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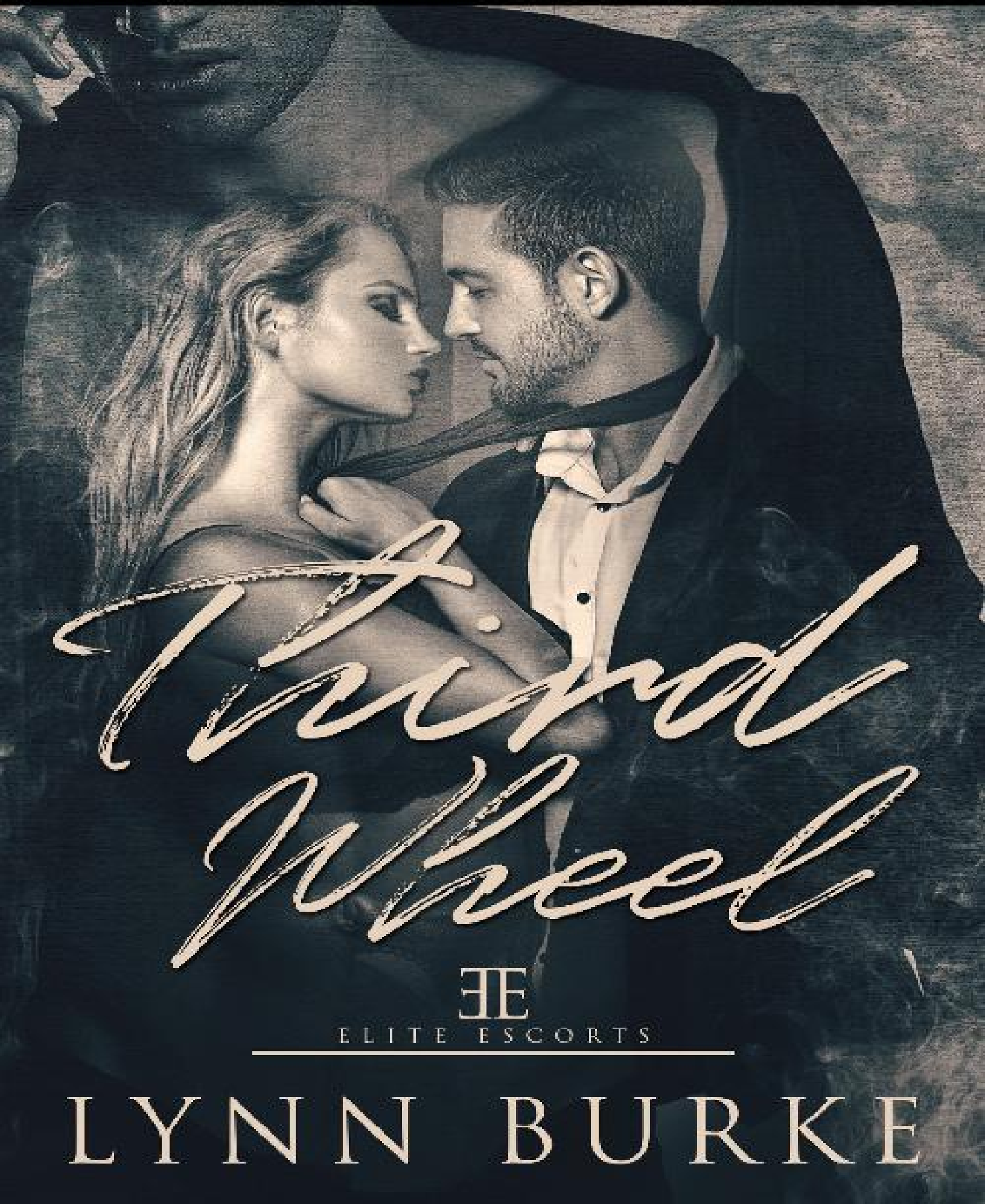

Trust Me

ELITE ESCORTS

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DEDICATION

For my fellow EP authors who inspire and encourage me to no end. Love you all!

THIRD WHEEL

Elite Escorts, 1

Lynn Burke

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Chapter One
Reid

Same as before, Mrs. Kimball answered the door, a sheer nightgown falling mid-thigh offering me an eyeful of large, dark nipples and the trimmed patch of hair between her thighs.

"Reid." She breathed my name and stepped back, the slight lines around her eyes crinkling with her smile.

"Mrs. Kimball," I said, stepping past her. I'd been in that particular hotel suite before—every first Friday of the previous four months since signing on with Elite Escorts.

I sold myself for sex. Or, rather, Elite paid me to satisfy the customers whose requests fit my profile: Tall, dark, and handsome … and a professional third wheel. Easy, enjoyable money, every time.

I followed Mrs. Kimball into the sunken sitting area where her husband lounged, butt naked on the white leather couch, a tumbler of scotch in hand. A good twenty or so years older than me, Mr. Kimball kept himself in good shape. Tanned, still ripped, a full head of hair, and in no need of little blue pills. The old man always gave me a run for the money with his wife moaning between us, but while he had stamina, I bounced back ten times faster. Youth, he explained. He often enjoyed watching the second time around, a similar finger or two of scotch in hand.

"Mr. Sullivan," he said, gesturing to the chair across from him. "Tina has been panting for you all week."

“Is that a fact?” I quirked a brow at his wife while sitting. Cheeks flushed and nipples poking out in greeting, she lowered her head, hands clasped in front of her.

“Mmm.” Mr. Kimball swallowed some of his liquor. “That’s a fact.”

I loosened my tie before settling back into the leather seat. “On your knees, Buttercup.” Mrs. Kimball hardly resembled a little yellow flower, but that’s the pet name I’d been supplied with. Her dark hair and eyes and maiden name of Romano betrayed her heritage.

I rested my forearms on the chair’s armrests while she sank to her knees between my thighs and unbuckled my belt. Before she even reached her slender hand into my slacks, my cock thickened, swelling to attention.

God, could the woman give a blowjob like no other. Her warm, wet mouth closed around me, and I let out a groan.

“Talented little whore, isn’t she?” Mr. Kimball asked with a chuckle.

My agreement came out as a grunt as Buttercup’s teeth scraped along me with the perfect amount of pressure.

A voyeur like few I’d met, Mr. Kimball got off on watching his wife submit to another man. He’d never raised a hand to her, no matter how much she’d begged—or so they’d told me—and that was when their marriage counselor suggested an unusual form of therapy.

I’d been given their file, and upon seeing the forty-something Italian beauty, I’d said “hell yes” to a night of debauchery with her and her willing husband. The three of us had eased right into a comfortable involvement that they booked me for the next six months.

Mrs. Kimball’s dark hair tumbled down around her shoulders, and I tangled a hand in the strands, taking control before I blew my load. She reached inside my slacks and grabbed hold of my balls, rolling and squeezing in time with the bob of her head and wet mouth.

“So good, Buttercup. Your mouth feels fucking amazing.”

She hummed her pleasure over my praise, and my balls drew up, straining my cock deep in her throat. Within thirty seconds, I yanked her up by her hair, and her mouth came off me with a pop. Lips parted, they glistened with saliva and pre-cum. Even though I’d jerked off two hours before to ensure I’d hold out as long as Mr. Kimball, his wife’s talented mouth took me to the edge faster than any woman I’d ever met.

“Your husband looks a little lonely.” I forced her head around toward him. “Go suck his cock.”

Like a good little sub, she crawled across the plush rug between us men, her nightgown rising above her round ass. Wetness coated her pussy and upper thighs.

I tugged my tie off and started on my shirt's buttons while Mrs. Kimball's head nestled between her husband's thighs. He swigged his scotch, face impassive, seeming unmoved as he watched her.

"You can do better than that, Buttercup," I said, standing to shove down my slacks. One yank freed my belt, and I dropped the pants to the floor, folding the leather strip in half. "Hollow those cheeks and suck him hard. Lube him up good."

Mr. Kimball's gaze rose to me as I drew near, arm lifting. I let loose, the crack of leather on skin causing both Kimballs to jump.

A shudder rippled down the missus's body, and she moaned around her husband's cock.

"Like that do you?" I asked, my cock jerking as she groaned her agreement. Two more quick swats and her ass reddened like a cherry.

A sheen of sweat rose on Mr. Kimball's brow and he clenched his jaw. He sat still like a fucking pro, though, as his wife worked him over.

"Enough," I said.

An explosion of breath left Mr. Kimball as his wife backed off, rocking onto her heels.

"Take off the nightie," I said, gaze on Mr. Kimball as his wife stood and slipped free of the silk covering her lush curves. He stared at her like a man possessed, longing and something beyond mere lust in his eyes. A flame of jealousy licked at my chest. I wanted what they had—commitment, honesty, and passion.

I'd never been lucky in love, though.

"Face me, but straddle him," I said, moving toward the couple. "Sit on his cock. Take him balls deep."

Gaze on my jutting hard-on, Buttercup started to sit, lower lip between her teeth. Mr. Kimball grabbed hold of her flared hips and slammed her down onto him. Both of their groans ricocheted through me, and I palmed my cock, rubbing my thumb over the bead of pre-cum at its tip.

I stepped closer and held out my thumb. Buttercup licked it clean.

"More," she whispered as her husband moved her up and down, her full tits bouncing with each thrust.

Shaking my head, I narrowed my eyes. “You don’t deserve more.” She pouted, but I ignored her pleading look. “Mr. Kimball told me you’ve been a naughty girl this week.”

Her mouth opened but snapped shut as I ran my belt along her cheek and down her neck to her breasts. Eyes closing, she moaned over the wet sucking noises of their fucking.

I flicked the leather against one bare breast then the other, and she jerked back against her husband’s chest.

Perfect.

Dropping the belt, I kneeled, eyeing her protruding clit. “No coming until I say so.”

Mr. Kimball’s thrusts slowed, and I leaned forward, latching my mouth onto his wife’s clit. I sucked, nibbled, and licked her senseless. She thrashed, and Mr. Kimball released his hold on her hips, arms wrapping around her to still her movements.

The slow gyrations of his hips and my lips and tongue had her panting and whimpering. “I’m going to come.” She gasped, but I pulled back and swatted her clit. “P-please.” Her heated, glazed eyes met mine. “Please, Sir.”

I stood. “On the floor, Mr. Kimball. Buttercup is going to ride you like it’s her last day on earth.”

They both complied, Mr. Kimball stretching out on the plush rug, abs tight, soaked cock pulsing. His wife impaled herself without hesitation, her deep groan tightening my balls. I grabbed the lube and condom Mr. Kimball had set out per my instructions in an earlier text.

Gaze on Mrs. Kimball’s sweet, jiggly ass, I sheathed myself and kneeled behind her. A little reach around action and a pinch of my fingers, and she whimpered another, “please.”

“Has she earned her reward yet, Mr. Kimball?” I asked, squirting lube onto my hand and slicking my cock.

“Yes.” He ground out the word, and I pushed Buttercup forward to lay over his chest.

I’d learned the first time with the Kimballs that the wife preferred a brutal fucking rather than slow and easy, so I grabbed her hips to still her jerky movements against her husband’s cock and slammed into her tight ass until my balls brushed against Mr. Kimball’s.

She cried out and tried to move, but I held her in a vise grip and leaned forward to whisper in her ear. “Your pleasure belongs to us, Buttercup.”

I nodded at her husband, and on his thrust, I backed off, leaving only my mushroom tip within her tight ring. I plunged back in, Mr. Kimball retreating in perfect harmony with my movement. We fucked her hard and fast, heavy breaths, groans, and the wet slapping of skin filling my ears.

Mr. Kimball’s jaw clenched, sweat dripped down his temples. His wife gasped with each exhale as I slammed into her tight ass. I slapped both cheeks to take my mind off my seized-up balls begging to explode. One more slap and I reached my limit.

“You have my permission to come, Buttercup.” The words rasped from my throat and Mrs. Kimball’s guttural scream brought a satisfied smirk to my lips—and a massive explosion of cum into the condom.

****

Showered and redressed, I crept down the hallway past the open bedroom door to let myself out. Mr. and Mrs. Kimball lay entwined beneath a thin sheet, her head on his chest, lips parted as soft snores emitted between them. At Mr. Kimball’s mouthed “thank you,” I dipped my head. He sighed and closed his eyes, his arms wrapping around his wife, a smile relaxing his face.

A few minutes later, my truck roared to life beneath me. I pulled out of the parking garage and into Boston’s downtown, discontent washing over me as rain splattered the windshield.

For four months, I’d been having a shit load of sex in every way and every place imaginable. I’d lost count after the sixth week of how many orifices my cock had become well acquainted with. Living every man’s dream, I should have been riding the top of the world.

Fucking empty. The thought pinged between my ears with each rain drop.

Seeing the Kimballs lying together in satiated contentment, sharing a bond I’d never experienced, twisted my stomach like a knife stab. I heaved a breath as the darkness of the Sumner Tunnel surrounded me, cutting off the pounding rain.

Jealousy, pure and simple. I craved what my favorite clients had. An open, honest relationship, but I’d never been any good at them with a single

woman. A countless heap of failed relationships littered my past, broken promises of picket fences and rainbow-colored roses for a lifetime.

"Face it, Sullivan," I mumbled to myself as rain once more slapped at my windshield, "you weren't made for that kind of life."

Chapter Two
Jessica

Praying the transferred call was for a sale, I put on my headset and smiled while clicking on the insurance quote shortcut on my work computer. “This is Jessica Lindy. How can I help you today?”

“Sorry to bother you at work, Jessica—”

I heaved a breath, my eyelids closing.

“—but Skye is running a high fever, and someone needs to come pick her up.”

Worry overshadowed my disappointment. “I’ll be there as soon as I can.” I disconnected the call and pulled off my headset. “This is when having a family close by would be a huge help,” I mumbled to myself, spinning around in my chair.

Christine, Gemberling Insurance’s future owner and my immediate boss, sat in the large cubicle behind mine against the building’s back wall where she could oversee the agents—myself included. Her father, the business owner, had offered her one of the glass-enclosed offices to my right, but Christine liked to keep an eye on her ‘flock’ as she called us. I knew the truth about my friend, though. She loved being in the thick of the action.

I caught her attention over the counter hiding her desk from view and waited for her call to end.

“What’s up, Jessica?” she asked, after disconnecting.

“Skye is running a fever again.”

“Damnit.” She tossed down her pen. “You don’t have any sick or personal days left.”

“I know.” I bit the inside of my lip.

“Since my dad hasn’t retired yet, I’m not officially the boss and can’t help you out.”

My heart sank at the prospect of a cut, much-needed paycheck, but at least Christine wouldn’t fire me. “I understand.”

She glanced up at the clock over the front door. “It’s close enough to your lunch break. I’ll make sure you get a half day’s pay.”

Tears stung my eyelids. “Thanks.”

Compassion softened her green-eyed gaze. “Go get your little bossy-boo and give her some cuddles. Hopefully, she’s feeling better by Monday so you won’t have to miss any more work.”

Still choked up, I nodded and spun back around in my chair to shut down my computer and gather my things.

The cold spring day in Massachusetts had required a heavy coat when the office had opened at eight, but I draped it over my arm when stepping out into the bright sunshine. My twelve-year-old Camry hesitated, spitting and sputtering before coming to life. Heaving a huge breath, I shifted and left my saving grace behind.

Stomach in knots, I pulled onto the highway and headed north on Route 1, mind on the medicine cabinet in my apartment. I had a little children’s Tylenol, but not much. The drug store came into view ahead, and I decided I’d better stop just in case Skye ended up being sick for a few days.

Two minutes later, generic grape Tylenol and a granola bar for my lunch in hand, I headed toward the cash register. The local newspaper caught my eye, and I stumbled.

Attempted Prison Break.

I shifted my gaze to the pictures of the two convicts, their black and white mugs taking up most of the front page. Heart thudding in my chest, I grabbed one.

Attempted prison break … Devon Martin … foiled by fellow inmate…

“Thank God.” The ragged whisper ripped from my throat. I crumpled the paper in my hand and let out an unsteady breath while putting my items on the counter. My fingers shook as I handed over payment, my mind a buzz of flitting thoughts, my emotions tumbling over the other.

My ex had been found guilty of bank robbery two and a half years earlier and had spent the time since then behind bars—thanks to me.

We’d been together for five, rocky years, the early ones of which I’d spent trying to help him grow out of his spoiled, controlling nature. Unfortunately, he turned to drugs to ease his woes, and like a blind idiot, I stayed in the hopes of healing the only man who had ever claimed to love me.

Broke and needing a fix, he’d robbed a bank and would have gotten away with it if I hadn’t recognized his face on the fuzzy security picture the news showed a day later. By that time, I’d felt enough of his barbed words

and the occasional fists that I decided turning him in would be for his own good.

Three days after he was thrown into prison, I'd found out I was pregnant and decided to write him with the news. He'd scrawled a reply—a few half-ineligible words about my being a whore and that he wasn't the father. The final line about getting back at me for what I'd done to him had choked the air from my lungs, prompting me to uproot and go into hiding.

Once inside the privacy of my car again, I allowed my tears to fall. Skye had become my reason for living. My toddler mini-me filled my life with joy even if I had ended up like I said I never would … just like my mom. Single and trying to raise a kid on my own. Throw in a jaded heart, and I reminded myself of her too much for comfort.

Barely scraping by on a small paycheck, and having to cut my hours short…

Pull up your big girl panties.

I swiped the tears from my cheeks, gritted my teeth, and started the car. Feeling-sorry-for-myself time was over. I needed to focus on the important things in life.

****

Skye ran a raging fever over the weekend and ended up so exhausted that I had to take two more days off work without pay. I'd planned on doing my budget and bills the following Saturday, but when Christine handed me my check right before my lunch break on Friday, I peeked to find it wasn't anywhere near enough to cover what needed to be paid. Playing catch up always sucked ass.

Skye and I will be eating box mac and cheese all next week, I thought while stuffing my check in my purse and heading to the tiny lunchroom down the back hall.

I wanted Skye to have a better life than me, have opportunities my mother couldn't afford to provide. Bad enough, my daughter didn't have a father—and I wasn't interested in finding her one, either.

Sitting down at the square table, peanut butter and apricot jelly on wheat in hand, I blew out a breath between my lips. Men. Dating.

What a joke. I tore a bite off my sandwich and stared at the water cooler. I'd tried a dating site once but gave up after a week. It seemed every guy on there was only out for a hookup—certainly not a ready-made family.

I hadn't broken the cycle, but Skye would. Even if I had to eat ramen noodles for the rest of my life.

"Hey."

I turned and tried to muster a smile for Christine. "Hey."

Her gaze landed on my sandwich and she grimaced.

I shrugged. "It's my fav."

"Nasty stuff right there." She grabbed a container out of the fridge and sat beside me. She popped the lid.

I wrinkled my nose. "Bunny food."

Her eyes twinkled. "It's my fav."

Thank God I'd inherited my mother's fast metabolism and I didn't have to battle the ten pounds that Christine always complained about lingering on her hips since college.

"Another letter came in the mail this morning."

Coldness seeped over me. "Devon?"

She nodded and speared some greens. "I opened it and read enough to know it came from him before filing it away with the others. You didn't want to read it, did you?"

I shook my head and tried to swallow the sandwich that had turned to dust in my mouth. Devon had somehow learned where I worked and sent a letter to my attention once a month like clockwork. Occasionally, a call transferred to me, the dead silence on the other end letting me know it was him.

"No," I managed to whisper. "Same threats?"

"To hurt you as you hurt him," Christine murmured. "Good thing he's behind bars."

I nodded, unable to make a squeak out of fear for my daughter.

"I'm hanging onto it. Just in case."

I made a noise of agreement while choking down my sandwich.

Christine heaved a heavy sigh as if to clear the air and shoved a forkful of salad into her mouth. "So. Any plans tonight?" she asked around a mouth of dressing-free greens.

I swigged my water for much-needed moisture and cleared my throat, happy to move on. "Disney Jr. and homemade popcorn."

"No hot date?"

I cast a sideways glare her way. "Yeah. Right."

She peered at me for a few long seconds while chewing.

“What?” I finally asked while shoving my empty sandwich baggie into my purse for a rinse out at home and second use.

“You need to get laid.”

“Yeah. I’m starting to forget what a penis looks like.”

“You’ll get a front and center reminder tomorrow night. I bought you an evening with one of the Elite Escorts.”

My gaze jerked to her face. Green eyes serious as hell, lips slightly turned up… “The whats?”

“A male escort. A sex slave whose job is to satisfy your every whim and take care of that un-tickled itch you’ve had going on since Skye came along.”

Heat flooded my face as the words flew from her lips. “Absolutely not. No. Way.”

“Yes, way. The limo will pick you up tomorrow night at seven.”

“No.”

Christine stuffed more bunny food in her mouth. “Yes,” she said around the greens.

“I don’t have a sitter.”

She smiled brightly while chewing and swallowing. “Yes, you do. I’ll bring an overnight bag and crash on the couch since you won’t be home until morning.”

“No,” I said again, my voice firm. “I’m not going out with some … some … man whore.”

She laughed. “It’s not a date, Jessica. It’s simply a chance to get laid. No strings attached.”

“I could have done that with any of those guys from that dating site you talked me into.”

“Maybe.” Her eyes narrowed although the smirk remained on her lips. “But, you deserve so much more. A night on the town being wined and dined by a man who’s sure to know his way around a woman’s body. I even picked out the perfect fantasy man.”

My blood slowed. “You didn’t.”

“Oh, I did.” The damn glint appeared in her eyes again. “A tall pretty guy with a hard body cut enough to slice through any woman’s inhibitions.”

“No.”

“I already paid. You’re going.” In went another pile of spinach and lettuce as if to say “I’m done with this conversation.”

Although a butterfly danced low in my belly, I slumped in my chair. If only I had the nerve to tell Christine I'd rather have the cash she blew on my date. The bills piling on my desk at home needed to be paid a hell of a lot more than I needed to get laid.

Chapter Three
Reid

He's late. Again. I pulled onto the job site, and shaking my head, parked beside the lumber that had been delivered the day before. I cut the engine and sipped my coffee from Dunks, gaze on the road and watching for Blake and his silver F350.

I'd been working for my best friend's company, Harper's Construction, since we graduated from high school. Blake had gotten his bachelor's in business while I'd toiled away for his father, sweating in the summer and freezing my balls off in the winter. I loved building, though. Lifting walls up, rafters, and the smell of sawdust … nothing like building something with my own two hands and seeing progress from my hard work every day.

My cell dinged from an incoming text, and I put my coffee in the cup holder.

Elite: New client booked for tonight. File attached.

Client? Brow furrowing over the singular, I punched in my password to access the private file Elite's secretary had sent. Another text came through before I got to read the file.

Elite: Not your usual, but Jarod had to cancel, and you're the only other one available who fits the request for tall dark and handsome. Please respond ASAP.

Sometimes specific requests accompanied reservations with Elite, and while Jarod and I could have passed for brothers with our dark hair and eyes, he always got the single ladies. We'd teamed up a couple of times when a woman wanted to fulfill her threesome fantasy—and paid good money to ensure we left her satisfied and smiling.

I flicked back to the file. A professional photo came up of a pretty, half-smiling blonde with light-brown eyes. Closer study showed those eyes shuttered off as though keeping anyone and everything at arm's length.

She's been hurt, I thought while skimming down through the request put through to Elite. The client name was listed as Jessica, but the requestor was a name I recognized from years earlier. Christine Gemberling,

valedictorian of our high school class, the girl who slept her way through the football team but couldn't be bothered with us baseball players.

While I didn't usually do one-on-ones for Elite, I swiped back up to the pic. Jessica … the name rolled around in my brain as I searched her face for a hint of recognition.

Nothing.

Someone banged on my truck window, causing me to jerk my head up.

"'Sup, Harper?" I asked, putting the window down.

"Where's mine?" My best friend and boss asked with a grin, pointing with his chin toward the large Dunks in my cup holder.

"You make me come into work on a Saturday and expect me to repay you by buying? The hell's wrong with you?"

"I didn't have time to stop."

"I don't want to know why—"

"Wren jumped into the shower with me, and I lost track of time."

"Sure you did." I pocketed my cell, grabbed my coffee, and pushed open the truck door wide enough Blake had to step back.

"Didn't get laid last night?" he asked, shoving his hands in his pockets, a lady-killing smile showing off his perfect teeth.

"'Course I did." Blake turned toward the foundation we'd poured the week before, and I followed a step behind, my mind going back to the hurt blonde. "Gunna get some tonight, too."

He grinned over his shoulder. "Third wheel job treating you good, huh?"

"Well enough I don't need this job for much longer. Swinging a fucking hammer all day is starting to wear my ass out."

"If pussy takes my top foreman from me, I'll kick your ass from here to Foxborough."

"Ha." I sipped my coffee and grinned. "I'd like to see you try."

Blake pulled up short and turned, focusing his gaze on my face. He may have had some height on me, but I outweighed his ass by a good thirty pounds of pure muscle. "You seriously thinking about leaving me?"

"Fuck, no." I punched his biceps.

"Fucker."

I grinned and lifted my cup. "That's what they pay me for."

Shaking his head, Blake started off again.

“Don’t tell me you’re missing your freedom,” I said, thinking of the woman who’d snagged him heart and balls the summer before.

“Shit, no. Wren is all the woman I’ll ever need for the rest of my life.”

A twinge of jealousy twisted my gut as it usually did when Blake mentioned his girlfriend. We’d shared more than a handful of women in his free days, but the times had changed. Wren asked if I could join them once or twice a month, and Blake didn’t mind, but our oat-sowing fun had long passed.

While I pondered futile dreams I’d one day find a woman I could give my undivided attention to, I sure as shit wouldn’t ever let another man touch her. Best friend or no.

****

My old classmate had gone all out in her desire to see her friend Jessica spoiled rotten. Elite gave me the limo for the night, a suite at the Kimball’s favorite hotel downtown, and the go-ahead to enjoy their five-star French restaurant and a good bottle or two of their best wine.

My ride pulled up in front of an apartment complex forty-five minutes north of Boston, and a quick glance showed me the place was clean—decent. The sun had begun to set, but daffodils and tulips lined the front walkway to the glass double doors, and flowering Nanking cherry bushes hid a couple of AC units with their pink and white blossoms.

I keyed in the apartment number on the intercom and waited. Rarely did butterflies twinge in my stomach, but for the first time in a long while, I would be on a one-on-one date—not a date—but still. No third wheel to help fill the silent gaps if personalities didn’t click. No buffer to hide behind if a woman’s emotions got too caught up in the heat of passion.

Christine had requested a night on the town with a tall, dark, and handsome stranger to wine and dine her friend.

Hurt friend.

I lifted my hand to buzz again.

“Yes?” a low, breathy voice twitched my cock at the same time I went to push the intercom button.

“Reid from Elite Escorts here for Jessica,” I said, surprised to find a slight tremor in my voice. *What the fuck? Get a grip.*

“I-I’ll be right down.” The replying, shaky voice let me know I wasn’t the only one nervous about the evening.

A discrete adjustment of my semi and I stepped back a ways, making plenty of room on the wide stoop. Unless a woman's body language and eyes begged, I stayed well out of their personal space. Nothing worse than someone getting all up in your wheels when you want three feet.

Clearing my throat, I smoothed down my suit coat, fingering the top button and making sure it was buttoned properly.

One-on-one. God, what the hell was I thinking when I agreed to this?

A flicker of movement through the glass door drew my gaze. Honey-blonde hair swept over bare shoulders … smooth, pale skin…

My mouth watered as my gaze dipped lower to lush cleavage and curvy hips hugged by a tiny black dress. Bare legs and high heels … screw the three feet.

I stepped forward to open the door, my head lifting. Her pale brown eyes drew me in, the wariness and exhaustion pouring from her like wet cement from a flute. My chest ached for her—a woman I didn't know beyond her first name.

"Jessica?" I asked, our eyes locked on each other.

"Yes." She attempted to tug on a sweater while fumbling with her purse.

"Allow me," I said, moving closer to help her. The warmth of her skin radiated as I held her sweater in place, tempting my fingers to lift her hair out of the way. Instead, I stepped back while she tugged the sweater tight and clutched her purse in front of her.

"Reid Sullivan." I offered my hand.

She stared. Took her a few seconds, but she released her hold on the purse and slid her cool hand into mine.

I went from semi to steel with one breath at the feel of her soft skin against my callused palms. I lifted our clasped hands and kissed her knuckles.

A small smile took over her lips, easing the wariness in her steady gaze.

Hurt but not insecure or timid. That, I can handle. Perhaps our 'date' wouldn't be so bad after all.

"Shall we?" I asked, moving to her side and tucking her hand into the crook of my arm.

Chapter Four
Jessica

Shall we? You're already bought and paid for, I thought about reminding my man whore for the night as he tucked my hand against his arm. My nasty attitude had bubbled out at Christine more than once since she'd shown up earlier to babysit, but I reminded myself not to be unkind to the escort beside me.

I glanced back at my second-floor apartment window. Christine gave me two thumbs up and a wide grin.

I stole a glance up at Reid as I turned forward once more. Tall, dark, and handsome didn't begin to describe the slab of man beef beside me. He towered over my five-feet, five-inch frame. The suit didn't hide his lumberjack shoulders, but it tapered nicely to show his trim waist. I knew what lay beneath—Christine had made sure to show me the pics of Reid on Elite's website. Reid, not Jarod, the escort she'd originally picked out for me. Mr. Pretty Boy had been more to her liking than mine, anyway.

They'd had to switch men due to personal reasons, and Christine hadn't hesitated to agree. I'd have been perfectly content with giving up the idea altogether, but upon seeing Reid's profile, I'd decided otherwise.

Fresh-shaven, he still sported a dark shadow on his jaw. Hair a little too long, unstyled and carefree … and his almost black eyes, twinkling like the stars I wished on at night.

Hotter than an early August day at noon on the beach. Playful, his eyes promised. Gentle, his touch had assured me. Soft lips against my knuckles … my knees had weakened as warmth flooded through me. And the woodsy cologne with a hint of vanilla? My mouth turned into salivation central.

"Nervous?" he asked, squeezing my fingers against the crook of his elbow.

Honesty is always the best policy. My mom's voice echoed in my head. Not that I disagreed. My honesty had caused more than one fight with Devon. "Yes."

"Me, too."

"Yeah." I huffed a snort. "Okay."

“Honest to God.” I felt his gaze on my head as we drew near the limo. A paid escort, full of shit, saying whatever he felt I needed to hear in order to fulfill my every desire for the evening.

I smiled at the driver as he opened the limo’s back door.

“Ma’am.” He nodded in greeting.

“Thank you.” I climbed into the limo as best I could without baring my ass and thong to the world.

Christine had shown up with the dress and undergarments. Early birthday presents, she’d said. I’d ended up tugging off the old skirt and outdated top I’d selected for the night—the clothing she’d frowned at—and poured myself into the tight thing she called a designer dress.

I’d felt like a million after seeing myself in the full-length, though.

She’d added more eyeliner and shadow than I felt comfortable with, but she’d smudged here and there, dabbed on some blush, and laid on the red lipstick, telling me to shut up and deal.

“So.” Reid settled beside me, his presence, heavenly scent, and aura of confidence filling the too-small space. Rather than feel intimidated or uncomfortable, though, my body actually melted into the leather seat, my breath emptying my lungs on a deep sigh.

“I think a night out is just what the doc ordered,” Reid said, his deep voice standing the hairs on my nape on end. Dark and merry eyes studied my face.

I raised a brow, trying to stifle my attraction to the fine specimen of man too close to my side. “I want you to know, my friend put me up to this. Never in a million years would I blow money on a—” I snapped my jaw shut as heat flooded my face. Damn run away mouth.

“Go ahead.” He smirked. “Say it.”

“Fine.” Chin lifting, I met his gaze, unwavering. “Man whore.”

“Ouch.” He slapped a hand to his chest.

What a way to begin the evening. Me and my big mouth, spewing out thoughts without a thought. It happened too often, when I felt comfortable with a person … I spilled. *Might as well lay it all out there.* “I have no intention of sleeping with you.”

“Fine by me.” The corner of his lips twitched again, and my PMS-ing emotional inner bitch wanted to read into his meaning.

Wasn’t I pretty enough for him to get it up? Did I look like a lousy lay? Devon had said it often enough I heard his words ringing in my ears.

“Glad we got that cleared up,” I snapped, jerking my attention to the window and the setting sun.

Silence settled over us, but without discomfort. Devon’s angry words continued to play through my mind, and I found my eyes filling with tears. I was dressed to kill—or so I’d thought—with a sure lay, a paid-for date, and all I could think about was my ex.

“Who was he?” Reid’s soft voice pulled me from my thoughts.

“Who was who?” I asked, turning to peer up at his serious face.

“The one who put the haunted hurt in your eyes.”

“Ouch,” I copied his word, lifting a hand to my chest.

Reid’s gaze didn’t waver. “Beautiful doe-like, whiskey-colored eyes. Far from unattractive.” He ran the back of his finger down my cheek. “Intriguing, actually.”

I found myself wanting to lean into his touch as though the soft caress of his hand could soothe away every hurt Devon had inflicted on my mind and emotions.

“Tell me,” Reid said again, lacing his fingers through mine.

“I thought you were supposed to show me a good time tonight.” I tried and failed to keep the bitterness from my tone. The poor man didn’t deserve to reap what Devon had sown.

“I’m a great listener.” His smile melted a little of the ice that encased my heart. “Hell”—he all-out grinned—“I’m a handy man to have in your back pocket if the time for revenge ever comes knockin’. I’ll give you my card just in case.”

I laughed. No clue why, but the sincerity of his offer baffled yet delighted me. “You really want to know?” I asked, angling on the seat to face him better.

His smile faded. “You need to unload, Jessica, or I’ll never get you to enjoy this evening like you should. Rant. Rail on me. Take out the aggression leashed inside of you.”

My gaze narrowed. “Did Christine put you up to this?”

“She paid for my time this evening, but that’s it. This is me.” He tapped what had to be hard-as-rock pecs beneath the suit coat. “Reid Sullivan asking a beautiful young woman to unburden her heart. Share her hurt and let someone try to erase it for a few hours.”

All sense of cold clenching my heart turned to warmth. “It’s a long story,” I said.

“We’ve got all night.”

“I’ll probably cry and make a mess of the face Christine painted on me.”

“I’ll bet you’re even more beautiful without all the makeup.”

“Stop already.”

His white teeth flashed brightly in the car’s dim interior, warming the lonely space between my thighs. Killer smile. Enough to make even the most cold-hearted bitch cave to his whims.

I started at the beginning.

Chapter Five
Reid

She didn't shed a damn tear for the next forty or so minutes on our way into Boston. Inner strength shone through her like a living force of energy lighting her up from the inside out. I'd never been so damn poetic about a woman in my life, but there was no other way to describe the hot package wrapped up in a clingy black dress beside me.

Her eyes flashed, brows furrowed, and lips pursed during her painful tale, but when Jessica finally turned her story to the love of her life, Cupid's bow found me hard and fast. Like a hammer to the thumb, a two-by-four to the head … goddamn, did I reel from the blow. All anger over her asshole ex faded away.

"Her name is Skye." Jessica's face softened. "I call her 'Mini-Me' since she looks just like I did at that age."

"How old is she?" I asked, curling my hands into fists to keep from touching her skin.

"Eighteen months. She's a little spitfire like me, too." She laughed, her brown eyes sparkling up at me. "Her favorite sentence is, 'No way!' which flies out of her mouth at least a dozen times a day."

"Outspoken already, huh?"

"Mini-Me." Jessica laughed again, and staring into her face, I decided I wouldn't mind hearing that sound every day for the rest of my life.

But, I sucked at relationships, and Jessica didn't need her heart broken more than it already had been.

"She's my reason for living—the only one. After Devon…" Another flash of hurt filled her eyes, stirring up my anger again.

"Asshole." I hadn't meant to voice my opinion.

Light laughter brought the sparkle back to her eyes. "More mild a name than he deserves, that's for sure. I shouldn't allow the wounds he's caused inside of me to control my future, but it's impossible for me to trust anyone."

I couldn't help myself—I tucked a strand of blonde hair behind her ear. "Deep hurt is hard to get past. Even when you think you're good to go, a simple circumstance can pick at the not-so-healed scab."

She peered at me. “You’ve been hurt?”

Shrugging, I considered my words—and the knife-like action in my gut over memories I’d tried to move past. “Not nearly as bad as you, but I’ve been engaged twice. I was also the one to end both relationships, but that didn’t keep me from experiencing pain.”

“I’m sorry.”

Goddamn, did I want to drown in her whiskey-colored eyes. The limo slowed, and I cleared my throat. “Hungry?”

“Yes.” Her smile reappeared. “Actually, I am.”

I laced my fingers through hers and squeezed. “Then let’s go take advantage of Elite’s tab and toast to your night out.”

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“Can I ask you a personal question?”

My brow rose. Unlike my usual clients, Jessica seemed to want to chat the night away—and not just about her. She’d already learned the names of my three sisters and all six nieces and nephews. “Pretty sure I’ve told you all there is to know about me,” I said and swallowed down the last of the second bottle of champagne we’d enjoyed over our three-hour dinner in the hushed restaurant.

She propped her elbow on the small, round table between us and rested her chin in her palm. “Why did you become an escort?”

I chuckled, and she laughed with me. “Because I’m an excellent third wheel.”

“Third wheel?”

“Threesomes.”

“Oh.” Her eyes widened a heartbeat later and she sat back. “Oh.”

“It was my best friend’s idea, really.”

“Your day job boss, right?”

“Blake. Yeah.”

“So.” She cleared her throat. “Have you … you know … joined him and his girlfriend?”

“A few times, yes.”

“Oh.”

I studied her face as her smile faded and she glanced away toward the empty tables around us.

“You’re a professional third wheel.”

A twinge of unease twisted in my stomach, but I couldn't figure out why. "Yes."

"But you also do one-on-one for Elite, too?"

"No."

Jessica turned to face me, a line appearing between her arched eyebrows. "No?"

"You're my first."

She sucked in one side of her cheek as though chewing on the soft flesh inside. "Do you have any choice in the matter when Elite schedules a client?"

"I do."

Silence hovered again as she stared at me, soft instrumental music sounding from somewhere overhead. I fought not to shift in my chair as I waited for her to get to her point.

"So why me?"

"Why you, what?"

"Why did you agree to this?" she asked, motioning between us with a hand.

I leaned forward, holding her gaze. "Because of the haunted hurt eyes on your profile picture. I needed to see happiness. Satisfaction."

Her lips parted as she sucked in a breath, her pupils dilating.

I had decided to keep sex off the agenda for the night—unless she suggested or hinted at the desire for more than a friendly night on the town. Up to that point, I'd done a damn good job of keeping my thoughts about what I wanted to do to her and those lush curves to myself.

My cock twitched at the obvious arousal in her eyes, and I slid my gaze down over her chest, watching hard nubs appear beneath the clingy fabric. I forced my head up, a brow raised in question.

Pink flushed Jessica's cheeks as she reached for her champagne. "I'm not going to sleep with you."

I couldn't help my grin. "You want to, though."

She shrugged and sipped.

Deciding to let the issue go, I settled on the next best option. "You have me until morning, Jessica. Is there anything—besides sex—I can do to please you?"

"A body rub and foot massage." The words blurted from her lips and the flush on her cheeks deepened.

“Your wish is my command.” I stood, tossed my napkin onto the table, and held out my hand.

“Where are we going?”

“Trust me.” I wiggled my fingertips at her in encouragement.

She hesitated a few seconds before gathering her purse and accepting my offer.

I wouldn’t get the chance to be inside of her body, but I sure as hell was going to touch every inch she’d allow.

Chapter Six
Jessica

"Where are we going?" I asked again as Reid led me through the crazy-expensive restaurant and back toward the hotel's lounge.

"Upstairs."

My heart thudded in my chest, and I was all too aware of the dampness coating my panties. "Upstairs. As in a room."

"Yes."

"You don't need to go through any trouble—"

"Elite has supplied the room and we have it until morning," he said, his hand tightening around mine. "A limo will pick us up out front at eight."

Christine had said I wouldn't be back until morning, but I hadn't expected to really spend the night in a hotel room. "No sex," I whispered as we approached the main desk.

"I promise," he whispered back.

I chewed on the inside of my cheek as Reid spoke with a young woman behind the desk, signed something, and accepted a card key.

On unsteady legs, I followed him into the elevator. The doors swished shut behind us, and I swallowed against my sudden nervousness. *No sex, no sex,* I chanted with each heartbeat. *I'm not getting caught up in this too-hot, too-sweet man whore.*

The word twisted my stomach, and I grimaced. He didn't seem like a whore—not that I would know what a prostitute ought to behave like. I'd expected a suave, full-of-bullshit womanizer who would earn his pay, but Reid seemed open and candid. He hadn't held back with any answer to the hundred questions I'd thrown at him.

But why get to know a paid escort, I asked myself not for the first time since we'd sat down to dinner. It was not like I'd be seeing him again. God knew I couldn't afford even an hour of his time. Just seemed rude to keep all the focus on me. I didn't like attention, so I'd turned the focus to him whenever possible.

Reid smiled down at me, his dark eyes full of more than mere friendliness, his panty-melting smile doing its job.

My panties did a lousy job of containing my body's immediate reaction. I clenched my thighs together while offering a wobbly smile of my own, images of him crowding me against the elevator door and ravishing my mouth vivid in my mind.

"You don't need to be nervous," he said, his low voice pebbling my nipples.

"I know that, but my body isn't in agreement with my head."

He chuckled and squeezed my fingers. "So I do turn you on."

I huffed and faced the elevator's opening doors. "A woman would have to be dead to not be turned on by your smile. Those twinkly eyes and carpenter shoulders."

Another chuckle and he led me down a long hallway. He paused before a door, slid in the card key, and pushed on the handle. "After you."

I stepped past him into a hotel room I'd only seen the likes of in movies and magazines. Leather couches, huge windows overlooking Boston's downtown… I moved across the sunken sitting area, soaking in the dark skyline and glittering lights as Reid turned on the dimmers overhead. "What a view."

"A hell of one." His suggestive tone had me glancing over my shoulder. His gaze roamed my backside, and the want in his eyes wobbled my knees. He stalked forward like a lion, keeping me ensnared with his dark eyes.

I held my breath, unsure of his intent, my body wanting the same thing smoldering in his gaze.

He stopped short of touching me, and the energy crackled between us. I stared up at him, my entire body thrumming. Trembling beneath the onslaught of his woodsy cologne and sheer presence.

"Ready for that massage?"

"W-what?"

"Massage and foot rub. That's what you want, isn't it?"

Took me a few seconds to remember why we'd come up to the room. I managed a dumb nod.

His slow smile caught my breath, and when he brushed his thumb across my parted lips, a moan escaped between them and my eyelids fluttered shut.

"I want to kiss you, Jessica. More than you could possibly know, but I won't. Not unless you ask me to."

Nope. No way. Not even one little caress of his mouth.

"One kiss," I heard myself whisper.

Soft, warm lips brushed against mine without hesitation, and I melted against his hard body. Oh. My. God. His sweet breath, the slow and gentle pressure of his full lips…

It had been so long since I'd been good and truly kissed. Arousal swirled through me like I'd never experienced, settling between my thighs and bringing another moan to my vocal cords. One of his large hands came to rest on my hip as he stepped closer, the heat of his skin burning through the thin dress. He slid his other hand up my neck and tangled it in my hair, gently tugging my head to the side.

A flick of his tongue against my lip, and my body said "why the hell not?" I opened, and we both groaned as our tongues came together and parted, dancing in time with the thump of my heart.

He pulled away too damn soon, leaving me panting and heated through. We stared at each other in the dim light, Reid with a slight smile, me a trembling, horny mess.

"Go into the bedroom and take your clothes off," he said, stepping back, hands releasing their hold on me. "There are towels in the adjoining bathroom. Wrap one around yourself and get comfy on that big ass bed, belly down."

Uh … oh yeah. Massage. Right.

Unable to find my voice, I nodded and tried to walk away. Damn heels near sent me sprawling on the floor.

"Here. Let me." Reid dropped to his knees and lifted one of my feet to unbuckle the black heels Christine had insisted on.

I grabbed hold of his shoulder to keep from falling over, my gaze locked on the dark head inches away from my throbbing clit. Thoughts of him lifting my dress's hem with his teeth brought a moan to my throat, but I bit down on the inside of my lip to keep from letting it out.

His large hand slid up my calf and back down before making short work of the clasp. My foot slid free, and he ran his hand up my other leg, catching my breath.

Get a grip, Jessica. The barest touch on my skin—hotter than any sex I could remember. My body craved more. One little lick, one little pinch on my clit, and I'd be screaming my release for the world to hear.

“Go on,” Reid said, standing and stepping back, my heels dangling from his hand.

With another thoughtless, dumb nod, I managed to make my feet move. I eyed the massive bed while making my way across the bedroom to the open bathroom door. Images of Reid’s ass clenching with each thrust into my writhing body beneath his flashed across my mind.

“G-good God,” I whispered.

Hands shaking, I all but ripped off my tight dress and restricting bra, but paused to consider my panties. A full body massage…

Another few seconds of indecision and I slid the soaked bit of silk down my legs. Just in case he wanted to knead my ass cheeks. And, nothing more than that, I told myself while wrapping a white fluffy towel around me. A peek into the bedroom revealed it empty, so I scooted to the bed, pulled back the comforter and top sheet, and lay face down a little ways from the edge, eyes clenched shut, pulse pounding through every cell of my body.

Closer than a hair to hyperventilation, I focused on slowing my breathing. Relaxed my muscles as soft instrumental music floated through the closed door.

“Jessica?” Reid’s low voice raised what little hair I had on my body. “Can I come in?”

I squeaked a reply but had to clear my throat and try again. “Yes.”

Yes. Please come … I mean, come in. Touch me. Make me come.

Chapter Seven
Reid

The scent of her arousal slammed into me like a sledge hammer the second I walked into the bedroom. I breathed deep, filling my lungs as water works went to town in my mouth. Swallowing rather than have drool drip down my chin, I strode across the room, my own thumping heart and heavy breathing loud in my ears.

My gaze ran from her feet, up pale, creamy skin to the towel wrapped around her midsection and hiding the globes of her ass from my starved sight. Her head faced toward me, eyes clenched shut. A shudder rippled down through her as I drew close.

"Comfortable?" I asked, noting her thighs pressed tightly together.

"Mmm hmm."

Sounded like a hummed yes to me, but she lay like rigor mortis had set in. "Just relax. I'll take good care of you."

I'd left the bedroom door open so the music I'd turned on would help set the mood. Elite's staff had already made the room ready for our arrival. Everything from massage oil to lubes and a handful of toys had been packed into the case I'd rifled through in the living area while Jessica had come into the bedroom to take her clothes off.

I snapped open the cap of a bottle and dripped oil from the back of her creamy white thighs to her ankles and then onto my palms before recapping and tossing the container on the far side of her stretched-out form. "Cold?" I asked, rubbing my hands together.

"No," she whispered.

With firm but gentle pressure, I began working her left foot, digging my thumbs into her arch.

"Oh my God, that feels good," Jessica muttered, the furrow between her brows dissipating, her legs finally relaxing and opening the slightest bit.

I grinned and continued my ministrations without a word. I ran my hands a little ways up her calf, spreading the droplets of oil kissing her skin. The darkness beneath the towel's edge called to me. Like a bloodhound on the trail of a hot-blooded meal, I salivated, my cock hardened and ready for sliding into her silky heat.

With each upward sweep of my hands, I imagined pressing into her pussy. I'd been hard on and off since first picking Jessica up, and the thought of the sexless night ahead had me thinking I'd probably need a little self-massage of my own in the bathroom once I finished with her.

Over the back of her knee, up to the edge of the towel, I smoothed the oil along her muscles with my thumbs. I rubbed back down a little ways and started upward once more, pushing the towel an inch higher with each pass.

I checked to make sure her eyes remained closed before dipping my head down to catch a glimpse of her hidden heaven.

Nothing. Damn.

A shuddering sigh escaped Jessica's parted lips as I slid my hands beneath the towel and worked her upper thigh. Deep inhales filled my senses with the musky scent of her arousal, and goddamn, did I want a taste.

Shifting my stance didn't help create any more room in my slacks for my hard-as-rock cock straining against the fabric. Kneeling one knee on the bed's edge didn't help either, but it made reaching for her opposite thigh more comfortable. I started at the top of her right leg, fingers so damn close to her pussy that her hips lifted the slightest bit with every upward rub of the base of my palms.

"How ya doing?" I asked, keeping my voice low.

"Amazing," she said, drawing the word out on a groan and spreading her legs slightly wider. "A girl could get used to this."

"You're an incredible woman and deserved to be spoiled, Jessica. Don't settle for anything less." I moved my attention downward to the back of her knee, peeking again beneath the towel I'd managed to rumple. Bare, pink flesh, glistening with moisture...

Thank God for self-control. I kept my hands moving downward to her calf, her ankle, eventually her foot, my gaze glued on the moisture seeping from between the swollen lips of her pussy.

"I'm going to pull down the towel to your waist so I can massage your back," I managed to choke out while releasing her foot.

"M'kay."

Every inch of bared flesh called out to my tongue, but I held myself in check, thinking of Jessica—her worries and cares, her need for pampering. Besides, I was a man of my word and had promised no sex. Didn't mean I wouldn't test her boundaries, though.

I leaned over her body to reach for the oil, making sure my hard-on brushed against her. No flinching or shying away, I noted with satisfaction.

Oil pooled where her back gave way to flared hips, and I set to work spreading the slickness up and down the length of her back, focusing on the muscles lining her spine. Seconds of palming her waist and circling my thumbs along her hip bones turned into minutes as I forced the knots of her lower back to release.

The towel slipped lower, and I moved my hands along with it to massage the perfect globes of her ass. I focused on her face and slid my thumbs down the top of her crack. Her lips parted on a quick inhale, but rather than squeeze her cheeks together like I expected her to, her hips rose off the bed as if inviting further exploration.

I made the same sweeping action, but pressing wide with my palms, pulling her cheeks apart enough for a peek at her little rosebud. Her moan accompanied the slide of my thumbs along either side of the puckered skin.

Jessica ground her hips into the bed and shuddered a third time, her breath coming fast and heavy. Her brow furrowed, cheeks flushed. Moisture dripped from her pussy onto the towel beneath.

I almost gave into the temptation to dive down head first and lap up her cream. God knew her body's response to my hands said she'd let me eat her out, but like a true gentleman, I kept my fucking promises.

My thumbs brushed the edges of her rosebud, and she gasped, goosebumps pebbling her skin. Oiled and slick, my thumb could press right past her ring of muscle with no resistance. The temptation of her responsiveness about drove me fucking insane.

Another squeeze of her ass and I slid the pad of my thumb lightly across her hole. A deep groan came from her lips, and she shuddered, grinding her hips. I swept back up and over with slight pressure.

Her body convulsed. "Oh, God, oh, God." She pressed her face into the mattress, hands grasping at the sheets beside her as she came, the mattress stifling her cries as I continued to run my thumb across her rosebud hole. One last shudder rippled down her body, and I skimmed my hands all the way up her back to her shoulders. Tension began to gather beneath my fingers as her head turned toward the opposite side of the bed.

"I-I'm sorr—"

"Shh. Relax," I said, leaning down to nuzzle her warm ear. "You're beautiful when you let go."

She melted beneath my touch again, and I decided to push a little more. “If you want to roll over, I’ll massage your front.”

Slow, but without hesitation, Jessica twisted and rolled, her eyelids fluttering open. I nearly drowned in her sleepy, satisfied eyes.

I traced my fingers along her collar bone, our gazes locked, the sound of our breathing drowning the music coming from the other room. Moving my hands lower, I brushed my palms along the tops of her breasts.

Her lips parted.

My gaze trailed down along with my hands, over the swollen sides of her full breasts. Her nipples hardened beneath my stare. I circled my thumbs closer, and her areolas pebbled.

I swallowed down against the need to suck the hard nubs soft again and glanced up to find Jessica’s eyes had closed. My attention turned to the askew towel covering her pussy and one hip bone, and how I could get it to move without actually baring her myself.

I brushed my thumbs along the bottom of her nipples, and she arched into my touch with a quick breath. Smirking and throbbing like a mother fucker, I palmed the undersides of her breasts and kneaded, gently running my fingers across both hard nubs.

Jessica released a deep groan, her hands grasping at the sheets again.

I rolled the hard peaks between my fingers, waiting as each rise of her hips revealed more of her hip and thigh.

“H-holy shit.” She gasped. “I’m going to come again.”

Pinching her nipples brought another cry of release that rolled over me like a tsunami. I gritted my teeth to keep from ripping off my slacks and pounding into her.

The towel slipped free from her body as one last shudder rippled through her, and my gaze zeroed in on the bare swell at the top of her splayed thighs. I slid my slickened hands down over her stomach, noting a few stretchmarks, but honed in on the cream coating her thighs and swollen lips of her pussy. Her erect clit.

Talk about fucking drool.

The sweet scent of her brought my inner caveman front and center, and all I could think was I just might shoot off in my pants without stimulation. Fighting for control, I spanned her waist with my hands and moved them down, my thumbs gliding along her pubic bone, down the insides of her thighs.

Eyes clenched shut, Jessica shifted as though restless beneath my touch. Her brow furrowed, lower lip caught between her teeth.

I brushed a knuckle up and over her soaked lips, and she pressed into my touch. An invitation if I'd ever seen one. I swept my thumb over her clit, and she gasped, eyelids flying open. Her gaze latched onto me.

I circled her clit with my thumb and dragged the pad down over the top into her slick folds. Her deep groan and the haze of desire in her eyes…

Fuck, did I want her. "Want me to stop?" I forced myself to ask.

"No," she whispered, hips rising in invitation.

Her cream coated my exploring fingers, and when she lifted her hips again, I slid one inside of her tight sheath. I pulled out and pressed in deep with a second.

Pupils dilated, mouth open and panting, Jessica stared at me as I fucked her with my fingers. Her breath came in gasps, her inner walls tightening.

One more, I thought, running my thumb over her clit as I buried my fingers deep inside her again and curled them.

Her pussy clenched down, and her eyes closed, back arching as a third climax rolled over her.

I made soothing noises until she grew lax beneath my hands and lay as one dead. Skin flushed and glowing. A small smile on her lips.

Unable to resist, I lifted my hand and sucked her cum off my fingers. Tangy and sweeter than anything I'd ever tasted. Goddamn, I had the worst case of blue balls. Jaw clenching, I pulled the top sheet and comforter up over her body.

A heavy sigh escaped her as her face turned, cheek pressing against the mattress.

I leaned down and brushed my lips across the damp hair plastered to her temple. "Sleep," I whispered.

Knowing my self-control neared its end—and the fact I'd be unable to keep from hollering the second I jerked off—I left the bedroom and softly closed the door behind me.

My shaft and balls ached to the point of pain, but I ignored the discomfort and grabbed my suit coat off the couch. I fished my card from the pocket and stared down at it in my hand for a few seconds. I couldn't stay the night and not fuck every hole in her body. No fucking way. But, I wanted to see Jessica again.

I scribbled my cell number on the back of the card and left it sitting on top of her purse. Within two minutes, I righted the bag supplied by Elite and left the hotel room.

Chapter Eight
Jessica

I woke and stretched beneath my blankets, ecstatic that for the first time since her birth, Skye had slept through the night. My smile faded as I cracked open an eyelid.

The previous night came back in a rush, and I sat up. No Reid. The other side of the bed hadn't been slept in. The alarm clock read seven AM. We had another hour until the limo would pick us up outside.

I yanked the comforter off the bed and wrapped it around me. No sounds came from the bathroom. He wasn't in the living area either, nor was there a trace of another person having spent the night in the suite.

Disappointment wormed its way into my mind, but I huffed a breath at myself. "He's a man whore. What'd you expect?" I muttered to myself while staring out over Boston's skyline. "Breakfast in bed? Good morning kisses?"

The truth sucked, but I shuffled into the bathroom and turned on all four jets to full blast—and hot. I forced my face to relax. Reid Sullivan's absence wasn't worth my frown. I'd had an amazing night full of good conversation, laughter, and … well, the most incredible orgasms I'd ever experienced.

Water sprayed on me from all sides, and I closed my eyes, remembering the feel of his hands on my body.

Two good, self-induced orgasms later and pruned like a grape, I climbed out of the tub and readied to go home. At ten of eight, I reached for my purse. A card fluttered to the floor.

Reid Sullivan, Elite Escort in simple black script on a snowy white card, I noted while crouching down to pick it up.

Nice, I thought with sarcastic snark. He left his calling card. Unable to help myself, I lifted it to my nose hoping for a sniff of his cologne. Nothing. I flipped the card over and found a phone number scrawled in blue ink.

I stared for a few seconds, fingertip tapping the card. An invitation to call, obviously, but why? He knew I couldn't afford to book him for another

night out. More disappointment—another frown. I stuffed the card in my purse and hurried out to meet the limo.

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I blew a wayward hair out of my eyes and reached into the toilet, sponge clutched in my rubber-gloved hand. The final chore of my Saturday morning before sitting down to my bills and a near-worthless checkbook.

Blues Clues' theme song drifted in through the bathroom door. I'd left Skye on her Dora chair, plastic cup of fishies in hand while I finished scrubbing.

Heaving a sigh, I allowed LaLa Land to take over my mind as I'd done all week long since my mommy's night out. I'd spilled the goods to Christine over two cups of coffee at my table the Saturday before when I'd gotten home. God, did she grill me for details … gave me shit over the fact I'd said no to sex, too.

Well, not real sex. Not really. Fingers didn't really count in my mind, but Reid's had definitely given me a taste of what I was missing. The hard ridge that had pressed against me while he'd been massaging my back would have felt ten times better, though.

Heat flushed through me, and even though I squatted elbow-deep in a toilet bowl, I considered getting myself off again. I'd never touched myself so much in my life. Even when Devon and I had first started fooling around, I'd never been so horny, my body weeping for penetration.

Should have slept with him, I thought for at least the hundredth time. Should have shagged the night away until I couldn't breathe or think. Should have been pleasantly sore come morning.

Stupid, stupid, stupid.

How many times had I said the same while fingering his business card? I hadn't called. Never would, either. I couldn't afford Elite Escort's fees—I'd checked just because I needed the proof. Why would he want me to call, anyway? He got laid a lot. Probably a few times a week with different women every time. He wasn't the type of man a woman could trust. Just like Devon.

"I don't need to be another notch in his belt, thank you very much," I grumbled while wringing out the sponge and tossing it into the bucket beside me.

Maybe he'd felt like a failure and wanted to hook up for his man-pride.

I flushed the suds down the toilet and stood, hands on hips. No. Reid was too much of a gentleman. Too … real to think something like that.

"Too bad I didn't meet him on that damn dating site." I yanked off the yellow gloves with a snap.

"Mah!" Skye called from the other room, a giggle in her voice. "Mah!"

Smiling, I dropped the gloves and went to see what else little miss Mini-Me needed.

Chapter Nine
Reid

I shifted my truck into park and stared at the front door to the LaCroix residence, a sprawling single-story mansion on the ocean. A salt-scented breeze blew in through my opened window, and my mind turned to whiskey-colored eyes and a sweet smile.

Fucking coward.

I should have just jerked off in the bathroom and crawled back into bed with her. Should have pulled her up against me, breathed in her strawberry scent, and enjoyed the idea of her. Should have taken advantage of every second beside her. Fuck the fact I didn't want to like her too much. Fuck the fact I could have fallen for her and ended up breaking her heart.

She'd been my last job of the weekend before, and I hadn't been able to think of much else all week long while framing out the first of five houses Blake had gotten approval for on the two acres he'd bought on the North Shore. Other than roofing, framing was just about the toughest part of building a house from the ground up. Wore an ass out, but thoughts of Jessica had kept me up at night—every night.

She hadn't called. I wanted her to, but yet I didn't. I reminded myself of my youngest sister who didn't know what she wanted, and when she did finally decide, she always changed her mind a day later. The worst part? I had clients inside waiting for me.

I glanced at the double front doors.

Doc LaCroix enjoyed having control over his submissive wife—he also enjoyed allowing other men to pleasure her while he sat back and watched. Good thing the missus didn't mind other men giving her pleasure to please her master.

I'd been with them once before not long after starting with Elite. A petite blonde with shapely legs and a pale, bare pussy…

"Just pretend it's Jessica," I grumbled at my flaccid dick stuffed into my jeans, "and we'll be fine."

Fucker didn't so much as twitch at the thought of being between Jessica's legs, but we had a job to do.

Doc opened the door and greeted me with a slight French accent. At five feet and a few inches, Doc looked more like a pre-pubescent kid than a forty-something neurosurgeon. He certainly didn't lack in the confidence department, though. Even though I towered over him and his scrawny-as-hell body, the man could hold his own. He had this quiet, tough aura about him. His slender fingers performed surgery every week, but after seeing the marks he'd left on his wife our first go-round, I decided I'd never mess with him.

The missus, though, I'd been happy to mess a hell of a lot with her last time, allowing the good doc to boss me around like a sex slave.

As I followed him to their play room, I couldn't muster any excitement I would have felt if the appointment had been pre-Jessica.

Goddamnit. Get your head in the game.

Doc LaCroix had tied his wife spread eagle on the bed against the far wall. Red welts crisscrossed her abdomen and thighs. Ropes bound her large breasts to the point they'd begun to turn blue-ish. Her plump lips wrapped around a ball gag, while a black blindfold hid her eyes.

I followed Doc into the room and paused beside him at the foot of the bed.

His wife's body, minus the grotesquely squeezed breasts, looked so much like my memory of Jessica that my chest ached.

"Her pleasure has been earned," Doc said, turning toward a leather chair in the dim corner. "Show her what a good pet she's been."

Focusing on the memory of the need in Jessica's eyes and the sounds of her moans, I tugged off my shirt. I reached for the button on my jeans and paused, my attention far from the job in front of me. How the hell could I fuck another woman when all I could think about was Jessica?

"Can't do it, Doc," I said, grabbing my shirt off the floor and pulling it back on. "I'm sorry."

"Is everything okay, young man?" he asked, catching up to me as I strode back down the hallway toward the front door.

"Yes. I just … can't." I couldn't meet his gaze, even when he clasped me on the shoulder.

"Shall I reschedule, or would you prefer we ask for another escort to play with us next time?"

The muscle in my jaw ticked as I considered his words. "Perhaps another would be best."

He nodded. “I’ll call Elite and let them know.”

“No.” I held out my hand. “I’ll call and make sure you’re fully refunded. And, next time you utilize Elite’s services, I’ll take care of it.”

Elite paid me to satisfy customers, I reminded myself while pulling out of the LaCroix’s driveway, the setting sun blinding me.

They needed my cock and oftentimes to merely be eye candy, nothing more. They expected me to do whatever was necessary to please their clients. Even if every single word, every touch and moan were lies.

Unfortunately, I didn’t have it in me to lie—not when my mind set itself on a lovely lady. I needed to find out if she was even worth thinking about.

Screw the contract I’d signed with Elite about client privacy … I needed to see Jessica again.

Chapter Ten
Jessica

Exhaustion tugged at my eyelids, and I snuggled my face into Skye's warm neck, the jingle of another Disney Junior cartoon blaring from the TV. Mini-Me smelled like her lavender bath wash, her footie nightie like dryer sheets. I landed a few smooches before she pushed a hand up to block my lips.

"No way!" she barked, attention glued to the screen.

I relaxed back into the couch, allowing my muscles to go lax. The apartment around us sparkled and smelled like citrus from my weekly cleaning. All I had left to do was to put Skye down and finally shower the stench off my own body. Then a glass of wine or two—

Someone knocked on the door, and I frowned. I hadn't buzzed anyone in. Must be one of the neighbors, I thought while sliding from beneath Skye. "Mommy be right back."

I made my way into the kitchen and pulled open the door.

Reid.

My breath left in a rush as heat swept over my skin.

"Hi," he said, eyes twinkling.

God, that smile … those eyes. I tightened my grip on the door knob as his woodsy cologne assaulted my senses. "How did you get in here without the key code?"

"Waited for a neighbor to get home from wherever the hell it was they'd gone."

The knowledge of him slipping into our secure building made me feel … insecure. "What are you doing here?"

"I wanted to see you."

"Why?"

He stared at me, his smile fading. "I can't get you out of my mind."

"Sounds like a song lyric," I said, peering up at him, unsure of how to feel.

"Can I come in?"

"I can't afford you."

His brow drew down. “I’m here as plain old me, Jessica, not Elite’s man whore extraordinaire.”

Extraordinaire indeed. “I considered calling, you know,” I said, keeping my firm stance in the doorway.

“Why didn’t you?”

“Because I can’t get involved with anyone—even just for a good time. My focus is Skye”—Reid glanced over my shoulder toward the living room where a new tune blared—“and I refuse to take a chance with falling for someone only to have my heart broken again.”

His dark eyes focused on me. “You’re too young, too beautiful and sweet to be alone. I’ve never met someone so easy to talk to, so comfortable to just be with.”

I chewed the inside of my cheek as temptation tugged on my heart strings and the moisture-makers inside my vagina walls.

“You deserve more, Jessica Lindy.”

Staring up into his twinkling dark eyes sure as hell didn’t help the rational side of my brain. The need for more, the desire to experience what he’d given me the weekend before loosened my grip on the door handle.

“Mah!” Skye called from the living room.

“I-I can’t do this.”

“Jessica, wait.” Reid put his palm on the door to keep me from closing it in his face. “Please.”

“I can’t.”

We stared at each other in silence while my heartbeat pulsed in my ears.

Reid took a step back and shoved his hands in his pockets, never once taking his gaze off of my eyes.

Inner lip between my teeth, I shut the door and leaned against it, tears stinging my eyes. Reid Sullivan was all that and then some, but I couldn’t trust again enough to take a chance.

Chapter Eleven
Reid

"Goddamn mother-fucking piece of shit!" I tossed my jammed nail gun aside.

"The fuck is your problem?" Blake asked, sunlight glinting off his shades as he turned toward me, two-by-four in hand.

"Goddamn piece of shit," I said again while motioning toward the gun with my chin.

Blake chuckled while I grabbed my cold Dunks and guzzled down the last of my morning's coffee. "Jessica, huh?"

I shook my head, pissed that I couldn't get past her. "Can't fucking get it up because of her. Had to cancel with EE's clients twice last weekend."

"Shit."

"Yeah." I threw my empty Dunks cup toward a barrel and grabbed the nail gun again. Took me a few seconds, but I pried the jammed nail lose and turned back to take the stud from Blake.

"So what are you going to do about it?" he asked.

I banged a few nails into place and held out my hand for another two-by-four. "Nothing I can do about it."

"Hound the shit outta her until she gives in like I did with Wren."

"My situation is a little more complicated."

"Because of the kid?"

"And the fact that Jessica's ex hurt her to the point where she doesn't trust anyone."

"Sucks for you."

"Tell me something I don't know."

"I proposed to Wren."

The nail gun slipped from my hand and bounced off the plywood floor. I turned to face him. "What?"

He gave me a sheepish grin. "We're getting married this September."

"No shit."

"Yep."

I couldn't help my own grin while pulling him into a back-slapping man-hug. "Congrats, Harper."

"Thanks." We stepped apart, still grinning like a couple of fools. "If you think Jessica is worth the effort," Blake said, grabbing another two-by-four, "don't give up. Find ways to let her know you're thinking about her—that you care. Maybe you'll get lucky in love for a change like I did."

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"Gemberling Insurance," a soft, feminine voice said. "How may I direct your call?"

"Is Christine available?" I asked, grabbing my cooler out of my truck.

"One moment, please."

I wasn't sure how to approach the coming conversation. Christine knew who I was—remembered me from high school—or so Jessica had told me over dinner, but could she be schmoozed into giving me what I wanted?

"This is Christine."

I recognized the smooth, sexy voice from years past, but her tone didn't do anything to my limp dick. "Hey, Chris. This is Reid Sullivan."

"How can I help you, Mr. Sull—" She coughed. "Wait. Sully?"

"One and the same," I said, grimacing at my childhood nickname.

She chuckled into the phone. "How the hell are ya?"

Fuck it, I thought. Might as well give it to her straight. "I'm not sleeping worth a shit, and it's all your fault."

More laughter. "How's that?"

"I met your little friend, and now I can't think about anything else." I sat on my tailgate and propped open my lunchbox lid. "She tell you I showed up at her place last weekend?"

"She also said she shut the door in your face."

I grabbed my ham sandwich. "Do I have any chance at all?"

Silence met my ear for a few seconds. "Well," Christine finally said, her voice muffled. "Jessica has been day dreaming between calls and customers. I'm pretty sure she's as equally enamored with you."

Something like hope woke inside of me as I stared at the sandwich in my hand. "Really?"

"Pretty sure, yeah."

"What'll it take for you to give me her number?"

“Hmm.” I swear I could hear the gears turning in her brain. “How well do you know your co-worker Jarod?”

Some things and people never change, I thought with a grin. “Not good enough to get him into your bed for free, but I’ll gladly pay for an evening of his time if that’s what you’re hoping for.”

“God, yes.”

Time for me to chuckle. “So no one has gotten you shackled to a ball and chain yet, huh?”

“Hell, no. Too many flavors to choose from and not enough time to sample them all.”

Yep. Christine Gemberling hadn’t changed one bit since high school. “So, for one night with Jarod, I get Jessica’s number.”

“Serve up that pretty boy on a hot platter, and I’ll pretty much do whatever the hell you want, Sully. Hurt Jessica, though, and I’ll rip your testicles out through your throat.”

My knees inadvertently pressed together. “Still a tough bitch, I see.”

“Tough enough to inflict serious damage if you screw this up.”

I sobered, my mind filled with Jessica and the knowledge I couldn’t promise to not hurt her in the long run. “I’m going to try like hell not to.”

Chapter Twelve
Jessica

On the weekends, I might get a dinging notification of a text or two, but during the week? Hardly ever. I finished up a call for a quote, hopeful they'd be in the following day as they'd said, and pulled off my headset.

I grabbed my purse from beneath my desk and tapped the screen. I didn't recognize the number but didn't need to.

R: I had a dream about haunted eyes last night

Tingles of warmth swept through me, and I smiled. A quick glance up revealed no one watching so I quickly turned my phone's volume to silent and replied.

J: How did u get my #

R: Easy enough to do when u know where to look

The pleasant buoyancy of my mood flattened, and my smile faded. I'd kept my cell number private out of fear Devon would get ahold of it

J: Seriously, how did u get my #? I keep a tight hold on personal info because of Devon

R: I bribed a little birdie into telling me

The only person we both knew … Christine. I shot a glare behind me. She chatted into her headset, oblivious.

J: My only friend betrayed me

R: I'd like to think WE r friends

Friends. With a man whore extraordinaire. He was easy to talk to.

J: U did say u were the kind of person that was good to have in a back pocket

R: So u kept my card

Warmth heated my face. I kept the damn thing on my bed stand, a nightly reminder of the best night of my life. Not that I'd tell Reid that.

J: It's stuffed in my purse somewhere

R: Well, I won't keep u from work. Just was thinking about u and wanted u to know

My fingers flew in response before I gave my reply a second thought.

J: What was the dream about?

It took a few for his next text to come through.

R: I sat in the front row of an auditorium and listed to a whiskey-colored-eyed woman give a lecture on parenting

I sat back in my chair and stared at his words. Not what I expected at all. I had no clue how to reply, and he sent another before my brain moved.

R: I was crushing on your passion for being a mom

My smile returned.

J: I don't think I've ever had someone crush on my mind before

Reid's reply was an emoji with hearts for eyes.

J: I have to work

I hit "send" and dropped my phone back into my purse, unsure which thoughts to focus on—giddiness or the glass-half-empty ideas I usually walked alongside to keep me and Skye safe.

****

R: *poke poke* U still awake?

The pleasant tingles returned as I burrowed under my blankets, phone in hand and disregarded book on the bed stand.

J: Yes

I bit the inside of my lip, waiting.

R: I can't sleep.

J: How come?

R: Can't stop thinking about u

The tingles turned to downright heat, and I rubbed my thighs together.

J: More lectures?

R: Not when I can control my DAY dreams

His wink emoji didn't have the same twinkling eyes I expected he did at that moment.

J: There needs to be an eye-rolling emoji

R: Ha! U really ought to go out with me again

J: Pretty sure I've answered to that enough times to get the point across

R: *knife in my heart* How was the rest of your day?

Surprised he turned our conversation toward friend zone so quickly, I settled in to tell him about the two sales I'd made—which meant I would almost be caught up with my bills. When I mentioned the silent phone call from who had to be Devon, he sent a red-faced, scowling emoji. Strangely, I felt comforted by his show of emotions.

****

Reid and I chatted on and off over the next two weeks—by text and phone calls. Even though I hadn't seen him since our "date," I knew him better than my own mother. He started every conversation by asking me about my day and how Skye was doing. I went on and on about Mini-Me finally using the potty like a big girl. He seemed just as excited about the milestone if his emoji use was any indication. The man seriously didn't hold back with his feelings.

R: I got Skye a present for being such a big girl

A shot of anxiety and excitement kicked me in the stomach. I chewed on the inside of my cheek and made my way into the living room to join Skye on the couch for the last few minutes of her favorite cartoon.

J: U didn't have to do that

R: Wanted to

I flopped onto the couch and propped my feet up on the coffee table beside a few drops of spilled milk from Skye's cereal snack. Unwilling to extend an invitation to visit, I waited.

R: Can I stop by?

J: How bout I meet you somewhere tomorrow?

R: Too late

A knock sounded, and I yelped, jumping to my feet.

Like the first time he showed up uninvited, I looked like shit in my ripped sweats and stretched sweatshirt.

"Damnit." I stomped across the kitchen and yanked the door open, trying for a glare and probably failing.

"Hi." He grinned, the warmth in his eyes sucking me in like fraps through straws on a hot summer day.

"How did you get in here this time?"

"Same as last time—waited for a neighbor to get home."

Heaving a sigh, I glanced at the gift bag in his hand. "You really didn't have to do that."

He handed it over, and I fought the need to press my thighs together as our fingers brushed in the exchange. "I'm a firm believer in rewarding kids for taking big steps."

"Mah! Phia over!"

I clenched my eyelids shut as little feet pattered close, *Sophia's* theme song tinkling in the background.

Skye brushed against the back of my legs. “Mah!” she hollered again, tugging on my faded sweats, and I grabbed the waistband to keep her from yanking them to my knees. “Phia over!”

“Hi there.”

I opened my eyes to find Reid squatting, eye-level with my daughter.

“Hi.” Skye beamed at him. “Phia over.”

“*Sophia’s* over, huh?” he asked with a smile, turning my insides to goo.

Skye nodded.

“Who’s your favorite—Crackle or the blue-ribbon bunny?” he asked.

“Mimimus.”

“I like him, too.” Reid glanced up at me, that damn twinkle in his eyes. “Who doesn’t like purple flying horses?”

Good God. Forget goo. My heart puddled.

Skye grabbed Reid’s hand and tugged.

With a sigh, I stepped back and allowed my mini-me to tug him into what used to be my man-free safe zone.

I checked to make sure Reid’s back stayed toward me before doing a quick armpit sniff. I grimaced. Plain old Reid Sullivan shows up looking delicious in a tight t-shirt and ass-hugging jeans, and I was a frumpy, stinking, pony-tailed mess.

Skye pushed him toward the couch, and the second he complied, she climbed up onto his lap. Her thumb went into her mouth, attention once more glued to the TV.

Reid met my gaze, one brow quirked along with his smile.

I sat beside them, but not close enough he’d catch a whiff of my BO.

He appeared completely at ease, and I reminded myself he had six nieces and nephews. I didn’t know what to say—or as always in his presence—how to feel. While his gesture appeared friendly, the desire in his eyes suggested want beyond a mere platonic relationship. Why the hell would he want to get involved with me when he had countless women paying for his satisfaction-gifting skills? Not that I’d enjoyed complete satisfaction our one evening together, but damn. The thoughts of his hands on me again, the feel of his lips, the taste of his kiss…

Heat swept through me, dampening my old cotton panties.

I dared a glance over at him.

A small smile lay on his face like a sprawling cat—content, and eyes half-lidded as he returned my stare.

"She's beautiful just like her mom," he whispered.

"Shush!" Skye barked and shoved her thumb back in her mouth.

One of Reid's eyebrows quirked again. "Bossy," he mouthed.

"You have no idea," I whispered back. "Christine likes to call her bossy-boo."

"Shush!" Sky said again, glaring at me. "Lena on!"

"Sorry, honey." I reached over and smoothed her hair back as *Elena* broke into song.

Reid nodded toward the kitchen, a question in his eye.

I held up two fingers and mouthed, "two minutes," knowing if we moved before Skye became a cartoon zombie, she'd only demand we stay right where we were.

Hands on my knees, I waited, my thoughts flitting from one to the other so fast I couldn't complete one before another began.

With expert ease, Reid slid from beneath Skye and set her back against where he'd sat. She didn't spare him a glance as he tiptoed around the couch. He laid a hand on my shoulder and squeezed.

I followed him from the room, my heart thumping like mad.

Chapter Thirteen
Reid

I leaned against the counter and held out a hand. Jessica had paused just inside the kitchen, arms banded around her waist, gaze glued to my face. “Come here,” I said, keeping my voice low so as not to disturb Skye.

Jessica took a few steps and slid her hand into mine.

I tugged, and with an oomph, she flattened against my chest.

“I smell awful,” she whispered, turning her face away. Pink cheeks, a messy pony-tail, makeup-less face … I’d never seen anything so beautiful.

Also no bra, I noted while running my hands up her back. Her nipples hardened against my chest. “All I smell is your strawberry shampoo.”

She lifted her face. “Holding me like this seems a lot more than mere friendliness. Why are you here, Reid?”

“You know why.”

Her huffed snort reached my ears. “For the ten-thousandth time, no, I’m not going out with you again.”

“Why not?” I asked for at least the same numbered time, my thumbs running in circles on her back.

“What man wants a woman with baggage?” she asked rather than spouting off the usual excuses about trust and focus.

“You did not just call your beautiful little daughter a liability.”

“No. It’s just that—”

“If anything, she’s an asset. She’s a Jessica mini-me, so it’s kind of like a two-for-one deal in my book.”

Jessica’s brow furrowed in a “yeah right” look.

“Go out with me.”

“I can’t afford you.”

“Go out with Reid Sullivan, the carpenter, not the man whore.”

Her cheeks flushed again, the pink spreading down her neck.

How far down, I wondered, my cock twitching at the memory of her large areolas and bitable nipples.

“It’s not easy for me to find a sitter. I won’t just leave Skye with anyone.”

I dared to hope. “Then we’ll all go out together.”

Her mouth opened, but I put a finger over her lips. “No more excuses. Just say yes. We’ll go to the ocean tomorrow. Collect shells, swing on the playground swings, get ice cream, and take selfies.”

“I don’t do selfies.”

“Thank God, cuz I can’t stand the damn things anyway.”

She inhaled a deep breath before her teeth went to town on the inside of her cheek.

“What?” I asked, releasing my hold on her the slightest bit.

She stayed pressed against me but glanced away.

“What?”

“While I’ve really enjoyed the past couple of weeks getting to know you better as a friend, I’m not the type of woman who can emotionally afford to get involved with someone unless I know there’s a chance for a real future. I can’t put Skye through something like that.” Jessica stepped back from me, and my hands fell to my sides. She crossed her arms over her chest, attention still riveted on my face as though trying to root out my secrets, my true intentions.

“I’m falling in love with you, Jessica.” Her breath caught, but I plowed on. “I love your honesty, your passion for being a mother. You’re sexy as hell and intriguing enough I’ve slept all of twenty or so hours the last couple of weeks.”

“I can’t sleep either,” she whispered.

The corner of my lip rose. “Been thinking about me while lying all alone in your bed at night?”

“Your fingers. Your lips.” Her gaze honed in on my mouth. “Your tongue.”

Two strides and I grabbed her by the waist with one hand, the other on her neck, and kissed her like Armageddon blazed in the background. She sagged against me, fingers fisting in my shirt, and let out a moan. I slid my tongue between her parted lips and against the moist warmth of hers.

Her sweet breath filled my lungs, and I wrapped her ponytail in my hand, tugging enough to turn her head to the side. I gently bit and sucked my way down her neck, pulling a deeper moan from her chest.

“I won’t sleep with you,” she said as I traced her ear with my tongue.

“No sex. Promise,” I murmured before sucking her lobe into my mouth.

A shudder rippled down through her, but she pulled away.

Not yet ready to give her up, I held her at arm's length. "So … ocean and ice cream only." I grinned. "Until you beg me otherwise."

She punched my chest. "Cocky jerk."

I kissed her again, taking my good old time turning her pliant beneath my hands. I didn't pull back again until she sagged against me. "I won't hurt Skye." I lifted a hand to tuck hair behind her ear. "And, I won't hurt you. I'm not like him."

"I know you're not." She heaved a sigh. "Okay. We'll go with you tomorrow. But, no sex."

"No sex." I grinned. "Got it."

Sex, I thought while walking out her door a few minutes later. Glancing down at my watch, I noted I had less than twenty minutes to get my ass to the evening's client's house.

"I am not in the mood," I muttered, slamming my truck door behind me and grabbing the bottle of blue pills from my console. I'd taken a two-week leave of absence, but Elite had given me an ultimatum—get my shit together and please their clients or take a hike.

I considered the prescription label all of two seconds before dropping the bottle back down and picking up my phone.

Chapter Fourteen
Jessica

Skye was perched on Reid's shoulders, giggling like mad as he ran through the sand, chasing after seagulls. Lightness filled me through, and for the first time in months, no worry ate at my stomach. I laughed along with my daughter, uncaring that my heart softened toward Reid. Unable to help myself, I fell harder for him with his every word, gaze, and action.

"How 'bout some ice cream, Munchkin?" Reid asked my daughter, short of breath and patting Sky's shin beside his neck.

"Ice key! Ice key!" She kicked her feet.

"Skye! No kick!" I said, horrified by her action.

"Don't worry about it." Reid tightened his hold on her ankles to still her movements and smiled.

"Ice key!" Skye insisted again, eyes the same color as mine flashing in the setting sun.

"Okay, Bossy-Boo." I trudged through the sand toward the steps up through the surge wall hiding the road from view.

We'd already enjoyed burgers for a late lunch and over two hours' worth of chasing Sky around the beach's playground. I was more than ready to sit and enjoy a strawberry frap.

Ice cream in hand, we settled at a picnic table beside the stand. Skye attacked her cup of vanilla with rainbow sprinkles, and I studied Reid as he watched her, smile fixed on his face.

"You'd think you never watched a little kid eat ice cream the way you're staring at her," I said before fitting my straw between my lips for a slurp. Cold sweetness hit my tongue as Reid turned toward me.

"She's cute as a button."

I swallowed my mouthful of strawberry frap and smiled. "She is."

"Just like her momma."

I grimaced.

"What?" He laughed.

"I'd prefer something like hot or sexy."

"Neither word does you justice."

Warmth swept through my face, and I busied myself with my frap.

“Lucky straw.” Reid all but groaned the words, and I jerked my head up, cheeks doubtlessly burning like the rest of my body. “Sorry.” He shrugged and ran his tongue around the tall vanilla and chocolate twisted soft serve. “Couldn’t help myself.”

My gaze followed his tongue as he took another round, thoughts of his face between my thighs creaming my panties to the point I expected I might leave a smear on the seat beneath me. Tearing my focus off Reid, I noticed rainbow-colored ice cream dripping down Skye’s chin. I grabbed a napkin to clean her up, my gaze flitting back to Reid again.

His dark eyes twinkled with a knowing look. Cocky prick knew exactly what I’d been thinking. I made a humph sound and wiped my daughter’s chin.

“No way!” she shrieked, jerking away, hand covering the cup in front of her.

“I’m not taking your ice cream, Bossy-Boo. Mommy just needs to wipe off your chin before you get ice cream all down the front of your shirt.”

“Ice key! Reid ah ice key!”

The sexual tension left my shoulders as I smiled. “Yes, Reid bought you ice cream, and you didn’t say thank you, did you?”

“Sank oo!” She grinned at Reid, and his returned smile melted my heart completely.

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“Want to come in?” I asked as Reid pulled his truck into my apartment building’s parking lot.

“No s-e-x,” he spelled, not bothering to hide his smirk.

“No,” I agreed, “but I actually have a six pack in the fridge. Signed five new policies this week and decided I deserved a reward.”

“In that case, I’m in.”

We walked up to the front stoop, Skye once more on Reid’s shoulders. I punched in my code to unlock the door and pushed it in for Reid. He had to duck to keep Skye from bumping her head.

She giggled and pulled his hair. “Up goggie!”

“He’s not your doggie,” I said, laughing.

“Reid mah goggie!”

“I’ll be your doggie, Munchkin.” Reid patted her leg again, and I stepped around them to lead the way up to the second floor.

Once inside, I tossed my purse onto the kitchen table and held out my arms.

"No way!" Skye grabbed Reid's hair again.

Shaking my head, I pointed toward the living room. "See if she'll let you deposit her butt on the couch. I'll turn on *Sophia*."

"Phia! Phia!" Skye chanted as we walked into the living room.

Lucky for Reid's hair follicles, Mini-Me let him put her down while I clicked on the TV. Her thumb popped into her mouth, and she flopped her head onto a pillow, gaze glued to the screen.

"How 'bout that beer?" Reid asked, hands in his pockets, tipping his head toward the kitchen.

He followed on my heels, making the hairs on the back of my neck stand on end. "I'm actually going to be able to get ahead on my car payment this month," I said, fighting to keep sudden nerves at bay.

"Way to go, Idaho."

I laughed and grabbed two beers out of the fridge. "Skye isn't old enough for *Toy Story* just yet." Rummaging around in my messy silverware drawer produced a barely-used bottle opener. I popped both open and handed him one as he leaned against the counter.

"Thanks." He tipped it up and swallowed, and I watched his Adam's apple bob. "Being a goggie is hard work."

We both laughed, and I sipped the pale ale. We drank a few more swallows in silence, but I didn't mind the hovering stillness. Sexual tension strung tight between us, and although I didn't really want to get involved with Reid, my body felt otherwise.

Why not let loose and enjoy my time with him? Why not keep my emotions in check and shag the night away?

"What are you thinking?" he asked, his focus on my chest and the hard nipples I felt poking against my thin bra.

"Sex," I answered without thought.

"No sex, you mean." He lifted his gaze to my eyes, and the desire I saw nearly buckled my knees.

"More like the throw-me-to-the-floor-and-pin-me-in-place kind of sex." My voice escaped breathless with need, but I didn't care. I wanted Reid, man whore extraordinaire. One casual fuck, a few good orgasms to get me through the next couple of celibate months or years.

Reid groaned and lifted his beer. “There’s a kid in the other room, or I would gladly make that dream come true.”

“It’s almost her bedtime.”

We stared at each other, the energy crackling between us like a surge of electricity looking for skin to zap.

“You’re serious?” He finally broke the silence.

“I’m not looking for a fairytale ending,” I said. “Just sex.”

“What if I can’t do that?”

I frowned. “You’re a pro, Reid. Don’t get all shy on me now that I’m finally giving in.”

A flicker of hurt glinted in his eyes, and he glanced away, putting his drink on the counter beside him.

“Sorry,” I said, looking down at my beer bottle. “Runaway mouth.”

Reid took two steps to close the distance between us, and placing his hands on my waist, pulled me close. “I quit Elite.”

My head jerked up, and I searched his eyes. No twinkle, no smirk, but I snorted anyway.

“I’m serious. I’ve never found a woman I wanted as much as I want you.”

“You have a different woman every weekend, Reid. One will never be enough for you.”

“I’ve never wanted to try until you.”

God, how I wanted to believe the sincerity in his eyes and voice.

“Mah,” Mini-Me mumbled from the other room.

“I’m going to put her to bed,” I said, stepping out of Reid’s embrace. “Why don’t you go on into the living room and finish your beer? I’ll be back out in a few.”

Chapter Fifteen
Reid

I muted the TV and listened as Jessica readied Skye for bed. Her voice carried from the bedroom as she read *Good Night Moon*. The light clicked off, and seconds later, she returned, curling a leg beneath her as she sat on the couch.

"She go down for you?" I asked, leaning forward to put my empty beer bottle on the coffee table.

"Yeah. She loves her crib." Jessica sighed and leaned back against the couch's armrest, head tipped against the back. "She's usually pretty good about bedtime. It's one of the few times she doesn't holler 'no way' at me when I say it's time to do something."

We shared a laugh, but the chuckles faded. The pull between us doubled in intensity, and even though I didn't want to fuck just for the hell of it, I found myself climbing her way and tugging her down to lay on the couch.

I settled between her thighs, propped on my elbows. Eyes wide and pupils dilated, she stared up at me, her mouth parted. I licked along her lips like I had my ice cream, and her body melted into the couch beneath us. Her tongue flicked out to touch mine, and with a groan, I captured her mouth, flexing my hips to show her how hard she made me.

Like a couple of high schoolers, we kissed and dry humped until Jessica started whimpering. "Please, Reid."

"Please what?" I kissed down her neck.

"I need more than kissing."

I sat up, and gaze latched on her whiskey-colored eyes, unclasped the button to her capris, telling myself to hell with getting more emotionally involved than I should. "You sure about this?"

"Yes."

"Just so we're on the same page … sex is a go?"

She tried to bite back a smirk. "Promise."

With her help, I shimmied the capris down her legs. A mere scrap of cotton hid her pussy from sight. I sprawled between her legs and used my

nose to nudge them aside, the scent of her arousal turning my hard-on down right painful.

I licked up through her wet lips and flicked my tongue across her clit, holding her panties out of the way with one of my hands.

Her fingers tangled in my hair on a groan as her hips lifted.

Nose burying in her pussy, I ran my tongue up across her puckered hole beneath, and she squirmed in my hold. She'd said yes, and I was going to take every single inch she'd allow. Lay claim to every hole in her body—even if she didn't realize I'd be making them mine.

"Please, Reid."

"Please what?" I asked, lifting my head to peer up at her.

Whiskey-colored eyes hazed, she stared down at me. "No more waiting. It's been too long, and I—"

I hopped off the couch and grabbed her up in my arms. A quick stroll back the hallway, and I made for the bedroom with the wide-open door. I sat her on the edge of her bed and pulled the shirt up and off her body. Her nipples pebbled against her bra, and I leaned in to capture one between my teeth.

She gasped and grabbed my head again, holding me in place.

I suckled her through the thin fabric, my other hand squeezing and thumbing her other full breast.

"G-God." Jessica tipped her back and pressed her chest toward me. "I'm going to come if you keep doing that."

"I've never met a woman so responsive."

A frown puckered the skin between her eyebrows. "Probably because I haven't been touched in two years."

With a flick of two fingers, I popped open the back of her bra and slid it down her arms. Her breasts fit perfectly in my hands as I weighed them and lifted both, pushing together until both nipples brushed my lips at the same time. I flicked my tongue across them, and she shifted her hips on the bed.

"I don't want to come until you're inside of me," she whispered, pulling on my hair to keep my face away from her chest. "Please tell me you have a condom."

I tried not to grin. "I'm an optimist," I said, pulling my wallet out of my back pocket. "Put in a fresh stash this morning just in case."

“Thank God.” She yanked off her panties and scooted up the bed. “Hurry.”

Blonde hair splayed across her pillow, light-brown eyes almost hid by the black of her pupils, she looked like a woman in need of a good lovin’. Forget a casual fuck, I thought, unbuttoning my jeans. I didn’t expect the first go-round to last too long, but I planned on staying in her bed until she lay like a limp noodle, satisfied, sore, and smiling.

Her gaze zoned in on my cock as it sprang free. “My God.”

I chuckled. “No one has ever called it a god before.”

Heat flushed her cheeks, but she didn’t look away as I slid a condom down over me.

I climbed onto the bed, and starting at her clit, kissed my way up her body until I captured her mouth. She slid her tongue along mine and wrapped her legs around me, squeezing tight.

With practiced ease, I angled my hips and nudged with the tip of my cock until her wet heat opened to me. Propped on my elbows and hands clasping either side of her head, I kissed her deep and slid in slow and easy.

Her inner walls clenched at me as she moaned into my mouth, and with one more slow thrust, her climax rolled through her body, tugging on my cock. Fingernails ran down my back as her legs tightened their hold and her mouth pulled away from mine.

“H-harder.” She gasped, still riding her wave. She bit her lip, trying to muffle her cries.

I ignored her and moved slow and easy, milking her climax until she loosened her hold on me. Hardest goddamn thing I’d ever done. I leaned down and bit her earlobe. “I want another one.”

“Mmm.” She lifted her hips on my next glide in.

I pulled back and out, and she whimpered, trying to tug me close again. “On your knees,” I said, palming her hip and helping her to roll. Her beautiful, round ass lifted, and my gaze landed on her puckered hole. Rubbing my thumb through her cream and up over her backside, I asked, “Anyone ever take you here?”

“J-just fingers.” She shuddered as I traced her rosebud hole and pressed back. My thumb slid in to the first knuckle, drawing a deep groan from her.

Cursing myself for not bringing any lube, I withdrew my thumb, lifted her hips, and slammed balls deep in her tight pussy.

She cried out and grabbed hold of the sheet beneath her, but I didn't bother taking my time. Within a handful of pumps, I knew I wouldn't hold in my load much longer. I coated my finger in saliva, and on my next withdraw, slid my finger up her ass.

"God. Reid!" Jessica buried her face in her pillow, her pussy spasming around my cock. I pounded into her heat, her name flying past my lips as my cum filled the condom.

Jessica collapsed onto the bed beneath me, and I pulled out, rolled, and lay on my back, sucking wind.

"Good God," she groaned into the pillow before turning her head toward me. She blew at the strands of hair across her face. "That was incredible."

"Mmm." My ears rang … or was that a phone?

"Shit."

Jessica sat up, and I reached out a hand to keep her in bed. "Ignore it," I said, my mind already on round two.

"Can't." She struggled up, batting at my hands. "No one ever calls me this time of night."

Goddamnit. I pulled off the condom, gaze glued on Jessica's round ass as she hurried toward the bedroom door.

"Hello?" Her voice carried from the kitchen, and anyone with half a brain would know what she'd been up to a few seconds earlier.

"What?" she nearly shrieked.

The TV clicked on. "…considered armed and dangerous. If you have any information on his whereabouts, please call the number on the screen below."

Fuck. I finished wadding the condom in a tissue from her bed stand and hurried out to the living room.

Face pale and palm against her mouth, Jessica stared at the TV, the cell phone slipping from her grasp. "Oh, God."

I moved close and pulled her against me. She resisted before turning her face upward. Recognition lit in her eyes, and she shrank into me like a child needing protection from the boogie man.

"Devon?" I asked through gritted teeth, my focus turning toward the black and white mug shot on the screen.

She nodded against my chest, a choked sob escaping around the hand she held to her mouth.

“Shh.” I smoothed back her hair and kissed her forehead. “He doesn’t know where you live. You’re safe.”

“B-But what if he finds us? I don’t even have a gun. Goddamnit!”

I held Jessica close, my hands in constant motion along her arms and back to help soothe her. “I’m staying the night.”

“But Skye—”

“I’ll leave in the morning before she wakes up.”

“But—”

“There’s no buts about it, Jessica. I’m not leaving you alone here tonight with that asshole on the loose.”

She sniffed and shuddered the last of her tears away. “Thank you,” she whispered.

A half hour later, once I’d made sure all the windows were locked and the door bolted, Jessica and I—fully clothed again—curled up on an old sleeping bag on Skye’s floor. I pulled Jessica’s backside against me and wrapped my arm around her waist. Her strawberry-scented hair tickled my nose, and I leaned closer to kiss the top of her head.

“Sleep,” I whispered, “I’ll keep you safe.”

It was some time after Jessica finally relaxed in my arms that my words returned to my mind. I wouldn’t just keep her physically safe … I had every intention of keeping her heart and emotions safe, too. Whether Jessica would like it or not, I’d found a new meaning to the phrase third wheel, and I planned on keeping that title for a long damn time.

Chapter Sixteen
Jessica

Unbelievably, I slept like a baby—as did Skye. I woke with the first beam of sunshine coming through her heavy curtains. Stretching made me very aware of the male body pressed against my back. Far from a morning person, I'd never enjoyed the feel of morning wood against my ass before. The hard length of Reid, though, lit a fire in the soreness between my legs and set my heart to racing.

As quietly as possible, I slid forward and glanced over my shoulder to find him wide awake. "You need to go before she wakes up."

Lips pursed in a thin line, he nodded and rolled off of our makeshift bed.

We tiptoed from the room, and I shut Skye's door behind us. Without a word, we went to the living room where Reid pulled on his sandals from our day at the beach.

"You going to be okay?" he asked, pausing with his hand on the front door knob.

I nodded but wasn't so sure.

"If you need me, please call. I'll get here as fast as I can."

Not trusting my voice, I nodded again.

He cupped my face in his palm and leaned down to swipe his lips across mine. "I'll come back tonight if you want me to."

"I'd like that," I whispered, tears clogging my throat.

"Lock up," he said, turning to leave me.

I did as told, and leaned against the closed door. Although I'd slept the night through, my head ached. Monday. I chewed on the inside of my cheek, trying to decide what to do. I had to work, but I didn't want to leave Skye at daycare.

With a glance at the clock, I headed back to the living room for my cell.

"Hey, Jessica. How are you?" Christine asked upon answering.

"Scared shitless."

"I can imagine. Sorry I called so late, but I figured you'd want to know."

“I appreciated the call.” I paced across the living room, gaze darting from the drawn curtains of my living room to the kitchen and front door. “Listen, I’m not coming in today. I can’t leave Skye at daycare all day and __”

“It’s okay,” Christine said as my tears fell and shook my voice. “I’ll talk to my father and get you some personal time. He knows about the letters, and would probably want you to stay home until Devon is found anyway.”

More tears coated my cheeks, and I struggled to say thank you.

“I’ll keep my fingers crossed they get that bastard soon. You stay inside and don’t answer the door for anyone.”

“I-I won’t,” I somehow managed.

“Now get some coffee in you and go snuggle with your little bossy-boo.”

I smiled through my tears and nodded. “M’kay.”

****

Reid stayed the next two nights and we kept our hands to ourselves. I couldn’t bear the thought of not having Skye by my side at all times, so we camped out on her floor. By the third morning, my body ached and temples throbbed.

“Blake will be back from Cancun and on the job site tomorrow, so I’m calling off and taking you down to the police station,” Reid said, lingering at my front door Wednesday morning. “They need to be aware of the threats Devon made on your and Skye’s lives.”

“They can’t do anything. It’s not like a restraining order will keep him from getting to me if he’s planning on making good on those sick promises of his.”

The muscle in Reid’s jaw ticked. “I’ll do my own stake out then—every day, all day until that asshole is behind bars again.”

“I’d rather have you on the floor beside me.”

“But you won’t let me in until Skye’s sleeping.”

“I…” I clutched my arms around my stomach, torn, and for a change, without words. While I wanted Reid in my man-free safe zone, I fought the desire for him our one sexual encounter had placed in me. I’d gotten too emotionally wrapped up in him—his touch, his kisses, and our shared orgasm where we’d called out each other’s names. I’d never experienced

that kind of closeness with Devon. “I’m sorry,” I mumbled instead of a lame excuse.

Reid drew me against his body and squeezed tight. “I told you that I won’t hurt her—or you. Now isn’t the best time, but damn it to hell, Jessica, I love you, and leaving you every morning knowing you’re shut up in the dark here tears me up inside. I can’t fucking stand it.” He kissed the top of my head as I tried to process his words. “Please give me a chance. Please.”

My heart clogged my throat, and I swallowed, desperate for air. “I-I told you I can’t get involved with someone who—”

He put a finger over my lips. “I told you I quit Elite, Jessica. I called them Saturday night after you finally agreed to go out with me and I went in Monday morning after leaving you to hand in my official resignation. My man whore extraordinaire days are over. I want us, Jessica. I’d give anything to be Skye’s and your third wheel.”

I pulled back enough to look up into his eyes, my mind racing.

“Unfiltered, please,” he finally said. “Don’t hold back your thoughts now.”

“I’m falling for you, too, Reid.” A wobbly smile made an appearance on my lips as I clutched at his rumpled t-shirt. “But I’m scared half to death of taking another chance. Of trusting a man with Skye’s heart.”

A twinkle lit in his eyes. “You do trust me, otherwise you never would have allowed me to spend the last three nights on your daughter’s bedroom floor.”

I opened my mouth as if to say something, but snapped it shut again. *Holy shit, he’s right.*

“You’re already giving me a chance, and you didn’t even realize it.” He kissed my forehead again. “I’ll be back this afternoon, but I’ll wait outside until Skye is in bed. We can talk more after, okay?”

I nodded, and Reid finally let go of his hold on me. “Lock up,” he said as he had the previous two mornings. “Call me if you need me.”

Reid Sullivan said he loved me. Giddiness tickled my stomach, and I bit my lip to keep from giggling. He had even quit Elite because he wanted to be with me. Hope blossomed in my heart as I turned toward the coffee pot, but faded a bit as I opened the grinds container to find it nearly empty.

Too good to be true rang in my head, same as when Devon had first started coming around. Something bad was bound to happen.

Chapter Seventeen
Reid

I probably drove Jessica nuts with all of my checking-in text messages to her throughout the day, but I couldn't get her and Skye off my mind. Imagining Jessica's fear for both herself and her daughter angered me to the point where I threw a few tools in frustration. God, did I want to punch something. Add in the fact that my craving for Jessica hadn't nearly been satisfied with our one night in her bed, and I was a short and curly short of going on a rampage.

My mind and cock craved another taste, but I wasn't an ass. I wasn't about to try to have sex with her while her mind fought preoccupation with fear of her ex.

Then again, perhaps she needed to have her mind taken off reality for a while…

Four o'clock swung round, and I sent the crews home, intent on getting my ass to Jessica's parking lot and the spot facing the front of her apartment complex with the perfect view of her second-story windows.

R: I'm out front

I wanted to push and ask if I could come up, but I told myself to be patient.

J: I honestly don't know what I'd do without you

R: Now that's what I want to hear!

J: Ha ha

R: How was your day? How's Skye?

J: Long and boring. Skye used the big girl potty three times today!

R: U must think she's getting too big too quick. My sisters always say that about their kids

J: *sigh* Yes. Whenever I tell her to slow down she hollers no way!

R: I'll bet

I chuckled, relaxing back into my seat and getting comfortable for a few hours' worth of sports talk radio. I'd had a whole lot of coffee and not

much else throughout the day, and I finally took note of my stomach. Growling beast needed something.

By seven, I was bored to death, starving, and couldn't wait any longer.

R: Do u want anything from the sub shop down the road? I'm about to chew on my leather seats

J: I have PB&J if you want to save some money

I grimaced.

R: Thanks, but I'm so hungry I'll wipe out an entire loaf of bread

J: I'm putting Skye to bed now, so I'll text you once she's sleeping

R: K. Brb

I hopped out of my truck and strode down one block to the sub shop even though dark clouds rolling overhead promised a good downpour. Every second waiting for my large Italian and side of fries felt like an hour, and I tapped my foot, teeth grinding.

Not soon enough, I started back up the street. The beginning of the storm splattered a few rain drops on my face and shoulders. I climbed back into the cab of my truck and all hell let loose, rain pounding on my windshield and pouring down in wide rivulets.

I shoved the key back in the ignition and started her up, flicking on the wipers. After stuffing a few fries into my mouth, I turned my attention to Jessica's window.

The living room curtain hung askew.

"Fuck!"

I tossed my dinner onto the seat and took off through the rain, uncaring my truck still ran. My fingers shook as I punched in Jessica's four-digit code she'd unknowingly trusted me enough with, and the damn contraption beeped red at me.

"Goddamnit!"

I tried again and got another blip of red.

"Green you mother fucker!" I pounded in the four digits. Green beeped at me, and I yanked the door open. I started hollering Jessica's name while sprinting up the stairs two at a time.

"Jessica!" I pounded on her door. "Jessica!"

A muffled shriek replied.

I stepped back, and putting all 230 pounds of myself behind my work boot, kicked at the door. It tore off the top hinge, and another kick flattened it in. Hands fisted and throat closing off in fear and rage, I ran through the kitchen only to pull up short in the living-room entrance.

Jessica stood on the other side of the couch, wide-eyed and hands clutching the arm wrapped around her neck. A handgun pressed into her temple.

I lifted my gaze to the asshole who had a death wish. His bloodshot green eyes bore into me, and I wanted to tear the fucker limb from limb. "Let her go, Devon," I said, surprised at how calm my voice came out.

He snorted out a sarcastic laugh. "The fuck I will."

The sound of Skye's whimpers from her bedroom filtered through the pulse pounding in my head. "Hurt either of them, and your life is over."

"Who the fuck do you think you are?" Devon waved his gun at me and yanked Jessica tighter against his chest. "You're nothing but her latest fuck buddy. She'll tire of you and toss you out with the morning trash."

"Mah!" Skye cried out, twisting my stomach.

I held my hands up, hoping he'd take the hint. "Let her go, Devon. Let her go, and I'll let you walk out of here. I won't even call the cops."

"I wasn't born yesterday, you stupid fuck."

"Everyone all right in there?" a male voice asked from behind me.

I glanced back to find an older gentleman in the doorway and out of sight from the living room, eyeing my boot's handiwork. "Go back to your apartment. Lock the door." Call the cops, I wanted to say.

He glanced up at my hands that I still held high in the air, dipped his head, and held a hand up to his ear to let me know he'd do exactly what I needed him to do.

I turned back around as Skye cried out for her mother again. Sending up a prayer Jessica's mini-me wouldn't figure out how to climb from her crib in the next few minutes, I focused my gaze on her mommy. The skin around her left eye had begun to bruise. A deep growl sounded in my chest as I fought to stay still.

The hand holding the gun shook, as though Devon had re-found his vice and needed another fix. A live wire, I realized, peering once more into his hazed-over eyes. And, I was going to kill him.

"Mah!" Little feet thumped on the floor and hurried down the hallway.

Shit.

In my periphery, I saw Skye round the corner. Devon's head jerked toward her, hand and gun unsteadily tipping upward.

I launched forward and dove over the couch.

Jessica wrenched herself away at the same time Devon's head jerked back toward me. He started to point the gun in my direction, but I barreled into him, and we slammed against the wall.

"Get her out of here!" I hollered at Jessica while grabbing Devon's wrist and squeezing with every ounce of strength I had.

The fucker was ripped from prison life dumb bells, but I outweighed him—and I'd been swinging a hammer for years. He tried kneeing me in the groin, but I threw him down to the floor, smashing his hand with the gun on the floor.

Devon clocked me in the temple with his free hand, and my grip on his wrist loosened. Fists flew, knees jammed, and I realized the asshole owned some serious strength.

The vision of Jessica and Skye eating ice cream by the ocean flitted through my mind. I wouldn't let him beat me. Couldn't.

Too late, I realized the gun had somehow gotten between our chests, and I bent back his hand with all I had. Just like in the movies, the gun went off, smoking between us.

"Reid!" Jessica shrieked.

For the span of a few heartbeats, I took stock of my body as Devon's grew slack beneath me. "Stay back there, Jessica! I'm fine!"

Devon stared up at me and tried to cough as blood spurted from his neck with each beat of his heart.

I grabbed the gun and clambered up, pistol trained on his head. Not that the fucker would move ever again.

Chapter Eighteen
Jessica

I cracked open an eyelid and glanced around the unfamiliar bedroom. Breathing deep, I became aware of woodsy, vanilla cologne and Skye's body wash.

A shudder rippled down through me as the evening before crashed through my mind with blinding speed.

Devon behind the door I pulled open while thinking Reid had decided to accept my offer of PB&J.

The fist connecting with my eye.

My stumble across the kitchen and into the living room where Devon grabbed me from behind and shoved me against the window.

My yanking on the curtain, desperate to let Reid know…

Nausea kicked me in the stomach, and I wormed my way out from between Reid and Skye on the massive king-size bed in Reid's bedroom. His toilet called to me, and I fell on my knees in front of it, breathing deep, eyes clenched shut.

Reid hadn't let me leave Skye's bedroom until after the coroner had removed the body. Yellow markers with numbers had lain strewn around the living room, but it was the pool of blood on the floor that drew my gaze.

Devon is dead.

My stomach heaved, but nothing came out.

Dead. And, Skye is safe.

I thought I'd sobbed my emotions dry the night before while Reid had held me in his arms, but guess not.

Footsteps shuffled behind me, and a hand gathered my hair back away from my face.

"You okay?" Reid asked, the love in his voice pouring over me.

"Y-yeah," I managed through the tears coursing down my cheeks.

I sat back on my heels and tipped my head back.

Reid smiled down at me. "Skye's sleeping peacefully, Devon will never bother you ever again, and I love you so much I would have gladly taken a bullet fifty times over to keep you both safe."

More tears.

He pulled me up and held me close, my cheek pressed against his bare chest. Hard as a rock and smelling so damn delicious … the water works stopped.

"Better?" he asked, thumbs running circles on my back.

I murmured an affirmative, and he stepped back enough to look me full in the face. "How 'bout we hit Friendly's for breakfast and take a walk on the beach?"

"What time is it?"

"Almost nine."

"Shit!" I tried to pull away. "I never called off work!"

He tightened his hold on me and smiled. "Already taken care of. I called Blake, too, letting him know I wouldn't be in until Monday."

A heavy sigh ripped through me, and I sagged against his chest again.

"Come on." He swung me up into his arms and walked back to his bedroom.

Skye let out a soft snore before plugging her mouth with her thumb and rolling away from us.

Reid chuckled and laid me back on the bed. "Scoot over," he whispered and crawled in beside me. He pulled the comforter up to my chin and stretched out on his side, facing me.

"I was so afraid I was going to lose the best thing I've ever found," he whispered, pushing my hair back from my face, dark eyes serious. "Thank God you messed up that curtain, otherwise I would have waited for your text telling me Skye was sleeping. I would have been too late."

I closed my eyes and snuggled into his soft mattress and satiny sheets. "You win, Reid." I opened my eyes again and met his stare. "I can't say no to my heart anymore. I love you. I want this." I placed my hand against his heart, and he grasped it with his own, brought it to his lips, and kissed my knuckles. His slow smile brought a twinkle to his eyes and the stirrings of desire to my body.

"I want you so bad right now," he whispered and kissed my knuckles again. "Think we can get away with slow and quiet?"

"Goggie!" A little knee poked me in the back, and I groaned as Skye crawled across me to get at Reid.

"Welcome to my life," I muttered. "I can't even pee in peace."

"Morning, Munchkin," Reid said with a chuckle, helping her to sit on his chest.

She grasped the hair sticking up on top of his head and did a little dance, her bum rubbing his chest. “My goggie!”

Reid’s laughter shook the bed. “Yes, I’m your goggie, and always will be if your mom agrees.” He glanced over at me, eyes twinkling, lady-killer smile flashing his white teeth.

“Sex tonight sounds real good,” I whispered, sliding my hand beneath my cheek.

His brow rose. “Promise?”

“Sex. Tonight.” I smiled for the first time in twelve hours. “Promise.”

Epilogue

2 months later…

Jessica ran from the breakfast table to the bathroom for the third morning in a row. I glanced over at Skye. “Mommy’s not feeling good again.”

Her little eyebrows furrowed. “Ah, canny?”

“Candy?”

She nodded, whiskey-colored eyes wide.

“You think too much candy made mommy’s belly hurt?”

She nodded again.

I smiled and ruffled the mess of blonde hair knotted from sleep in her new big girl bed I’d set up the day before in my guest room. “Pretty sure it isn’t candy.”

“Ugh.” Jessica stumbled back into the kitchen a minute later, the back of her hand to her mouth. “What the hell is wrong with me?”

I chuckled and pushed her chair out again with my foot. “Where are you in your cycle?”

Her face scrunched up as she plopped back down. “I-I’m not sure. Between Devon, moving in with you, and—” Her head jerked my way, her pale face taking on a sickly pallor. “Oh, shit.”

“Well?”

“I think I skipped last month.”

“You sure?”

She bit her lip and moaned, eyes filling with tears.

I pushed back from the table and held out my hand. “Get over here,” I said, wiggling my out outstretched fingers.

Took her a few seconds with indecision in her eyes, but she finally complied. I tugged her down onto my lap and kissed her good and hard.

Skye giggled.

I didn’t pull back until Jessica relaxed in my arms. “Skye,” I said, still smiling at the love of my life, “I think my days of being the third wheel in

this relationship are over. We're going to be a full-on four-wheel drive in eight months or so."

A tear slid down Jessica's cheek, and I swiped it away with my thumb. "I'm getting tired of asking, Jessica Lindy, but now will you marry me?"

She laughed as more tears rolled. "Ye—"

I kissed the word off her lips, and Skye giggled some more.

The End

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