I'm so fucking sorry, Sage.”

“What's going on?”

Feeling like the biggest piece of shit known to man, I said the words that were every mother's worst nightmare, “I can't find Haiden and Haven.”

“You what?!”

“I swear I didn’t—”

“I’m on my way!” She hung up, and I instantly felt worse.

I sat on the bench waiting for her.

Waiting for the police to tell me something.

Waiting for Haiden and Haven to show up.

Once Sage arrived, she shot out of her car as if she was a bullet. In three long strides, she was standing in front of me. Her face was red and blotchy because she’d been crying.

Profusely.

Making me feel much, much worse if that was even possible.

“Did they find them?” she practically bellowed. “Did they find my babies?”

“I’m so fucking sorry.”

“Ashton! How could you lose them?! I told you! They need to be watched at all times! How could you let this happen?! I knew this was a bad idea! I just knew it!”

“Sage, Haiden took Haven to the bathroom—”

“You let him take her to the bathroom? Alone?”

“He said you let him when you’re at the grocery store.”

“Bullshit! I never let them out of my sight! Why are you lying? My boy would never tell you that!”

“Sweetness, I’m not lying. That’s what he told me.”

“Don’t call me sweetness!”

“Sage, I’m sorry, but that’s what he told me.”

“My kids are gone, Ashton! You lost my babies!”

“Sage, I’m—”

“Save your apologies! They mean nothing to me! Go find my kids!”

“Baby, if I knew where they were, don’t you think I’d be there right now?”

“Ma’am.”

She snapped around, facing the officer.

“We found them. They were by the Ferris Wheel.”

“The Ferris Wheel?” I retorted. “How did they get there? That’s on the other end of where we were at.”

“Mama!” Haiden hollered, running into her arms with Haven right behind him.

“Babies!” She immediately fell to her knees, and they wrapped their arms around her neck.

“We were so scared, Mom. I’ve never been so scared.” Haiden’s voice trembled.

“Guys, I’m so sorry. Why didn’t you meet me where we agreed?”

From the moment that Haiden lifted his eyes to meet mine, I knew the truth.

He. Played. Me.

It wasn’t until he opened his mouth that I comprehended what he was trying to pull.

Haiden cunningly grinned, narrowing his gaze, and I swear it was like staring into the eyes of a boy who’d just checkmated me.

“Ashton, what are you talking about? We didn’t agree to meet anywhere. You lost us, and we were so scared. Right, Haven?”

Her head was bowed, and she wouldn’t raise her eyes to me.

Was she ashamed? Regretful?

I honestly thought she liked me.

What a fucking fool I was...

Now it all made sense—they were both in on it. She was the diversion he needed to pull all of his stunts, pretending the entire time that she wanted me around.

In her life.

Her mother’s.

One big happy family.

For fuck sake, I’m an idiot.

“It’s okay, baby.” She hugged them tighter. “Mom is here, and I won’t let anything happen to you.”

“Ashton, why did you disappear on us? We looked for you everywhere.”

The little brat even cried a tear. It was an Academy Award performance, and I couldn’t hold back any longer.

Needing to get it all out, I spit the truth, “Sage, he’s lying. I never left them.”

“No, Mom! He did! He did! Why are you lying, Ashton?”

“Haiden, why don’t you tell your mother everything you’ve done to me in the last three months?”

He glared at me. “I haven’t done anything but try to get to know you. I thought you liked us. I knew it! I knew you just wanted my mom all to

yourself, and you're trying to get rid of me! Is that why you left us, Ashton? Because you wanted us to get taken?"

"Oh, come on... Sage, you know me better than that. He's lying! He's done nothing but treat me like shit. Tell her, Haiden! Tell your mother the truth about what you've been putting me through! Including today! I didn't lose you. You purposely planned all this. Starting with last night when you told me that Sage told Aspyn..." I growled, being extremely frustrated.

How much more can this kid put me through? What more can I do to make him like me? Accept me?

I wasn't trying to be his dad.

All I wanted was to be his friend.

"I bet you knew where I was all along. Were you watching me from afar? Huh? Did you enjoy the show? Did you?"

"Ashton!" Sage abruptly stood. "That's enough." Placing her kids behind her, she roared, "I can't believe you'd lie this much to cover your own ass! What kind of man are you?"

"Tell me, Sage ... have I ever lied to you? Do I ever say things I don't mean? I hate liars! You know that! I told you in St. Thomas!"

"How do I know you weren't lying there too?"

I pointed to myself. "I'm the liar? You're the one who didn't even tell me you're a mother!"

"You know why I didn't tell you! Don't you dare throw that in my face?!"

"I'm just stating facts, sweetheart. The only one who is lying to you right now is your demon spawn!"

I regretted the words as soon as they flew out of my mouth, but there was nothing I could do now. I'd said them, and there was no taking it back.

She loudly gasped. "You know what?!"

"No, what, blind mama?"

"I was right! You're not fit to be a parent! I never should have continued things with you!"

I jerked back—it felt like she'd kneed my balls. Haiden was beaming, getting exactly what he wanted.

Haven still hadn't lifted her face, and I resisted the urge to hug and comfort her. It was obvious Haiden had made her do this.

Maybe a little part of her did like me? Or maybe that's just wishful thinking, and I'm as blind as their mother when it came to them...

“That’s a low blow, pissed off mama. I have been nothing but understanding with you since the first time we met! And I’m talking about eight years ago!”

Haiden peered up at her. “You knew him eight years ago?”

“Yeah, I saved her from your fat—” I caught myself. “Never mind. It doesn’t matter. Haiden, I’m begging you. Please... Please tell your mom the truth. The pranks. Today. I didn’t lose you. You set me up.”

“Ashton, enough! Leave my boy out of this and your irresponsibility. I can’t believe you’re shameless enough to drag him into this.”

“He’s only doing this to break us up. How can you not see that?”

“My son is not a liar! He’s never lied to me before! How could you do this to me? I trusted you.”

“Yeah,” Haiden agreed. “I trusted you too, Ashton.”

This was the last straw, and I snapped. Focusing my eyes strictly on their mother, I spewed, “I’ve been putting up with everything he’s done to me because I fucking love you!”

Sage stumbled back from the impact of my words, blown away by what I’d revealed. It was the first time I’d shared it with her, and I’d been wanting to since I didn’t know how long. I thought a huge part of me had fallen in love with her when I was sixteen and she was all pretty and awkward.

If I was going to lose her anyway, I might as well go down in a blaze of glory.

“Yeah, I love you, Sage. I’m so in love with you that I can’t see straight. And despite the fact that your kid gives Dennis the Menace a run for his money, I’m willing to overlook it, if it means I get to stay in your life. And in theirs. No relationship is perfect. We’ll work on it. I’ll do whatever I can, whatever you want, need... Jesus, do you hear me? I’ll do anything to keep you.”

Tears were streaming down her face, and Haven’s. Haiden’s wall was so thick, so big, there was no way of ever jumping over it.

“How am I supposed to trust you? I can’t...”

It all came to a head.

Our battle.

His war.

I lost.

Surrendered.

Breaking my heart when she uttered the four words I had been dreading since day one, "I can't do this."

Ending our relationship with the first woman I ever loved.

CHAPTER 26

—Ashton—

“Bro,” Leo stated, sitting next to me at the bar. “I’m sorry. Women fucking suck. You can’t live with them, and you can’t live without their pussy.”

I breathed out a chuckle. “Says the man who’s whipped on his fiancé.”

Leo and Mila got engaged three months ago. I was actually there, barging into their bedroom after he’d proposed to her to tell him about Sage and the twins. I’d flown back to Tennessee the night before from St. Thomas, and he was the only one of the boys who didn’t know I was dating someone.

He was busy with Mila and managing his old man’s construction company as a project manager, and I wanted to catch him up on my life.

Chugging down my fifth Jack of the night, I slammed it down on the counter. It was only Leo and me. Sawyer was at the hospital being their bitch for the night.

“You’re drinking too much.”

“Nah.” I gestured for another. “Not nearly enough. I just got dumped because Haiden the Hellion decided that I wasn’t good enough for their mom. I literally lost to two seven-year olds. Can you give me a fucking break?”

“Sage may come around. Maybe the kid will come clean.”

“Have you not heard a word I’ve said? He fucking hates me, Leo.”

The bartender set my drink in front of me.

“You know what? Bring me the whole damn bottle.”

“Ashton, do you really think getting hammered at a bar is going to make you feel better? It’s not going to change anything.”

“I guess we’ll see after I drink the bottle.”

“Man, I never thought I’d see the day when you’re crying over a woman.”

“Man, I never thought I’d see the day when you’re being an asshole.”

“Dude, don’t fucking come for me because I’m not telling you what you want to hear.” He nodded toward the drink in my hand as I chugged that one down as well. “I’m not rubbing your back when you’re throwing up your liver.”

“That’s a myth. You can’t throw up a liver.”

“No shit—it’s a figure of speech.”

My bartender was on point, bringing the bottle fast. I smiled pleased, and she winked at me before she turned to her next customer.

“Bro, she’s interested in licking your wounds. Why don’t you take her up on her offer? Getting your dick wet is the best remedy for just about anything.”

I glared at him. “You’re the worst friend ever.”

“I’m trying to help you.”

“I don’t want random pussy, Leo. I want Sage.”

“I know, but right now she doesn’t want you.”

“Dude! You’re fucking fired, man. No more talking. Just sit there and pretend to care about what I’m going through.”

“I do care. Of course I care. I’ve never seen you like this, not even when your dog died.”

“I miss that bitch.”

“Sage is—”

“She’s not the bitch, dipshit. I’m referring to my dog.”

He shrugged. “You can understand my confusion.”

I averted my eyes off of Leo, mostly because I wanted to knock him upside the head.

What the fuck kind of sympathy is that?

Out of the corner of my eyes, I saw someone at the bar who caught all of my attention. The motherfucker was sitting on a stool, hitting on the bartender, and I abruptly stood.

Driven on pure impulse and anger for the last three hours, I let the fury ride out. It seemed like the best idea at the time—take out all my frustrations on Sage’s babies daddy instead of my body.

“Where are you going?”

“To take out the fucking trash.”

“What—”

Without giving it a second thought, I made my way to the other end of the bar, coming face to face with the man I hadn’t seen in years. The last time was at a party, and his face was buried in a pair of tits.

Was Sage pregnant when I last saw him?

The son of a bitch looked the same, and I wanted nothing more than to knock him out again.

I wasn't surprised he was hitting on the bartender, but that didn't stop the rage I felt knowing he'd dipped out on Sage and their kids. I decided it was time for someone to put this piece of shit in his place.

Me.

Maybe it would make me feel better?

Leaning in, loud enough for him to hear, I spoke to the chick whose tits were now in my face. "I'd stay clear of this one. He's not much of a man, sweetheart. He abandoned his own twins."

"Who the fu—"

I stood tall, facing him. Counting on him getting pissed, I provoked him. Knowing it would push his fucking buttons. Men like him didn't change. They wanted to feel big and almighty, and I couldn't wait to knock him down a few pegs.

With his truths and my fists.

Part of me knew he was still salty about that night; what guy wouldn't be when I embarrassed him in front of everyone, and I was about to do it again.

I grinned. "Those are fighting words, Memphis. Tread fucking lightly. You remember what happened the last time you ran your mouth? I made you eat your words."

He snidely chuckled, recognizing me. "Doesn't change the fact I had Sage first, and she has my kids to fucking prove it."

I was in his face, yanking him up off the chair by the collar of his shirt.

"Truth hurts," he baited. "Don't it, motherfucker?"

Leo rushed to my side. "Dude, what the hell are you doing?"

He wasn't there that night. Leo didn't know Memphis from a hole in the wall.

"Allow me to introduce you to the twins' deadbeat dad."

"I'm not a deadbeat. My check clears every month."

"You mean Mommy and Daddy's money?"

He shook his head, scoffing out, "No one asked you! I don't know what you think you're doing, but you need to back the fuck off! I heard she was with someone, and I'm guessing it's you?"

"You'd be right." I shoved him away. "And let me tell you, Memphis, knocking her up doesn't change the fact that she's always been mine."

"How's my dick taste, asshole?! Seeing as you have my sloppy seconds."

"Ashton, no—"

I punched him.

My fist was in his face before Leo got his last word out. Memphis's face whooshed back, stumbling to find his footing, and I didn't stop.

"That's for knocking my girl up!"

Left hook to his eye.

"That's for abandoning your twins. You're the reason Haiden can't trust me! You're the reason he won't let me in!"

Right hook to his other eye.

He fell to the ground, weakly trying to get back up.

"I'm calling the cops!" the bartender threatened, but I didn't give a shit. I kicked him in the stomach instead.

"That's for being a shitty ass fucking father to two little humans who deserve to have a real one!"

Another kick to his chest.

"That's for all the times you cheated on Sage when she's the best thing you ever had!"

"Enough..." he pleaded, coughing up blood.

In one swift motion, I yanked him up to me before punching him in the face again.

"And that's for sending Sage to the emergency room with your sorry ass fucking excuse of a cock!" Holding him up, my seething glare was close to his. I hit him with the last truth I wanted him to know.

"You're so fucking lucky I'm feeling generous, or else I'd put you on your deathbed. And you know what's even better than beating your ass right now? That you're just a sorry piece of shit who gets to live with the fact he left one of the best women I've ever known. One who is hot and sexy while still being the best damn mom in the world. You'll never get to see how sweet Haven is, how adorable and funny with half the shit that comes out of her mouth. She's brave, witty, going to do big things one day. You're never going to see how smart Haiden is, how clever and strong. How he protects and looks out for Sage like it's his fucking job!"

Memphis grimaced; he didn't try to hide it.

"Despite the fact you abandoned him, he already knows what it takes to be a real man. He's loyal, genuine, and loves his mother and sister with everything he has. Everything that Haiden and Haven are is because they have the love of that woman. They don't even miss you. They don't even need you. You mean nothing to them. Do you hear me? Fucking nothing!"

“Ashton! The cops are on their way.” Leo grabbed my arm. “Let’s go!”

I slowly nodded, saying the last thing I needed to express, “You’re nothing more than a sperm donor who couldn’t get her off.”

With that, I let him go, and he dropped to the ground like a rock.

“Now...” I kicked him one last time because why the fuck not. “We can go.”

CHAPTER 27

—Sage—

I tried to put on a brave face for my babies, but my efforts were pitiful. They could always read me like a book, and they absolutely hated seeing me sad, especially Haiden.

“Sage, you can’t eat another tub of ice cream.” Aspyn tried to take it out of my hands, and I growled at her.

“You’ve eaten three tubs in the last twenty-four hours.”

“I don’t know what you want me to do or say. I’m devastated. I love him too, and I can’t believe he lied to me like that.”

She bowed her head, kicking around her feet.

“What?”

“Nothing...”

“Don’t nothing me. Why do you look like you’re biting your tongue?”

She took a deep breath, raising her eyes. “Okay, hear me out before you go all mama bear on me. Promise?”

I nodded. “I promise.”

“So ... what if Ashton wasn’t lying?”

“What do you mean *if* he wasn’t lying? Of course he was lying.”

“But what if he wasn’t...”

“Are you saying what I think you’re saying?”

“Maybe...”

“Aspyn!”

“What? It’s not that farfetched, Sage. You know how Haiden is. He’s so territorial about you and Haven. He always has been. We’ve been telling him he’s the man of the house since he was in diapers. I could see him putting Ashton through the wringer. This is the first man he’s ever met. Your *boyfriend*. I mean, come on—he watches reruns of Dennis the Menace all the time. It’s his favorite show and the movie. Plus, Brady shows him how to pull pranks and stuff. The shoe fits, babe.”

“I can’t believe you’re saying this. Haiden is a good boy.”

“I know he’s a good boy. He’s a great boy. He’s just protecting you, and he doesn’t want to share you. He’s never had to. I could see him doing what Ashton said, okay? I’m sorry.”

“You think he set him up too? He faked Ashton losing them?”

“It would be easy to pull off...”

“Oh my God. I can’t believe you think Haiden is lying! You’re his godmother!”

“I’m not blind, Sage. Even when we were in St. Thomas, he was blowing up your phone. I bet he knew about Ashton before he even heard him on the phone.”

“How?”

“We talk about him all the time. Maybe he was eavesdropping. How many times have you caught him listening to grown-up conversations when he was supposed to be sleeping? Kids are perceptive; you know that better than anyone.”

“Wow...” I shook my head, dumbfounded. “Now I don’t know what to think.”

“I’m sorry. I love Haiden; you know that. This isn’t easy for me to say to you. He’s just a kid, though, and he’s doing what he feels is best. It doesn’t matter how many times you’ve told him that no one is going to take you away from him. He’s making sure no one does.”

I wanted to believe my son, but what if Aspyn was right?

“I think you should hear Ashton out some more. At least give him a chance to give you more details, and then draw your conclusion from there.”

“I can do better than that.” I stood, throwing the carton into the garbage in my kitchen. “Follow me.”

Haiden was outside playing soccer with Brady, and this was the perfect time to find the one person I knew would tell me the truth.

“Haven,” I announced, walking into her bedroom with Aspyn behind me.

“Hey, Mama.” She smiled, looking up from playing with her dolls.

I sat on her bed and patted next to me. Once she was sitting beside me, I grabbed her hands and placed them in my lap. Aspyn was sitting on her reading nook.

“What’s wrong, Mama?”

See ... she could read me like a book.

“Baby, I need you to be honest with me. Can you do that?”

I swear she already knew what I was going to ask. Her face paled, tightening her grasp in my hands.

“Haven, look at me.”

She shook her head.

“Why won’t you look at me?”

“Because I’ve been bad.”

“What do you mean you’ve been bad?”

She shrugged, and I grabbed her chin, making her eyes connect with mine. Her gaze was rimmed with fresh tears.

“What’s going on?”

“Mama, please don’t hate me.”

“Baby, I could never hate you.”

“Please don’t hate Haiden.”

“I could never hate either of you. Why would you think that?”

“Because what we did to Ashton.”

I sighed, instantly feeling horrible I didn’t believe him. “So it’s true? What Ashton said at the fair?”

She nodded again, and I wiped away one of her tears.

“I’m so sorry, Mama. Please don’t be mad at me. I didn’t know what Haiden wanted to do at the fair, and he made me. He said Ashton was going to tell you the truth about all the pranks, and I got scared. I didn’t know what to do, so I did what he wanted.”

“And the pranks? You were in on those too?”

“Yeah.” She bowed her head. “I didn’t do them, Haiden did, but I kept you guys busy, so he could.”

I was beyond disappointed with them. “When did it start?”

“The day we met him at his house. It’s why I didn’t have my bathing suit in my unicorn backpack. Haiden needed it to put more boobytraps in both our bags.”

“What did you do to him?”

She flinched. “We put the bleach you use on your hair in his shampoo.”

I gasped. “Is that why Haiden asked me if Ashton had ever had blond hair?”

Ashton’s response quickly arose in my mind as if he was saying it to me right then. “*Not by choice.*”

“Your brother used me to taunt him. What else did you do?”

“That night?”

“Oh my God! There was more aside from the bleach?”

“Yeah ... he put itching powder in his boxers.”

“Where did you get itching powder?”

“Uncle Brady’s house. Haiden says he uses it for his feet sometimes. When they go numb from all the soccer he plays.”

I couldn’t believe what she was disclosing.

How could I have been so blind to not know that my twins were torturing him? And why didn't Ashton tell me.? It's not like you would have believed him if he did...

“I want to know everything you did to him, young lady.”

She told me about all the pranks, from the batteries, to the gum, to the peeing on his carpet, and the slingshot to his dick that was on purpose. We couldn’t have sex for a week after that one.

“I’m really sorry, Mama. Are we in trouble?”

“What do you think?”

She grimaced.

“Why did you guys do that to him? I thought you liked him?”

“I do, Mama! I swear I do!”

“Then how could you go along with it?”

“I don’t know. I didn’t want Haiden to be mad at me if I didn’t.”

Haiden had this authority over Haven, and she always did what he wanted, ever since they were toddlers. Hence, why we ended up in the ER more times than I cared to remember.

“Haiden likes Ashton too. He just doesn’t want to say it out loud. He feels really bad about the fair. He told me so.”

“Honey, do you understand how wrong that was? To lie about something so serious?”

“Yes. I’m so sorry. Please forgive me.”

“I’m not the one who has to forgive you, baby.”

“Mama—”

The doorbell rang, cutting her off.

“I’ll get it,” Aspyn stated, walking out of the bedroom.

“We’re not done here, Haven. I want you to stay in your room for the rest of the day. No watching TV, and you get no dessert for dinner.”

“Okay.” She bowed her head again.

“Haven, I love you very much, and I’m extremely disappointed in both of you, but that doesn’t change my love for you. For either of you.”

“Are you going to get back together with Ashton? Because I really like him, Mama. A lot.”

Breathing deeply, I replied, “You have a funny way of showing it.”

“You want to know why I really, really like him?”

“Yes.”

“Because he makes you happy.”

I smiled. “You’re still grounded, Haven.”

“I know. You want to know what else?”

“What?”

“He makes me happy too.”

Wiping away all her tears, I kissed her nose. “Let’s see if we can get your brother on the same page.”

“We can. I know he likes Ashton; he just doesn’t want to lose you. I told him that we wouldn’t, and I think in the last couple of weeks he started to believe me.”

“He was still torturing him.”

“Yeah, but Haiden likes to be a bully. He is with me, and I know he still loves me.”

I narrowed my eyes at her. “You’re too smart for your own good.”

“Hey, Sage,” Aspyn interrupted, standing by the door. “There’s something you need to see.”

“What’s going on?”

“Someone is here to see you.”

“Who?”

I never expected who she divulged, “Leo.”

I jerked back, confused.

“He’s waiting in the living room.”

Kissing Haven on the nose one more time, I made my way downstairs to Ashton’s best friend.

What was he doing here?

Question after question tore through my mind at rapid speed when I locked eyes with him.

“Hey,” he greeted.

“Hi, how did you know where I live?”

“Ashton doesn’t know I’m here. I found it on his phone while he was in the shower last night, washing away the blood from his fists.”

My ass fell on the couch from the shock of that statement. “I’m sorry, what? Did he get into a fight?”

“I don’t think you can consider what he did as fighting, more like kicking someone’s ass.”

I arched an eyebrow. “And you came here to tell me this why?”

“I was debating on texting you this, but I figured it would be best if I came here and showed you myself.”

In four strides, he was handing me his phone as I heard Memphis’s voice on the speaker, “*No one asked you! I don’t know what you think you’re doing, but you need to back the fuck off! I heard she was with someone, and I’m guessing it’s you?*”

“*You’d be right.*”

With wide eyes, I watched Ashton shove Memphis on the screen of Leo’s iPhone.

“*And let me tell you, Memphis, knocking her up doesn’t change the fact that she’s always been mine.*”

My heart exploded. I couldn’t believe what I was seeing, hearing.

“*That’s for knocking my girl up!*”

He right hooked him.

“*That’s for abandoning your twins. You’re the reason Haiden can’t trust me! You’re the reason he won’t let me in!*”

I didn’t know what was worse—seeing Ashton kick Memphis’s ass, or hearing what he was spewing at him.

“*That’s for being a shitty ass fucking father to two little humans who deserve to have a real one!*”

Another kick to his chest.

“*That’s for all the times you cheated on Sage when she’s the best thing you ever had!*”

I wasn’t surprised that Memphis cheated on me. He always had a wandering eye. But it wasn’t until Ashton yanked him up off the ground that my heart truly melted.

“*You’ll never get to see how sweet Haven is, how adorable and funny with half the shit that comes out of her mouth. She’s brave, witty, going to do big things one day. You’re never going to see how smart Haiden is, how clever and strong. How he protects and looks out for Sage like it’s his fucking job!*”

What truly blew my mind was the way he was talking about Haiden and Haven. Even with everything they’d put him through—the pranks, the setting him up—

he was still defending and speaking up for them.

Almost as if he were their father.

“Despite the fact you abandoned him, he already knows what it takes to be a real man. He’s loyal, genuine, and loves his mother and sister with everything he has. Everything that Haiden and Haven are is because they have the love of that woman. They don’t even miss you. They don’t even need you. You mean nothing to them. Do you understand me? Fucking nothing!”

The video ended, and it was only then that I realized I was crying. Ashton defended my honor and my twins.

How could I have been so stupid to break up with him?

Aspyn sat next to me and pulled me into a tight hug.

“I have never, ever, seen Ashton be with anyone more than a couple of dates.”

My eyes locked with Leo’s as he continued on with what he came here to say.

“He is absolutely head over heels in love with you, Sage. He kept trying with Haiden. I can’t tell you how many times he told me that. How many times he’d call me, trying to ask for advice on what to do with him. It didn’t matter how many times we told him to tell you. He wouldn’t do it. He wanted to earn Haiden’s respect on his own, not because you made him. No matter what he put him through, he wasn’t going to tell you. He was determined to win him over on his own. Not with your help or authority over Haiden.”

Resting my chin on Aspyn’s shoulder, I listened intently to everything Leo was sharing. However, it was the last thing he said to me that really drove me over the edge.

“He’s not only in love with you, Sage. I know, especially after watching him last night, that he loves your twins too.”

“Mom.” Haiden walked into the living room with Brady behind him, and I quickly wiped away my tears.

I didn’t want him to see me cry.

“Yeah.”

“I’m leaving with Uncle Brady for soccer practice.”

“We need to talk when you get back.”

Haiden’s perceptive stare lingered on my face. He could tell I was upset. When he turned to leave, he snapped back around and threw his arms around my neck.

Whispering, “I’m so sorry, Mama.”

My arms went around him too, rubbing his back.

Was he eavesdropping? Did he hear me and Haven? Leo? The video?

I opened my mouth to ask him, but I didn't have to because he followed it up with...

“I'll make it better. I'll make it right. I promise. I'll fix this, Mom.”

CHAPTER 28

—Ashton—

There was a knock on my door.

“Leo! I told you I want to be alone! Can you just let me wallow in my own self-pity for a day?”

The knocking turned into pounding.

“Jesus, man! You’re worse than my mother!”

Reluctantly, I got off the couch to answer the door, never in a million years expecting who was on the other side.

“Haiden?” I jerked back, watching him standing there in what appeared to be his soccer uniform. “How did you—”

“I remembered where you lived. We’ve been here enough.” He waved to Brady who was sitting in his car before he took off.

I’d met him briefly a few times at Sage’s house.

“I told Uncle Brady I’d call him if I needed him to pick me up, but I’m hoping he won’t need to.”

“Why is that?”

“I’m hoping that you’ll come home with me and make up with my mom.”

I cocked my head to the side. “Am I hallucinating? Is this really happening right now, or am I dreaming this?”

He smiled. “Can I come in?”

“Do I have to pat you down?”

He raised his arms up in the air in a surrendering gesture. “Truce?”

“I’ve heard that before. It was actually two days ago, so forgive me if I believe you’re up to no good.”

“I’m here for my mom. And Haven. And... me. Can I please come in?”

I’m such a fucking sucker.

I opened the door wider, and the little hellion walked right in. He didn’t waver—this kid was here on a mission, and I almost fell on my ass when he started to open up to me. I didn’t know if it was a trick, but I gave him the benefit of the doubt.

I shut the door as Haiden professed, “My mom is my best friend. She’s always been my best friend. She’s not like a normal mom, you know? She’s

fun, and funny, and always rubs my back when I can't fall asleep. When I'm sick, she lets me sleep in her bed. She always knows what to say or do when I'm sad, when I'm scared. She never makes me feel like a baby. She's the best mom in the whole wide world."

"I know. You're lucky to have her."

"I knew about you after your first date."

Now that I wasn't expecting him to relay.

"I heard Aspyn, Uncle Brady, and Grammy talking about you in the kitchen. They thought I was still sleeping, but I wasn't. I was listening in the hallway. I've never heard my mom talk about anyone the way she was talking about you. I hated it. I hated you. I didn't want you to take my mom away from me, and I was scared you were going to."

I didn't know what to say, so I just listened.

"When she said she was going on a work trip, I knew she was lying. She'd never lied to me before, and it really hurt my feelings. I thought... I guess I thought she was forgetting all about me. All about Haven too. I didn't want to lose my mom, so I made sure to call and text her as much as I could. It made me feel like you were taking her away from me because we weren't there with you. You didn't know about us, and I didn't understand why she didn't tell you."

"Haiden, your mother wanted to make sure I was the right fit for your family. It had nothing to do with her not wanting you there. She wanted to make sure I was still going to stick around after she told me about the two of you."

"Yeah ... because of what Memphis did to her. He didn't want us, and I thought you didn't either."

"That was never the case."

"I didn't understand that until today. Until I heard what you did to Memphis."

My eyebrows lowered. "What do you—"

"Your friend Leo came by. It's why I'm here. My mom doesn't know. She thinks I'm at soccer practice with Uncle Brady. The doorbell rang, and I went to go answer it while Uncle Brady was on the phone with someone from his job. Aspyn opened the door first, and I hid in the hallway, wanting to know why he was there. I thought ... he was going to rat me out like you did at the fair."

“Haiden, you’d left me no choice. What was I supposed to do? I’ve been trying so hard to get you to like me for the last three months. I never intended on telling your mom about your antics. I knew if I did, she would only make you like me, and it would only make you hate me more. That’s if she actually believed me. You can do no wrong in her eyes. You’re her baby boy. Trust me, I get it. I’m my mom’s baby boy too.” I paused for a few seconds to allow my words to sink in.

“We have that in common. We actually have a lot in common. If you’d given me half the chance, you would have been able to see it.”

“Can I still see it, Ashton?”

“Well, your mom thinks I’m a liar, Haiden. I’m not sure—”

“She said we had to talk when I got home, so I think she knows the truth. Haven must have told her. She was really upset that I made her pretend you lost us at the fair.”

“What do you mean? She wasn’t in on your evil plan?”

“No. I made her do it.”

“I see.” Now that made sense. “What about the pranks?”

“She knew about those, but I made her do them too. She really does like you a lot. She always tried to get me not to prank you, but I didn’t listen. I’m sorry.”

Now the apology, I wasn’t expecting.

“You’re not playing me, right?”

He shook his head. “No. Not after what you did for my mom, for us. You know, with Memphis.”

“How did you—”

“Your friend recorded it on his phone. Did you...” His eyes went to the floor, shuffling his feet. “What you said to him ... did you mean it? About me being strong and a real man?”

“Haiden, look at me.”

He did.

“If I hadn’t been the one you were torturing, I would have patted you on the back for a job well done. You’re brave and strong, and I can’t tell you how much I respect how you protect and love your mom. You’re the man of the house, I get it. If my mom started dating some random guy, I probably would have done the same thing. I told you, we’re more alike than you think.”

“Did you mean what you said? You know, about loving my mom?”

“I’ve never meant anything more in my life.”

His eyes rimmed with tears. “And what about us? Do you love Haven and me too?”

Talk about a kick in the balls. I was a man, we didn’t cry, but holy fuck did I want to.

“Your mom is a package deal, Haiden. If I love her, that means I love you too.”

His bottom lip trembled as fresh tears slid down the sides of his face.

“Do you want to ... be with her ... like ... forever?”

“I think I’ve loved your mom since I was sixteen years old. I’ve never stopped thinking about her. I made this pact with my boys when I was that age. Cain’s parents were getting a divorce, and Leo had the bright idea to make a pact to stay single and never fall in love. Later that night, we went to a party, and it was the first time I’d met your mom.”

His eyes perked up, surprised by what I was sharing.

“She was beautiful and awkward and adorable. It was her sweet sixteen, but your dad got in the way of that, and I never saw her again until seven months ago. I’m going to be honest with you, man to man. I didn’t want your mom to fall for me. I didn’t want to fall for her either. But I quickly realized I didn’t have a choice. She was everything I wanted and didn’t know I could have.”

“Like your soul mate? Grammy says Grampy is her soulmate.”

“Yeah, bud. I think your mom was made for me. And you want to know what else?”

“What?”

“I think you guys were made for me too.”

He beamed, wiping away his tears.

“I’m not trying to be your dad. I just want to be your friend.”

“I want to be your friend too. So will you come home with me? To fix things with my mom?”

“I’d love nothing more than to go home with you and fix things with your mom, Haiden.”

“Okay.” He extended out his hand. “Truce then? For real this time.”

I smiled. Relieved was an understatement as I shook his hand. “Let’s start over. I’m Ashton.”

He grinned. “I’m Haiden.”

At the last second, I tugged him toward me, and he came effortlessly. Wrapping my arms around his body, I hugged him, and he hugged me back.

“I’m really sorry, Ashton. For everything. I hope you can forgive me.”

“You’re a good son, Haiden. And consider yourself forgiven. Just don’t ever slingshot me in the balls again, alright?”

He laughed. “Your nuts are safe. Unless you hurt my mom.”

“Duly noted. And I won’t hurt your mom.”

He peered up at me with the biggest, sincerest gaze I’d ever seen on him.

Breathing out, “I know.”

—Sage—

I was cooking dinner when I heard the front door slam shut.

“Haiden! Do not leave your soccer gear by the door or in your bedroom! The last time you did I couldn’t get the stink out of your room for a week! Put it in the laundry room!”

“Okay, Mom!”

“We need to talk! Bring your butt in here when you’re done!”

“What about my butt?”

My heart dropped hearing Ashton’s voice.

I snapped around, locking eyes with the last person I expected to see. My gaze went from him to Haiden, who was standing right beside him as if they were suddenly best friends.

“What’s going on?”

“Mom, I lied to you, and I’m really sorry.”

I set the dishrag on the counter. “I know. Your sister told me.”

“I’m sorry, Haiden,” she apologized, sitting at the kitchen island.

“No, Haven, I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have made you do all those things to Ashton. I know you only did them so I wouldn’t be mad at you. I’m sorry I got you in trouble.”

“It’s okay. You’re just a dumb brother.”

He nodded. “I am dumb. Ashton loves you, Mom. I knew that before the fair. He looks at you the way Grampy looks at Grammy. I’m sorry I lied about him losing us. He didn’t. I just wanted you to break up with him.”

My gaze shifted to Ashton as he pulled Haiden into his side.

“Look, forgiving mama, I made a new friend.”

“I see that. How did you meet this new friend?”

“He showed up at my door like a lost puppy, and I’m returning him home now.”

“Did Brady take you to Ashton’s?”

“Yeah, but I asked him to after I heard what Leo—”

“Oh my God. You heard Leo? Haiden, how many times have I told you about eavesdropping on adult conversations?”

“But, Mom...”

“Don’t but mom me, mister. How much did you hear?”

“All of it.”

“Haiden Christopher McCoy!”

“It’s fine, Mom. Ashton whooped Memphis’s butt.” He high fived him.

“Ashton did what?” Haven exclaimed, sitting up on her feet to lean on the island.

“Yeah, Haven. He told him that he’s a piece of sh—”

“Haiden, don’t you dare!”

“What? It’s what Ashton said! He told him that you’re going to do big things one day.”

“Really?” She scratched her head. “I’ve always wanted to do big things like cross the street by myself.”

I laughed, I couldn’t help it.

“Yeah, and he told him that Mom’s the best thing that ever happened to him.”

“Facts.” She nodded, looking at Ashton all adorable and sweet. “I’m really sorry about what we did to you, but Haiden is my twin brother, and I didn’t want him to get mad at me.”

“He told me, baby girl.”

“So you’re not mad at me then? Because I’ll give you a big hug. Mama always forgives me when I give her big hugs and say I’m sorry.”

He squatted to the ground, opening his arms. “I’ll take the big hug anyway.”

She giggled, jumping down from the seat. On her little legs, she ran over to him, and he instantly swung her around in his arms.

“Ashton!”

“What? Too slow? Should I go faster?”

He did, and she laughed from deep within her belly. Watching Ashton with my kids always did things to my ovaries.

I was swooning.

Hard.

Once he set her down on the floor, she threw her arms around his legs. “I love you, Ashton.”

I froze.

He froze.

Did Haven really just say that?

He put his hand on her back, looking down at her with a tender expression I’d never seen on him before. Smiling from ear to ear, she peered up at him, and I got teary eyed.

“I love you too.”

“Mama! Did you hear? Ashton loves me too! Now he loves both of us. Maybe one day you can love Haiden too. When he isn’t a fart face booger to you anymore.”

I chuckled, wiping away a tear.

“Wanna know a secret? Even if he is a fart face booger, I still love him too.”

I was surprised when Haiden hugged his legs like Haven was. There stood three of the most important people in my world.

How did I get so lucky to score such a perfect man who accepts me for everything I am?

“How about you, Mama?” Haven questioned, glancing at me. “Do you love Ashton too?”

Through the slits of his eyes, he gazed at me with an irresistible grin.

“Yeah, little mama, do you love me too?”

This wasn’t how I imagined I’d tell him for the first time I was in love with him.

Deeply.

Wholeheartedly.

Head over heels in love with him.

With my heart on my sleeve, I walked over to them. Haiden and Haven were still wrapped around his legs, but since they were two small humans, I had his whole top half.

His hand caressed my cheek, and I didn’t think I’d ever feel it against my skin again.

“Are you going to leave me hanging?”

“Well, you know ... I need to keep you on your toes.”

“I think these two have that covered for you.” Gripping onto the nook of my neck, he pulled me toward him to whisper in my ear, “Or do I still need to convince you with my many talents?”

“I could use lots convincing.”

“Don’t tease me, playful mama.”

Kissing his lips, I professed, “I love you too.”

“Yay!” Haven exclaimed. “We all love each other now! Like one big happy family!”

I’d met Ashton on my sixteenth birthday. That night when I blew out my candles on the cake with my family and best friend around me, I wished for true love. My wish came true later that night at a party I didn’t even want to go to.

Ashton Hayes.

My one and only.

The twins wrapped their arms around my legs as well. We all stood there in the kitchen, hugging each other.

For the first time in my life,
I knew what it felt like to be loved. Not just superficially, but truly loved for all of me.

My flaws.

My quirks.

My kids.

My everything.

And nothing had felt so good.

CHAPTER 29

—Ashton—

“Come in,” Sage’s dad announced after I knocked on the door to his office.

Sage was at some yoga class with Mila, learning downward dog or some shit. I waited until I knew she wouldn’t be around. Tomorrow was our anniversary, and I wasn’t talking about the year we’d been together.

It was her birthday, and I wanted to make it one she wouldn’t forget.

This was my first stop.

Then the twins.

I opened the door and walked inside, taking a seat in one of the chairs in front of his desk.

“Hey, Ashton. Why the unexpected visit? Did you come to ask me something?” He grinned in that fatherly way, fully aware of why I was there.

“As a matter of fact, I am here to ask you something very important.”

He smiled, leaning back into his leather chair. “I know what question you’re wanting to ask me.”

“Figured you would.”

“I have never seen my little girl as happy as she’s been with you this last year. The same with Haiden and Haven. I know you guys started off rough, but now they’ve taken quite a liking to you.”

“As I have them,” I simply stated, looking him in the eyes, so he knew I spoke the truth.

“I know.”

“I didn’t think I’d ever be in this situation, let alone this relationship with a single mom. However, I can’t imagine my life without any of them in it, and I want to keep it that way.”

He nodded. “I understand.”

“I know we’ve only been together for a little over a year, but it doesn’t feel that, sir. I’m here to get your blessing to make Sage my wife.”

When I told the guys I was going to propose to Sage, they basically shit themselves. Her old man, on the other hand, couldn’t appear more pleased than he was in this moment.

“And the twins?”

“What do you mean?”

“What do you plan to do with them?”

“I would love to eventually adopt them as my own, but I’ll start with claiming your daughter first.”

He laughed.

“I don’t want to force myself to be their father, but I’d love nothing more than to eventually have them carry my last name too.”

“Haiden and Haven Hayes, huh?”

“I know. I told her she never gave them a chance.”

We laughed.

“I told her that when she told us she wanted to name them that.”

“Great minds think alike.”

“Great men think alike.”

“Thank you for that.”

“Ashton, my daughter and grandkids would be extremely lucky to have you as a husband and father. You definitely have my blessing.”

“Thank you, sir. I won’t disappoint you.”

“I know.”

We shook hands, and I left his office. I told Sage to enjoy her class, and I’d pick up the twins from their friend’s house. I wanted to ask their permission and include them in on my proposal. We could all come up with something together.

It was a little after four when they jumped into my truck.

“Ashton,” Haven addressed, wearing a unicorn dress and headband. “I didn’t know you were going to pick us up.”

“I wanted to surprise you.”

“I love surprises.”

“How was your playdate?”

“It was super fun. Ashley has a crush on Haiden,” she teased.

He was sitting in the front seat. “What can I say? I got lots of girls wanting me.”

This kid.

I began driving. “It’s a blessing and a curse to be irresistible like us.”

We fist bumped.

In the last six months, Haiden and I had truly turned a corner in our relationship. He was my buddy, following me around like a fucking shadow.

We talked about everything, and Sage said I was his new hero. It wasn't that hard of a role to fill. They both made it so easy. Sage often got jealous because they wanted to be with me more than they did her.

I was like a new shiny toy, and sometimes the twins fought for my attention.

I had been crashing at Sage's house a lot. They stayed at my house as well. I'd turned one of the guest bedrooms into their room. Adding bunk beds and a bunch of their toys so they would always feel at home. At first, I'd sleep on the couch until the kids fell asleep, and then I'd sneak into Sage's room or mine if we were at my place.

Until one morning, Sage had forgot to set her alarm, and we woke up to two little humans staring at us. Thank fuck we weren't naked; she was just sleeping in my arms.

Haven asked if I was sick since I was sleeping in the same bed with Sage because it was what she did when they got sick. Sage didn't lie. She explained to them that we were in a serious relationship and sometimes adults sleep in the same bed.

In my head, I was thinking we wouldn't have to worry about me sneaking in or out anymore. I didn't think we would get two more bed companions. We'd fall asleep together watching movies and eating popcorn. Sometimes Haven would sneak in the middle of the night, saying there were monsters under her bed. She'd plop right in between us, and I'd wake up with a swift kick to the face.

How the fuck did kids sleep like contortionists?

I'd be lying if I said I wasn't nervous to ask them about marrying their mom, but the time had come, and I needed to grow some balls.

I made them a snack, and while they were eating at the kitchen island, I pulled the black ring box out of my pocket.

Setting it down in front of them, Haven narrowed her eyes at it.

"Did you get us a gift?"

"No... That's for your mom."

Haven wiped her mouth with the back of her hand and reached for it, opening the velvet box.

She gasped.

A three-carat princess cut diamond ring with a platinum band sparkled against the afternoon sun.

"Oh my goodness! It's beautiful."

“Ashton,” Haiden spoke, bringing my attention to him. “Is that a gift for my mom’s birthday tomorrow?”

“Something like that.”

“Oh ... Mama is going to love it. It’s so sparkly. Can I try it on please?”

“Sure, why not. Want to see what finger I want her to put it on?”

She eagerly nodded, still not picking up on what I was trying to convey. Sliding the diamond down her ring finger, I smiled when she cocked her adorable little head.

“But, Ashton, I thought this finger is for when you get married? That’s what mama says.”

I grinned, and she smiled wide.

“Haiden! Ashton wants to marry Mama! He wants to marry us! That means we will be a family forever, ever, and ever!”

I chuckled, “She still has to say yes.”

“Can I be the flower girl? I want my dress to be bright pink!”

“A bright pink dress for the flower girl it is.”

Haiden still hadn’t said a word, and I was beginning to worry. His face didn’t hold any expression either.

Shit.

“What do you think about that, bud?”

“What does that mean? You wouldn’t go home?”

“My home would be where you are.”

“So you would live here?”

“We haven’t discussed that yet, but here or my house or we could buy another house.”

His eyes went from the ring to me. “Does that mean we’ll call you dad?”

I chose my words carefully. “You can call me whatever you want, Haiden.”

“Do you not want me to call you dad?”

Haiden’s gaze shifted from him to me, then back to him again. “Yeah! I want to call you dad! Daddy O, Pops, Dowadidity daddy.”

I laughed, my nervousness at ease and subsiding. “What about you, Haiden?”

“If you marry my mom does that mean we’re your kids too?”

“You’d be my stepkids unless I adopted you.”

“Oh...” He thought about it for a second. “Do you want to adopt us and be our real dad?”

I smiled. “Man to man, I’d love to be your real dad.”

He bit his lip, and Haven bumped into his shoulder with hers.

Haiden shrugged. “I guess that would be cool.”

“You mean that?”

“Yeah, it would be really cool to have another man in the house.”

“You know, us men, we need to stick together.”

He nodded. “When are you going to ask her?”

“Tomorrow on her birthday.”

“Yesssss! Can we help?!” Haven put her hands together in a prayer gesture. “Please, Ashton! Please! I’ll be a good girl.”

“You’re always a good girl, and I’d love for you to help me.”

“Yay! Haiden will help too! We will all ask Mama together!”

“Okay, now the fun part.”

“What’s that?” she asked.

I set my elbows on the kitchen island, wiggling my eyebrows. “We come up with a plan.”

—Sage—

I rolled over and found myself alone. “Ashton,” I called out, sitting up as I wiped the sleep from my eyes.

There was a note on his pillow in Ashton’s handwriting that read: Roses are red, violets are blue, happy birthday, sleeping mama, your men and baby girl are downstairs waiting for you.

I smirked, throwing the covers off my body to go brush my teeth. Once I was done with my morning routine, I went downstairs. From the first step I took, I could smell the bacon in the air.

As soon as I walked into the kitchen, my mouth dropped open. There was a whole spread of food on the table.

Eggs.

Bacon.

Waffles.

Pancakes.

You name it, and it was there.

“Mama,” Haven declared. “We have something to ask you.”

My stare shifted toward her voice on the other end of the kitchen, and within one second, I lost my breath and all the air from my lungs.

Haiden was standing beside her. They were both holding signs they'd obviously made.

Haven's said: Will.

Haiden's said: You.

Ashton was on one knee, and his sign said; Marry me?

"Oh my God," I rasped, shocked by the turn in events.

He included my kids on his proposal! I started to cry. There was no holding back the tears that were suddenly flowing out of my eyes and down the sides of my face.

"Of course! Of course, I'll marry you!"

"Yay!" the twins celebrated, jumping up and down.

In two long strides, Ashton was standing in front of me with the shiniest diamond I'd ever seen. I jumped into his arms, and he picked me up off the ground.

"I've loved you from the moment I laid my eyes on you."

"Dimples, I love you too."

We kissed like the twins weren't in the room with us. Pecking my lips softly, he uttered the most swoon-worthy words I had ever heard...

"I want you to be my baby mama."

EPILOGUE

—Sage—

“I had a bad day.”

“Don't worry, baby mama, I'll throw you the dick.”

“Oh, really?”

“You look like you need a good dicking. Let me take you for a ride.”

“I could go for a ride.”

“In my car or on my dick?” He stuck out his tongue.

“What are you doing?”

“Showing you what you'll be riding later.”

“Ashton!”

He played coy. “What?”

Several things had changed in the last year. We had gotten married, Ashton adopted the twins, and we all carried his last name.

Oh, and the biggest change. I was pregnant.

With twins.

“I'm going to get so fat.”

He grabbed my ass. “More for me to love on.”

“How can we be having twins?”

“You can thank your bloodline for that.”

“It's supposed to skip a generation. I don't understand.”

“My sperm had other plans.”

“Your sperm doesn't determine twins, Ashton.”

“Why can't you just let a man dream?”

I giggled, throwing my arms around his neck. We'd just found out about the twins yesterday. Haven was ecstatic—she wanted sisters, not another dumb brother. Her words, not mine. Haiden wanted brothers—not another sissy sister. Again, his words, not mine.

The boys laughed their asses off for at least twenty minutes straight when Ashton told them over the phone. We were actually on our way to meet them for dinner. Cain was in town. He said he had something to tell us.

“I feel like I just started sleeping again, and one baby would have been a breeze.”

“You have me this time around. I’ll help with everything I can, but I don’t have tits, babe. You’re on your own with the breastfeeding.”

“I didn’t breastfeed with Haiden and Haven. I didn’t make enough milk to fill them.”

He placed his face in between my breasts; my lace shirt made it easy to kiss my cleavage. “Is that why they’re so fucking perfect?”

“They’re about to get huge.”

“I can’t wait.”

“Ashton, I’m going to get huge.”

“I can’t wait.”

“You’re not going to be saying that when I don’t have ankles.”

“Ankles are overrated anyway.”

He kissed my lips, beckoning me to open them for him. When I finally did, he groaned into my mouth, and I smiled against his.

We loved each other just too damn much.

Feeling him.

Needing him.

Loving him.

He consumed me.

My family.

“We’d better go before you get carried away.”

“I already knocked you up with twins, sweetness. I think we’re long past that now.”

“You’re insatiable. How does a pregnant woman turn you on so much?”

“You have my babies growing inside of you. It’s the caveman in me who wants to fuck you silly.”

“We’re going to be late if you don’t get your hands off my ass, dimples.”

“I see those motherfuckers all the time.”

“Not Cain. Why is he here again?”

“Not a clue. Maybe he knocked Lively up too?”

“No way!”

“A man can dream, right?”

“Leo and Mila are pregnant.”

“I know. Our kids are going to be the new playboy pact.”

“Ashton! Don’t you dare wish for that.”

“I’m kidding.” He mischievously grinned, speaking the truth, “But look how well it turned out for us.”

—Ashton—

The only woman I've ever loved.

How did I get so damn lucky?

The thought of my babies growing inside of her was doing all sorts of things to my cock.

Our relationship had been a whirlwind from the start, and I wouldn't have wanted it any other way.

It was perfect.

She was perfect.

We arrived at the restaurant fifteen minutes late because I went down on Sage, eating her as an appetizer. The twins were with my parents, and we had to get it in when we could.

Do you have any idea how big of cock blockers they are?

I laughed at the thought.

Grabbing Sage's hand, we walked into the restaurant and found everyone in the back.

"Finally," Sawyer stressed, shaking his head. "What took you so long? I'm starving."

"I was too."

Sage slapped my arm, giving me the look that made me want to fuck her in the bathroom.

"Where's Cain?"

"He's taking a piss," Leo answered. "He'll be right out."

"Mila, how are you feeling?" Sage asked.

"Today wasn't so bad. How are you feeling?"

"Grumpy."

"I hear you. These pregnancy hormones have me all out of whack."

"Lala." Leo grabbed her hand. "What was your excuse before?"

"Hahaha."

It was nice having all of us together like this. I couldn't remember the last time we were.

"Where's Aspyn?" I questioned Sawyer.

"Who the fuck knows."

They were still hooking up with no strings attached, but I couldn't keep up with them any more than I could with Cain and Lively.

Speaking of the devil, Cain walked back to the table.

Nodding to him. “Where’s Lively?”

“Yeah, good question,” Sawyer stated. “Where’s your girl?”

Taking a long look at all of us, he rubbed the back of his neck. It was one of those moments when you knew what he was going to say next was drastic.

I just never expected him to announce...

“She left me.”

The End.

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She lives in Brandon Fl with the love of her life, her lobster, and husband Bossman. They have one Golden Retriever mix, a gordito Wheaten Terrier and a user Tabby cat. She is extremely close to her family, and when she isn’t living the cave life writing her epic love stories, she is spending money shopping or living boat life. Anywhere and everywhere. She loves reading and spending time with her family and friends whenever she can.

She truly appreciates her readers being on this writing journey with her. She thanks God every day that this is her life of telling stories to make people feel and disappear to another world.

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